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Urban Development Planning and Culture

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Abstract

The paper explores the relationship between strategic urban planning and cultural policy in recent years.

It outlines how culture emerged at the level of urban agendas, at the beginning ('80s) used by certain cities in the context of urban restructuring, to become later a recognised component of urban regeneration strategies, notably at the level of the EU, which had by then (middle '90s) arrived at a well articulated Urban Agenda.

Tracing the institution of European Cultural Capitals, the paper highlights the fact that lessons drawn from the experiences of implemented ECC programs show a high degree of symmetry between the ingredients of a potentially successful ECC programme and the current idea of Co-operative Strategic Urban planning.

Therefore it is argued that experiences of ECC organisers on how to encapsulate the vision of the city in drawing objectives, how to mould innovative forms of urban actions through artistic inspiration, how to resolve dilemmas between 'Culture' and 'culture', how to experiment on 'smart' forms of governance ensuring efficiency and inclusion, all these are enough reasons to use the ECC programs as "demonstration projects" of the possible osmoses between Strategic Urban Planning and Cultural Policy, as an instance of the so-called Cultural Planning.

Urban Development Planning and Culture

"Modern urbanity means an all encompassing policy. Consequently city planning, city development and city culture are to be perceived as a unity….."

A. The '80's: cultural policy as an emerging component of urban development policies

1. Analyses conducted at the beginning of the '90's among urban development experts (16) show that already during the '80's, several European city governments 'use' or rather integrate cultural components in their policies to instigate their city's development.

More specifically, after the economic crisis of the early seventies (oil crisis of '73) and in the midst of post-Fordist economic restructuring, following trends take shape:
a) The cities become the field of intense physical, social and economic transformations, which on the one hand makes them attractive to investments while, on the other hand, provoke serious social tensions and exclusions.
b) Cultural policy, faced by budgetary restrictions, shifts from the social and political goals of the two first postwar decades to more 'economically minded' priorities.
   In other words,
   - while the goal of cultural policy in the '50s was to promote art and make it more accessible, as well as
   - in the '60s-'70s, to empower the community and marginal social groups,
   - cultural policies in the '80s tend to align themselves with the efforts made by cities to face the new challenges .

During this period, the notion of 'subsidizing' the cultural sector starts to give way to the notion of 'investment' into the cultural sector.

2. Already in 1994, in an acknowledged book by **Parkinson – Biankini** (16), there is an extensive presentation of the European cities which managed to use culture in various forms in the context of broader restructuring of their economy and/or international profile.

> Frankfurt is mentioned as a characteristic example of a metropolis with high status in the financial field, but very poorly performing in terms of culture. According to the study, the city managed to offset preexisting images (expressed in nicknames like Bankfurt of Krankfurt) and reaffirm its profile through high prestige cultural interventions, made possible thanks to the collaboration between Mayor and the Cultural officer of the municipality.

> Barcelona, is among the cities which practiced a sustained cultural policy combined with broader economic restructuring, so as to put into gear a city of modernity and innovation. In this process was inscribed the way the city government prepared for the Olympics 1992, whereby urban design and innovative planning interventions (eg. the well known creation of 160 new squares) were not an isolated attempt, but instead the cornerstones and physical symbols of urban regeneration.

Glasgow, having been found, along with cities like Bilbao and Sheffield, in the turmoil of de-industrialization, attempted to catalyze its economic restructuring through cultural initiatives and to find a new place in the international division of labour. The efforts culminated in the successful implementation of the ECC programme in 1990: the latter, despite usual criticisms, is credited with offering valuable cultural infrastructures, promoting a different image of the city and its cultural institutions and, above all, unifying the citizens under a new vision for the future. ("urban unification")

3. From the book of Parkinson – Biankini becomes obvious that the conception and implementation of a strategic cultural policy linked to the development of a city stems mainly form enlightened and **dynamic local leaderships**.
Of course, in the case of metropolises of international caliber, the motor for such bold cultural conceptions can also be national governments, as in the case of Paris in the Mitterand era : there, the high profile cultural initiatives, apart from promoting the image of the city, aimed also at leaving a legacy of a whole generation or rather a "cultural cycle".
As an opposite case to that of Paris, is mentioned in the book the case of London, which during the same period has been deprived of both a 'culturally minded' national government (Thatcher era) and a metropolitan local government (given the dissolvement of GLC), which could promote and refresh the image of London as an international metropolis of economic and cultural innovation.

B. The '90s: culture and accepted ingredient of urban regeneration, the EU urban agendas, the institution of European Cultural Capital

4. At the turn of the '90s, and while budgetary pressures continue on the cultural sector, the latter more and more permeates and mutates activities of the tertiary sector, notably tourism, leisure, advertisement, design.
Policies like those of Glasgow and Barcelona mentioned above, symbolize the emerging realization that the more the cultural sector is organically is organically and heuristically integrated into strategic urban policies the better it can help the latter in achieving its objectives.
Thus, cultural policy during the 90s becomes a recognized parameter of urban regeneration, encompassing a wide variety of goals - away from simplistic notions of immediate economic benefits - like: improving quality of life, fighting social exclusion, strengthening communal spirit etc.

5. It is the period when cities come into focus also at European level, due to the opportunities and challenges they represent.
In this context, the Commission tries to forge a common understanding of the new geography of Europe and of where cities are going: product of this process has been an agenda of common theses and policies (the **"Urban Agenda"**).
In the same spirit, the then DG 16 (regional development and cohesion) launches a package of innovative programs (art.10 ERDF), like the Urban Pilots and the program "Culture and Economy". Likewise, the then DG 12 tries to encourage innovative thinking about the cities through Research and Development programs (ACTVILLE).

6. In **1994**, in the context of the International Seminar "Culture, building stone of Europe2202" that Dr. H. Fischer organized in Athens on behalf of the Flemish community of Belgium, there was included a thematic Workshop on "**Urban and regional development and Culture**" for which the undersigned was responsible. The participants comprised recognized academic figures in the domain of Urban and regional development, like Andre Loeckx, Fr. Moulaert, P. Delladetsimas, Araxta

Rodrigues, M. Parkinson. The latter, had been advising the Commission on how to introduce an integrated approach to urban matters, an outcome of which was the European initiative URBAN, just having been launched that year.

Professor Parkinson gave an outline of the main problems of cities and drew a parallel between the dilemmas of urban policies and those of cultural policy. Indeed, urban policies at that moment had to choose between

- promoting economic development and competitiveness and
- fighting social exclusion

while the dilemma of cultural policy had always been between

- supporting high prestige projects usually in the centers, addressing mainly urban elites or
- promoting decentralized cultural actions in order to better integrate low income, marginal social groups.

To overcome these dilemmas, P. Parkinson considered an EU response necessary and even obligatory, since the achievement of competitiveness by the cities contributes to EU competitiveness, whereas, at the other end, the neglect of social tensions in the cities could undermine the EU edifice itself.

An added reason for EU assuming responsibility on these matters was that, since local and even national governments can be easily tempted to favor an one sided economic success overlooking the need for social and cultural actions, the EU should step in and cover this gap.

It has to be noted that the EU, during that period under the leadership of Jaques Delors, was credited, even by non EU minded academics, with the fact that its urban initiatives tended to be far more inclusive and non 'economistic' than most of the relevant initiatives at national level (3).

7. The ECC concept was initiated in 1985 by a charismatic politician of national and international appeal, Melina, in order –as Spyros Mercouris puts it (12) – to draw attention not only upon the city of Athens and culture as the 'national industry of Greece' (as Melina believed), but also upon culture as a neglected component of European integration.

This is an important reminder, given that, since then, the European dimension of the ECC programs has been shrinking (see 13), giving way to the needs of the so called "competition of cities".

In a very informative, comparative analysis of the **ECC institution**, mainly in the period 1995-2004 (13), there appears a whole panorama of cities selected as ECC, their respective programs being analysed according to many parameters, which can be grouped in to following categories :

- content (objectives, cultural program, technical program, European dimension)
- results and impacts (immediate: economic, social and long term)
- management-governance (organizational structure, communication-media, evaluation-monitoring)

8. The main conclusions, for the needs of this presentation and **lessons** from the above study, can be summarized as follows :

- In terms of objectives :

  The most commonly referred objective of the ECC programs was to " promote the international image of the city"
  The main suggestions done by respondents to the interviews of the study were: the avoidance of too many objectives as well as of the rhetoric about the objectives.
  Basic advices were: "*Start from what is important for the city*" and

*"Develop and implement your actions **with** and not **for** the citizens; if you convince your own people, tourists will come.."*

- In terms of cultural program :

"The cultural and artistic program is the heart of the ECC program: artistic autonomy is indispensable"
"Do something creative, something new: no imitations"
"The ECC program is a vehicle for change: be bold in your themes and vision"
Pervasive was the dilemma: how much to concentrate on high profile commercial events and big cultural institutions and how much to opt for decentralized participation of either grass roots institutions or the citizens.
]
- In terms of technical program:

The dilemma here was how much to decentralize the investments done in cultural infrastructures: here ECC cities left a very positive legacy, since even Athens, with low budget and short planning horizon attempted a bold decentralization of cultural infrastructures which created afterwards the base of cultural activity of the municipalities in the metropolitan area of the city.
The technical program was not usually the epicenter of the ECC, understandably so given the budgetary and managerial requirements of a complex construction program in the short planning horizon of the ECCs.
Physical cultural infrastructures, new ones or through renovations, was more pronounced in the first cycle of the ECC institution and in special cases of cities characterized by either lack of infrastructures (Thessaloniki) or bad conditions of existing ones (Weimar).
In all cases, however, the technical program of the ECCs, even in cases of extensive criticism in terms of its basic choices and proper implementation, it constitutes a concrete 'acquis' for the city, something that only exemplary cultural programs of the ECC can achieve.

- In terms of organizational structure - governance :

Here, the demands are, according to all respondents of the study, very high:
Efficiency, leadership, international experience, dedication to culture is one of the requirements for the director, while for the basic team they are: professional competence, ambition and creativity.
And the basic advice:
"Good organization is better than a lot of money!"

D. The situation today: the broader recognition of culture as prerequisite for creative and innovative environments. The notion of "Cultural Planning"

9. Until recently, the problematic of urban and regional planning had little to do with the problematic of culture, with the exception of cultural heritage: very often in the past, when dealing with 'classical' spatial studies, one could easily forget that the territories are places inhabited by people (let alone people who think and behave according to values…). Even worse, in the case of regional development, studies can make one forget not only about people, but also about territory …

Looking at the recent (2006) 3d Synthetic Report of the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (**ESPON**), one sees that the above paradigm of thought belongs to the past, given that:

Nowadays, the conditions for local and regional development do not depend upon hard infrastructures but on soft infrastructures, among which culture occupies a privileged position.

Today, motors of competitiveness and sustainable development are parameters like: quality of life, natural environment, social solidarity, cultural activities and services and the broad participation in them by social groups, protection and innovative valorization of heritage, the creation of 'cultural clusters': such clusters is advisable to be developed around cultural heritage resources.

Likewise, the importance of spatial planning in preserving all these resources is being stressed by the Report.

Last but not least, the prime role of 'smart' public administration (local / national) can be overstressed, as well as the creation of inclusive partnerships. At this point, the contribution of culture is considered a key factor in mobilizing local structures and building up social consensus.

10. The shift in the approach of local development so as to transform governance into an objective of policy instead of its initiator, should not surprise us, given the deep transformations in society and the economy, under which altogether new types of economic activities are taking shape, eg in tourism :

In a very interesting article on **'new tourism'**, P. Skayannis and Stamboulis (17) describe the shift in the content of tourist services: what is offered today to (or rather demanded by) the tourist is no longer just the accommodation and related facilities, but the realization of a 'whole new experience'. For the creation of the parameters of this 'experience', the individual business is not enough: in the emerging new model, the part of the classical business has to be played by the place: the tourist destination.

In order that an 'experience' is materialized and lived, the creation of a 'myth', a narrative about the place is necessary. Something which is not material production and also not an individual one: the participants have to be many, including tourist agents, intermediaries, local bodies, various local collectivities.

The key role of culture in developing and sustaining such a model of tourism becomes obvious.

Also obvious become the pressures exercised on local governance by such activities based on knowledge assisted by new technologies.

11. Art and culture enhance the creative abilities of people from which all other aspects of life gradually benefit: creativity, imagination, intuition are skills of utmost importance for the future. There culture not only enriches the quality of life, but increases the probabilities of a person in creating or finding a job.

Therefore the promotion of culture by the cities, regions and whole countries, as a public policy serving both social and development targets, has become an imperative of our times: how to link development, and particularly local development with culture, this is what **Cultural Planning** is about.

Specifically about the cities, as the city of Linz declares in its Cultural Development Plan, (18) "modern urbanity means an all encompassing   policy. Consequently city planning, city development and city culture are to be perceived as a unity….."

Likewise, Lia Ghilardi (7) stresses that "cultural planning has to be part of a broader strategy of local development and to create linkages with urban planning, economic policy, industrial policy etc."

She even clarifies that cultural planning is not about planning culture, but about planning a territory having culture in mind.

There are two basic ingredients in a cultural planning operation, according to Ghilardi:

- Mapping of cultural resources of the place
- Strategy building

Both the above require joint thinking, cutting across disciplines, administrative departments, sectoral logics.

The need to overcome these traditional dividing lines, led Ghilardi, along with F. Biankini, in an important report to the Council of Europe, to talk about "the need to experiment with new, more 'open', more creative forms of governance" (7)

E. Conclusions

12.   From what has been outlined above, one can draw the following tentative conclusions about the conditions for possible osmoses between the domain of urban planning and that of culture:

- when the strategic plan of a city is being done, then is the suitable moment to insert the problematic of culture : that is the moment when the vision for the city is being moulded, and if culture and the people of culture cannot help shape visions, than who can? (culture helps planning)
- If a strategic plan of the city already exists, then definitely it can help culture by giving the umbrella for specific initiatives or by integrating in its programmatic context a cultural program of the scale of ECC, especially at the level of the infrastructures. (Planning helps culture)
- If Cultural Planning is adopted and attempted by a city or local area, then urban planning and culture have to go hand in hand, in a joint effort under the guidance of local administrative structures.

    For this to happen:
- urban and spatial planning have to go beyond their traditional administrative and thought models, they have to give up old fashioned top-down methodologies and adopt more open, collaborative models of governance.
- Likewise, Cultural policy has to overcome sectoral logics and dominance by central governing bodies, so that horizontal and vertical interactions can take place.
- Cross fertilisation between the two domains cannot happen without the actual participation of people of culture and artists, either in the context of particular projects or in the planning process itself.
- People outside culture do not know how to handle this demand, how to do joint 'ventures': the ECC programs, whereby people of mixed origins sit and plan together, can be seen as a 'demonstration project' for joint thinking and acting in a strategic way for the city.
- for this to happen, the ECC institution must, above all, guarantee cultural autonomy and artistic freedom: if cultural institutions such as these are subsumed to political calculations and to various professional agendas, how then the clear voice of culture will be heard? How one can expect to arrive at conditions of innovation and creativity as is the demand of Europe, to which all aspire??

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