

URBAN POLICIES, PLACE IDENTITY AND CREATIVE REGENERATION: THE ARABIANRANTA CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the transformation of cities must be accompanied by changes in the urban design and planning tools, modifying those already existing and creating new ones. These tools must be suited to interpreting new processes and should not be merely guided by market forces. As regards, the history and identity of the site has to be taken into consideration and ensure that the urban regeneration is supported by the activation of sustainable creative processes. Starting from such premises, the aim of this paper is to investigate the concept of the creative city and illustrate the Arabianranta case study in Helsinki, a case of creative urban regeneration in which the involvement of population, place identity and sustainability of interventions play an important role. Waterfront redevelopment and enhancement is increasingly becoming a starting point for implementing complex urban redevelopment strategies which involve not only the waterfront but also the whole urban area. The more value is given to the local cultural peculiarities - such as cultural heritage and place identity - the more the operation of regeneration may be embedded within the local fabric and be attractive for residents and visitors.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the role of culture has become a major and often driving factor for the process of urban regeneration. The focus on culture as a factor in regional transformation has been particularly extensive in response not only to competitiveness among cities but also to sustainability requirements in the cultural sector. In the same perspective of this approach, culture in its broadest sense assumes a decisive role in constructing a system of interventions where employment, social and sustainable development become the product of the integration of places, people, economies and traditions (Scott, 2000).

Creative cities are currently working on how to improve the interaction between regeneration building, economic development and social renewal in order to achieve more comprehensive development of the city (Carta, 2004; Florida, 2005). Existing creative cities may be seen to revolve around the design, promotion and activation of urban areas established due to their particular local characteristics. Such areas become creative clusters as a result of economic and structural innovations, related to the realization of innovator projects achieved with the help of local development strategies based on the economies of excellence, culture and territorial quality. Two main types of clusters may be recognized within the creative city. The first are cultural clusters, created around activities such as fine arts, music, cinema,

architecture and design, and whose start-up is encouraged and planned by local administration. The second is the cluster of events, whose development originates in the organization of great events or different kinds of recreational and cultural manifestations (Carta, 2007; Mommaas, 2004).

Starting from such premises, this paper aims to investigate the concept of the creative city, what factors condition creativity in cities, and how they stimulate sustainable urban innovation. By way of example, the case study of Arabianranta in Helsinki is illustrated. (Sepe, 2010a). This case study is related to the regeneration of urban waterfront. Such places are able to absorb tangible and intangible energies from the water, combine them with the urban context and transform them into local resources of value to residents and visitors alike. In this regard, it is important not to place too much stress on tourist development where the term "cultural" is an instrument rather than a quality: for sustainable development, a real engine of change, the "cultural" element must offer quality to tourism, not vice versa (Sepe, 2010b). The more value is given to the local cultural peculiarities - such as cultural heritage and place identity - the more the operation of urban regeneration may be embedded within the local fabric and be attractive for locals and visitors. (Evans, 2001; Richards, 1996; Unesco, 2006).

PLACE IDENTITY AND INNOVATION

It is generally acknowledged that creative cities are able to generate economies of innovation, culture, research and artistic production, and hence strengthen their own identity capital. It is a question not only of boosting existing culture-based economies but also producing new economies out of cultural capital, understood as an essential element of both tangible and intangible place identity -- and creating a system together with other urban capital (Carta, 2007). Indeed, the changes in the contemporary city have contributed to an increasing urban identity crisis, transforming European cities into complex heterogeneous societies. Recognising the value of place identity as a fundamental component in implementing urban change serves as a reference point both in terms of society's wishes and in safeguarding and constructing the sustainable urban image (Carter et al., 1993; Castells, 1997; Hague and Jenkins, 2005; Neil, 2004; Sepe, 2007). Built *heritage narratives* facilitate the creation and enhancement of national identities by 'denoting particular places as centres of collective cultural consciousness' (Graham, 1998). Cities have to find out how to reduce the risks inherent in the tendency of contemporary urban societies to fall back on their heritage and roots as they face up to an identity crisis. In this respect, innovation in urban space design represents an opportunity to construct an identity of places and give international scope to the urban form of European cities (Gospodini, 2004; Massey and Jess, 1995). Florida (2002) observes the relationship between the transformations in the capitalist mode of production - in particular those occurring at the urban scale including the clusters of high-tech firms, the dissemination of leisure activities and the urban economic networks - and the changes in identities of the actors involved in such transformations. Florida argues that the more cities are able to attract the creative class of workers and managers in the various sectors of the economy such as art, design, fashion and advanced technologies, the greater are the chances that those cities can successfully face up to the challenges of competition among cities imposed by globalization (Landry, 2000). However,

creativity is typically present not only in the entrepreneurial spirit but also in the dissemination of behavior favorable to cultural exchange as well as enhancement of lifestyle diversity. The city may be viewed as an organism: all elements are inextricably interwoven and planning is based on how people feel the city from an emotional and psychological point of view. Its guiding principle is placemaking rather than urban development (Landry, 2008). In this way, the creative city recognises the complexity and addresses the spatial, physical and land use conditions which help people to think and act with imagination and live the city as a satisfying experience. The creation of an urban environment which encourages the setting-up of innovative activities requires, at the local level, the construction of a specialized production system and the establishment of an urban environment which can support the testing of consensual practice of regional government (Scott, 2006).

The creative city is moving from a city where the creative class attracts new economies to cities where the creative class generates new economies, producing new identities and new geographies based on culture, arts, knowledge, communication and cooperation. The objective is to nourish creativity within the city, and produce a creative class from inside rather than attract one from outside. In this framework there is the creative *milieu*, intended as a place, which may correspond to the whole city or to a part thereof and which contains the characteristics necessary for generating a flow of creative ideas and innovations. It is possible to define the milieu as a local system, where its players can operate in open contexts and are capable of global experiences, and where, in turn, spatial interactions create new ideas, products and services, and thus contribute to the regeneration of the city. In the creative milieu, clusters and districts capable of strengthening the cultural urban structure can be developed (Carta, 2007; Florida, 2005).

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Nowadays visitor demands are many and varied, and the task of the city is to create an environment designed for low-impact consumption of culture and place identity. The city has to provide new types of cultural uses - meant in the broadest sense -, where the wishes of residents, visitors and tourists will coincide in some points. Indeed, the formation of an international creative district must be accompanied by lines of action to make the factors of development, enabled by the cluster, consistent with the identity and sustainable growth of the city (Nijkamp and Perrels, 1994). Creative resources are usually more sustainable than physical ones: monuments and museums are often subjected to degradation, while creative resources are constantly renewable. Furthermore, creativity is more mobile, because it does not depend on the concentration of cultural resources and can be produced anywhere (Richards and Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, the development of a creative district has to be considered alongside sustainable development intended in the economic, social and environmental sense (Ferilli and Pedrini, 2007), conditions which are equally important and interdependent for the sustainability of cultural resources.

The *economic sustainability* of culture as a resource depends on a complex system of balances and social actors which may become decoupled as a result of an overly instrumental attitude toward the economic potential of culture (Comunian and Sacco, 2006; Zukin, 1995). Although culture and cultural

institutions have benefited from the recognition of its social and economic value, when public policies primarily focus on the potential of developing culture, the result is a gradual loss of attention toward intrinsic motivation of the production and consumption of culture: particular emphasis is laid on its economic benefits. As Comunian and Sacco argue, the risk of this type of operation is to conclude that “all that is creative is good”, relegating to second place the quality of projects and initiatives. Thus economic sustainability can be defined as “the ability to generate income, profits and work within a system of equal opportunities for all the elements of society, inside a model which enhances and increases land resources, and furthermore does not produce a collapse of the same in quantity or quality”. The characteristics of territory, seen as a complex system where tangible and intangible cultural resources become elements of a chain of added value, assume a key role in developing the local system. In this way the district, starting from the elements of territory and their enhancement and promotion, will be economically sustainable in the long term (Ferilli and Pedrini, 2007).

Social sustainability is the ability to guarantee the same opportunities of growth and welfare conditions in society. Setting up a development model based on enhancing culture fosters social regeneration in the area, generating in people a perception of belonging, an increase in the social capital, the change in place image, and an increase in the level of education. Cultural production and use perform the functions of generating and disseminating creative thinking. Furthermore, this use provides tools for the growth of individual opportunities by creating a process for socially sustainable development.

Finally, with respect to *environmental sustainability*, the area should be understood in its various historical and cultural values, and in its tangible and intangible capital. Territory is characterized by both types of capital, and its identity cannot be considered separately from them. However, even if the consequences of resource depletion on the nature of territory are known, depletion of intangible capital is less evident, albeit just as important. It is therefore necessary to create a close relationship between production systems and central areas, so that companies interact in processes which generate value for the territory.

URBAN POLICIES IN CREATIVE REGENERATION

The transformation of cities must be accompanied by changes in the urban design and planning tools, modifying those already existing and creating new ones. These tools must be suited to interpreting new processes and should not be merely guided by market forces.

The experiences of creative cities can lead to the promotion of areas in cities which base their competitiveness on local peculiarities related to the value of the “city brand” (Anholt, 2007), and also highlight the possibility of steering the evolution of urban systems in the city. These areas become creative clusters as a result of innovative economic and structural initiatives, implemented within appropriate local development strategies based on territorial quality and excellence (Bagwell, 2008; Caroli, 2004).

Two main types of clusters may be recognized within the creative city: cultural clusters and event clusters (Carta, 2007). The competitive advantage of the

cultural cluster is the use of new technologies and the creation of districts in which to allocate and develop regional excellence.



Figure 1. Bilbao, Abandoibarra project area (from: www.bilbaoria2000.org)

Cultural clusters are created around activities such as fine arts, music, cinema, architecture and design, which are encouraged and planned by the local administration. The intangible resources and skills of the actors depend on the local authorities that through local planning aim to restore the whole region.

Examples of cultural districts include: the Ciudad of Valencia, the Guggenheim of Bilbao (Fig. 1), and Liverpool's Albert Docks and Tate. Public support for the cultural cluster serves in the start-up phase to give credibility to the project, and allows visibility at the international level. Area policies are devoted to creating the social and economic conditions to develop an urban environment that attracts culturally interested actors.

The second cluster type is that of events which is fuelled by the interconnections of innovative resources in cities. This cluster intercepts new cultural flows and leads to new cultural infrastructures being built. Its origins lie in the organization of great events or different kinds of recreational and cultural activities which are bound together by the importance that the city gains in connection to these events. The cluster of events includes Expos (Fig. 2), the *Venice Biennale*, the European Capital of Culture and the Olympic Games.

The manufacturing and services "machine" which is built around the event is active throughout the year, while the event has a limited duration. To ensure a cluster of urban creativity a system of governance needs to be created to support the network of players who must cooperate so as to generate new resources and enhance those already existing, as well as contribute to embedding the results in the area.

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The risk of losing the positive long-term effect of such operations at the conclusion of the event is thereby avoided.



Figure 2. 2008 Expo Zaragoza site (from: <http://www.milladigital.es>)

Thus the function of the cluster should serve to transform the intangible energies connected to culture, art and leisure, into financial, productive and social resources both for the host city and the surrounding area, which in turn are capable of transforming them into structural resources.

By way of example, an emblematic case study of creative cluster is illustrated, namely Arabianranta in Helsinki contextualized in the cluster of events, which have used waterfront renewal as an opportunity for urban regeneration as well as social, cultural and economic revitalization.

Substantial urban revitalization is now under way involving sea shores or river banks - mainly for business use - after they have fallen into disuse. Waterfront redevelopment and enhancement is increasingly becoming a starting point for implementing complex urban redevelopment strategies which involve not only the waterfront but also the whole urban area (Guala, 2002; Smith, 2007).

This project was chosen because it is based on a particular attention to place identity, strong involvement of the population and sustainability of the interventions, which are to be considered key elements for urban and cultural regeneration for both citizens and visitors.

THE ARABIANRANTA PROJECT IN HELSINKI

HELSINKI EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

The opportunity provided a European Capital of Culture is to enhance, develop or transform its own cultural identity and gain international visibility. The proposed regeneration plan of this city, although begun at least 10 years before, experienced most visibility in 2000 and beyond on the occasion of Helsinki European Capital of Culture. Helsinki is a city of about 600,000

inhabitants and the capital of Finland. In 2000, in addition to being designated European Capital of Culture, it also celebrated its 450th anniversary. The specific theme for the European City of Culture for 1998-2000 focused on the impact of society on urban development, while the topics for the anniversary were knowledge, technology and future. In the late 1990s, Helsinki strove to become a European model for the city, in terms of variety, quality and efficiency of services.

The project for the area of Arabianranta, based on integrating environmental regeneration of the waterfront, the creation of mixed-use housing and of a district for the arts within a “third-generation park”, can be considered as part of the broader objective of Helsinki for innovation and experimentation.

THE PROJECT

The Arabianranta project covers an area originally occupied by the Arabia ceramics factory founded in 1874. The area is built around a park along the shoreline, which stretches from Sornainen to the mouth of the Vantaanjoki river (Camerata, 2008; Somervuo, 2007). The Department of Urban Planning of the City of Helsinki started the planning of the area in the 1990s. The plan was designed in agreement with the municipal administration by Pekka Pakkala and Mikael Sundman. The elements that inspired and guided the whole operation are based on the history and nature of the place, social diversity, creativity and innovation. Construction started in 2000, with a completion date in 2012. The authors designed the plan as a set of residential blocks around courtyards, with one side open towards the coastal park in order to allow the building to be wholly integrated with the landscape (Figs 3-4).

To meet the concerns of the local community about the environmental impact of the interventions, the designers decided to make a 1:1 scale model of the corners of buildings and place them in the area in order to study the effects in loco and to collect suggestions from residents.

The urban planning tradition in Finland is mainly plays upon differences, an aspect that Sundman wished to take into particular account and consolidate.



Figure 3. Arabianranta, residential blocks, project and photo (from: <http://www.arabianranta.fi>)

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Figure 4. Arabianranta, residential blocks, project and photo (from: <http://www.arabianranta.fi>)

Realization of the common courts was therefore conceived as a set of independent lots which, remaining the property of Arabian Palvelu Oy, could not be privatized by the construction companies.

An element to be stressed is that the apartments targeted users and uses of various kinds: not only flats to be rented and sold at market prices, but also homes sold under the Hitas system, which guarantees - on the basis of a preliminary agreement between the City and the builder - the final sale price of houses built on public land (Fig.5).



Figure 5. Arabianranta, residential block, detail (from: <http://www.arabianranta.fi>)

The themes of knowledge, technology and the future established by the Helsinki European Capital of Culture have been achieved by building, along with other infrastructures, an experimental fibre-optic broadband network. The network is designed to allow the construction of low-cost connection services to residents, cultural institutions and businesses. To ensure proper implementation of this operation, guidelines have been drawn up by the ADC (Art and Design City Helsinki Oy) and the Department of Public Works to install information technology in residential buildings and have been included in the assessment criteria for the assignment of lots to builders.

Another factor of interest is the construction of the Cultural District Kumpula-Arabianranta that includes in itself all the strengths of the project. The construction of this district is in continuity with the creation of science parks such as Otaniemi, Oulu, Tampere and Viikki in recent years in Finland. The purpose of these parks is to attract capital to companies wishing to build their headquarters in areas close to the production of know-how, and offering opportunities for research and work as well as residences and services. The Arabianranta district contains the University of Art and Design, the Arcada Polytechnic of Swedish language, the Polytechnic Stadia with the Pop and Jazz Conservatory and the Aralis library, and the Kumpula campus.



Figure 6. The Arabian old factory chimney (from: <http://www.arabianranta.fi>)

The district is based on an image of culture and innovation well grafted onto the historical memory of the site's industrial past. This is evoked by the old factory chimney familiar to customers of the Iittala factory shop that still produces pottery under the Arabia trademark (Fig.6).

To promote in an integrated manner the presence of art within the site, the plan envisages that 1-2% of construction costs are reserved for the creation of art works to be included in the district during the construction process. An Artistic Director coordinates the integration of artists, architects and engineers

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for the creation of sculptures, installations, ceramics and photographs in the residential blocks (Figs 7-8).



Figure 7-8 Art works in the district (from: <http://www.arabianranta.fi>)

The presence of art in the form of entertainment and understood as a form of neighbourhood bonding is also ensured through events of applied theatre organized by the Faculty of Culture of Stadia Polytechnic.

These events aim to raise awareness on common problems to the residents and how to face them, and the opportunities to influence social policy (Ilmonen, Kunzmann, 2007) (Fig. 9).

The approach of the plan and the status of implementation are as follows: the cultural identity of the neighbourhood has not been imposed from the top nor has it developed as a spontaneous process.

The Administration has started to work from the place and its history, specific planning rules have been studied, and appropriate policies have been adopted which have been helpful as well as acting as an incentive to creativity (Camerata, 2008).

In 2006 50% homes were new and from that date all dwellings were equipped with an Ethernet network for free. In 2010 Arabianranta will host 7000 workplaces, 10,000 residents and 6,000 students. Furthermore, considerable attention has been paid to communication and the care and enjoyment of

public spaces, understood not only as places for physical interaction but also for virtual communication.



Figure 9. Spaces for children (from: <http://www.arabianranta.fi>)

One of the clearest manifestations of this operation, communication and integration between the plan and the residents is the Helsinki Virtual Village, the local web managed by the ADC, which contains an open area and an intranet area which is managed by real estate companies.

CONCLUSION

This paper has illustrated the concept of the creative city with particular attention to the relationships between place identity, involvement of population and sustainability of interventions. Traditional policies of urban renewal, mainly based on combating social exclusion and building physical constructions, are now changing and realising that cities are not just buildings and material structures, but also people, networks and intangible elements, such as memory, history, social relationships, emotional experiences and cultural identities. In this way, the creative city recognises the complexity and steers the spatial, physical and land use conditions which help people think and act with their imagination and live the city as a satisfying experience. Furthermore, culture, communication and cooperation are the resources which the creative city offers city administrators, planners and designers, and constitute the fundamental elements with which to generate innovation and quality.

In this regard, we illustrated an emblematic case study of creative cluster related to urban waterfront regeneration particularly devoted to city residents, namely the Arabianranta project in Helsinki.

In the urban regeneration of an area, the history and identity of the site has to be taken into consideration and ensure that it is supported by the activation of innovation processes, which in turn generate a virtuous economic mechanism. As occurred in the case of Arabianranta, creating the identity of the neighbourhood started from the place and its history, constructing the most suitable urban policies and strategies, and involving students and residents in many ways and occasions.

Many ingredients were also used that seem to have had positive effects: from controlling the pressure of the real estate market to the promotion of activities not focused only on consumption; from the involvement of architects, artists,

to the inclusion of local socio-cultural capital diversity. A balanced mix of historical memory and technological innovation seem to be a recipe for success even if, for instance, in relation to the Helsinki Virtual Village portal, a recent survey showed that not all residents are convinced that a virtual community is able to offer added value.

In any case, it is necessary during the period of project completion to ensure that public policies do not only focus on the potential of developing culture. To achieve the long-term success of urban and cultural regeneration it is important to attain throughout the process the involvement and integration of the local community at all levels, and enhance and consolidate place identity, all in respect of economic, social and environmental sustainability.

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