

Brand-building: the creative city

A critical look at current concepts and practices

edited by

SERENA VICARI HADDOCK

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Foreword

The essays in this volume are the final result of work carried out by young researchers within the Research and Training Network known as *UrbEurope*, financed by the European Commission for four years between 2002 and 2006. The network, for which I served as coordinator, involved the following Departments: Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale, Università di Milano-Bicocca; Department of Social Policy, Helsinki University; Humboldt Universität Berlin, Institut für Sozialwissenschaften Stadt- und Regionalsoziologie; Istituto di Sociologia, Università degli Studi di Urbino; Sciences Po Paris – CEVIPOF (Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po) and OSC (Observatoire Sociologique du Changement); AME – Amsterdam study centre for the metropolitan environment, University of Amsterdam; Sociology Department, London School of Economics.

UrbEurope provided grants to young European researchers – PhD students and Post-doc fellows – allowing them to spend periods in one of the universities of the Network in order to pursue research and training projects on urban change in Europe in areas of interest specified below. The working of the network was mainly based on strong interdisciplinary competences on urban issues, which in the participating departments often also find expression in strong PhD programmes on urban social change in Europe. In the case of the Sociology department of the University of Milan – Bicocca, which acted as the coordinating institution, a strong synergy has been developed between *UrbEurope* and the development of the Doctorate Programme on European urban and local studies, *Urbeur*, which began in the academic year 2001/02.

Over the four years the project involved 98 young researchers who spent some time in another university, attending Summer schools and

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classes and discussing their research topics with professors from a range of different disciplines. Except for the case of Summer Schools, the network privileged long periods of stay (up to one year) on the assumption that the young researchers would require a considerable amount of time, not only to strengthen their theoretical background, but also to carry out empirical fieldwork, which is time-consuming in its organization, especially when conducted abroad.

During this same time and to the benefit of these young researchers, *UrbEurope* organized a two-day seminar every six months in the participating universities. In these seminars specific topics of interest were presented and discussed by leading scholars; the researchers were then asked to present their own work, in order to benefit from the collective discussion and from the participation of experts in the field.

The aim of the *UrbEurope* network was to map, integrate and update the results of international and national research projects on urban-related issues in Europe, within a broad framework. The three main areas of analysis were:

1. how global changes and local impacts are conceptualised in theories and through which methods they are investigated;
2. how such changes impacted the built environment (gentrification, suburbanization and segregation);
3. how the changes impacted the role of local social policies and governance.

The main objective behind the investigation of these three areas – highly interrelated with one another – was to attain a better understanding of the tension between identity and change in European Cities (the local-global link), of the existing differences and of the directions of change (the convergence-divergence hypothesis). During the project seven thematic subgroups were founded and developed around the following themes:

1. housing and land use;
2. local welfare;
3. middle class;
4. urban policies;
5. poverty and social exclusion;
6. cultural cities;
7. neighbouring effects-segregation.

This book is the result of the work undertaken by the Cultural Cities group. In order to provide a general background to these essays we offer a brief presentation of the contents and results of the research conducted by the group.

Though attitudes to the city always seem to have been ambivalent – they have been viewed as centres of both civilisation and corruption – one side of this has emphasised their particular and active role in promotion

of culture and creativity (e.g. P. Hall 2001). This idea is hardly limited to the observation that these activities have been disproportionately more important in large cities than in smaller settlements, or that the major developments of an era were concentrated in specific places rather than across all urban areas in a nation or continent. On the contrary, such creative developments have been stimulated, produced by and have matured in the circumstances of particular cities, both reflecting and shaping the distinct characters of these places – in economic, social, political and physical terms, as well as culturally.

Among the more general explanations as to why this should be so, three arguments have been deployed:

- the power of traditional elites/communities to contain diversity, deviance and originality – the underpinnings of ‘rural idiocy’ – tend to be much less in larger, expanding, externally linked settlements with shifting economic bases;
- cities, as seats of governance/authority and major markets, have traditionally housed large concentrations of potential patrons/customers for novel, specialised and luxury products (both tangible and intangible); and
- agglomeration economies, including what Storper (1997) calls untraded interdependences, pools of specialised skills, and tacit knowledge, together with reputational spillovers, are of particular importance for non-routine kinds of production/consumption subject to high levels of uncertainty.

It can be argued that these factors operated with rather less force in the context of industrial and especially Fordist cities than in other economic contexts. Over the past 30 years or so, however, their salience for European cities seems to have been greatly heightened, through a combination of:

- de-industrialisation;
- globalisation;
- mass higher education; and
- post-Fordist flexible specialisation.

These developments have brought about:

- a strong incentive in advanced economies to switch toward competitive strategies based on the development and marketing of specific, distinctive qualities, rather than price (or even price/quality), requiring greater investment in creative innovation, underpinned by access to high quality factors of production, including labour and specialist services (Porter 1990);
- greater emphasis on market-based forms of co-ordination, restoring the importance of face-to-face contact within city-regional clusters/labour

markets, and thus on the ability of territories to attract and retain key factors including talent for non-routine 'creative' functions of various kinds);

- more intense territorial competition for investment flows, prestigious events and shares in product markets, increasingly tolerated and encouraged by national governments because of its cross-national dimension;
- increasing use of image promotion, and (particularly following Florida [2002]) of higher profile, dynamic and/or bohemian cultural environments as city marketing tools in relation both to inward investment flows and the attraction/retention of 'talent' (bright, ambitious, young, unattached people with marketable specialist skills required by the cultural industries), increasingly seen as sensitive to such locational factors.

Some of these elements of the 'new conventional wisdom' about the relation between urban resurgence and the 'new economy' and what this requires may be more in the nature of hypotheses (encouraged by some interested parties) than established research findings. But they point toward several new/revived roles for cultural/creative activities in (at least some) cities of advanced economies:

- as core elements of economic activities with rapidly expanding markets (in leisure, entertainment, tourism, media and cultural production/distribution);
- as sources of added-value/competitive advantage in a much wider range of activities dependent on innovation, fashion and quality-based niche markets; and
- as integral to the marketing of places as sites of production, residence and consumption, through cultivation and/or representation of distinctive qualities offering elements of monopolistic advantage as protection against 'race-to-the-bottom' tendencies.

The creative/cultural city theme has been the object of interrelated research projects by young RTN researchers in relation to each of these three 'new' (or rather intensified) cultural roles of cities, addressing questions related to:

- the role of urban institutions, communities, resources and policy initiatives for 'cultural' production, in sectors such as fashion, fine art and popular music;
- influences of urban design/architecture, and regeneration initiatives on residents' use and experience of the city/neighbourhoods; and
- representations of the city and their manipulation for marketing, policy and political purposes – including that of 'the creative city' itself.

This thematic grouping was not foreseen in the original design of this RTN programme, but rather emerged from an interaction between the ar-

ray of research proposals submitted by some of the strongest applicants for fellowships and the specialist interests/resources of particular nodes in the network (including e.g. the presence of a city-design programme and of established researchers working on both 'cultural industries' and cultures of urbanism at the London School of Economics). In fact this set of questions clearly relates to and links all three of the thematic areas identified in our 'calls' for fellowship applicants.

The specific configuration of this research area emerged from discussion among and with the young researchers during the early workshops of the programme, and this clear 'ownership' of this theme by the researchers themselves represents a particular strength; it also confirms the value of the programme in developing synergies and cross-national collaborations among researchers at a much earlier stage in their careers than would otherwise have been likely.

In fact, fourteen of the researchers had active research interests in this theme, with a core group of eight developing an agenda for their common activities in these terms. Although the cultural cities group consists of young researchers dealing with different fields of urban culture, there is nonetheless a strong connection between each individual research project. They all deal with different aspects that represent the necessary elements of urban culture, and moreover, be it the built environment, cultural politics, creative industries or cultural flagship institutions (among others), they are the modules that form the so-called 'creative city'.

The interdisciplinarity (as well as internationalism) of the core group can be seen in their respective statements of thematic interests and areas of expertises, viz:

- urban cultural studies and translocalism (Giacomo Botta, Helsinki University);
- socio-economic features of creativity, cultural economy, fashion industry (Marianna d'Ovidio, London School of Economics and Sciences Po – Paris)
- culture and entertainment, built environment, cultural policy, media and urban space, spatial theory (Hanna Harris, Università di Milano-Bicocca);
- urban governance, cultural regeneration, built environment, urban planning (Jussi Kulonpalo, Sciences Po – Paris);
- public space, urban landscapes, use of 'culture' in urban renewal (Philip Lawton, London School of Economics);
- multicultural cities, urban regeneration, public space, local actors (Ugo Rossi, University of Amsterdam);
- arts-led urban renewal, public and creative city, urban design (Bettina Springer, University of Amsterdam);
- images of the city, landscape, urban hierarchies and polycentrism (Alberto Vanolo, Helsinki University).

The network has provided a framework enabling these young researchers to develop a collective research agenda, from initial exchanges in workshop/conference sessions to a shared project in the later phases of the network on 'the cultural city', culminating in the production of several papers. Serena Vicari Haddock, professor of Urban Sociology at the University of Milano-Bicocca, provided further feedback to these papers and subsequently edited and arranged for publication of the present study.

It should be stressed, however, that the development of the book has been entirely the responsibility and achievement of the working group of young researchers. This has been a major success in terms of the professional development of this group of both doctoral and post-doctoral researchers, reflecting very positively on their growth, maturity and consciousness of themselves as leading members of a new cohort of researchers within a cross-national European urban studies community.

M. d'Ovidio
S. Vicari
Haddock

Introduction

When Sir Giles Gilbert Scott built the Bankside Power Station on the South bank of the Thames in 1965, he could hardly have imagined that forty years later the site would house paintings by Picasso and Warhol, installations by Damien Hirst or sculptures by Anish Kapoor, flagship works held by the Tate Modern as part of Europe's largest collection of modern and contemporary art. In Milan, the Ansaldo steel mill underwent a similar transformation and today hosts a set design laboratory for La Scala and a showroom for Giorgio Armani. Comparable rehabilitations of former industrial sites can be found in all major European cities, where factories, emptied of machinery and equipment, have been occupied by new types of production whose most important component is immaterial: knowledge, ideas, signs, meanings. Spectacular new structures built to house such production and related consumption are the most visible signs of the transformation of contemporary cities into centres of innovation, creativity and culture, and are perceived as icons of the emerging knowledge-based urban economy.

With the decline and failure of manufacturing-based industries as the traditional engine of urban economic and social development, efforts to re-vamp city economies have focused on feeding the new cultural industries in the hope they might become the engine of renewed urban growth. Cultural industries are a hybrid set of activities comprising production and services in science and technology, design and fashion, arts and culture. Each city attempts to find its own distinctive path of development, investing in a particular combination of local industries in order to foster economic growth and to attract visitors and inhabitants wishing to enjoy the buzz and the beauty of urban life; for all cities the crucial factor has become the spark of new ideas, in whatever field they may find application. Indeed, creativity seems to have become the ultimate asset of every city in the construction of what makes a city special, or, preferably, more special than other cities.

Creativity and the making of the creative city have generated a great deal of interest, policy debate and action, particularly in the last decade. The concepts are popular with politicians, who use them to highlight the cultural assets of their cities and thus to enhance the city's image in the context of international competition. Behind the scenes, scholars in many fields concerned with urban development have tackled the issue of creativity, noting in particular its roots in the social and urban context; many have sought to identify effective ways to promote creativity as a means to foster the development of cultural industries. A primary focus of interest in the scientific literature has been the definition and analysis of the creative city, with questions ranging from «what makes a city creative?» to «what makes a city attractive to workers in the creative industries?».

In brief, inquiries into creativity and the creative city have led to a wider examination of the nature and workings of the new urban economy on the one hand and its social and spatial context on the other. This examination has been accompanied by an animated debate on urban policies and their alleged (in)ability to enable, encourage or enhance creativity and amplified by a large number of analyses and evaluations of creative practices. Much attention has also been devoted to the representation of the new city as a whole—its economic and political make-up, its socio-spatial order and, in particular, the image-making and branding processes that have developed in parallel with the evolution of this type of post-industrial city.

The essays presented here aim to contribute to this broader debate in two directions. The first four essays focus on key concepts associated with the creative city discourse; the following three make use of case studies of specific cities – Manchester, Milan/London, and Dublin – to illustrate the ways in which these concepts are translated into policy and practice.

S. Vicari Haddock's opening chapter provides a road map for the exploration of the creative city as a conceptual construct, a normative ideal and a set of policy practices. The exploration begins with the positioning of city marketing and branding in concepts and theories originating in the business world, and goes on to highlight the difficulty of translating and applying these ideas to cities in general and to the creative city in particular. The author goes on to argue that city marketing and branding effects are most often linked to specific urban policies and practices that have been shown to be particularly attentive to selected city-stakeholder interests while expunging more general concerns from the public discourse.

In chapter two A. Vanolo introduces the concept of the 'creative city imaginary' and discusses the process of image-making. By presenting city marketing materials from different European cities he illustrates how these cities have shaped their images in accordance with different interpretations as to how to promote the creative city. In particular, the process of producing and promoting different post-industrial images and ideas is illustrated by the case of Turin, where a new image was built to replace that

centred on the city's Fordist industrial past. The process is seen as involving the probing of different 'alternatives' (where the image of the city refers first to its natural endowment, then to technology, to culture, and finally to creativity) and the related construction of different images by local government and other local public agencies in Turin. In conclusion the author questions whether the city, under the pressure of global urban competition, has produced little more than a sequence of standard promotional policies or has found a specific way to advance its heritage and identity and, as a result, to promote its distinctiveness.

In the third chapter, B. Springer connects public space and image-building, focusing on site-specificity in public art and architecture. Notwithstanding the need for distinction and uniqueness of locational identities, the use of site-specific works of art and architecture is subject to tensions and results in ambiguous outcomes. The author argues that 'decorating' a city with such works is more likely to blend it in with a common 'creative city' image than to differentiate it. In order to illustrate the paradox of site-specificity and reproduction patterns in public art, she presents several works by the architect Frank O. Gehry and the artist Richard Serra, used by cities to create (or re-create) public spaces, and discusses the conflicts arising from such use.

In the fourth chapter J. Kulompalo bridges the city-image analysis with a discussion of the cultural economy and creative industries. He explores the main building blocks of the new discourse of the creative city that emerged during the late 1990s and early 2000s, using the city of Helsinki as an illustration. In particular the author describes two parallel phenomena: he looks first at how the new discourse is shaped by notions of creativity and innovation that, although based on local urban culture and related phenomena, remain rather vague and not always able to build on the development path of the city. He then discusses the discourse of the creative city and the concept of the creative class and places them in the contemporary theoretical debate, stressing that creativity and innovation leading to economic success more often result from the efforts of innovative, hard-working individuals and firms with – often very limited – public sector involvement and investment.

The following chapter by G. Bottà, is the first of the essays focusing on a specific city. Bottà studies a specific cultural industry, popular music, and explores the relationship between popular music production and the promotion of Manchester as a creative city between 1976 and 1997. The formation of the local music scene as a 'creative milieu' and its development is presented with emphasis on the link with the city's industrial heritage. The author shows the connection between the regeneration of some areas of Manchester and the consolidation of the local popular music scene through bottom-up and autonomous projects. The focus is on the creative qualities of local entrepreneurialism and its effects on the city. Bottà goes on to