



From creative city to generative governance of the cultural policy system?: The case of Barcelona's candidature as UNESCO City of Literature



Maria Patricio Mulero^a, Joaquim Rius-Ulldemolins^{b,*}

^a Department of Sociological Theory, University of Barcelona, Spain

^b Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of Valencia, Spain

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1980s, cultural policies have been increasingly oriented to promoting cities. However, under the paradigm of the creative city, this approach had presented several dilemmas and contradictions. Since then, there have been various attempts to tackle such issues through a more systematic approach to cultural policy — what we identify as cultural governance oriented to cultural generation. Barcelona is a paradigmatic case illustrating this trend. The city's candidature as UNESCO City of Literature in 2015 reveals an attempt to combine international promotion, development of local cultural industries, citizen cultural engagement. Moreover, this project emerges as an attempt to capitalize on the local literary heritage and on the image of local literature as a sign of identity. Finally, we highlight some limits and contradictions arising from the approach adopted by Barcelona.

1. Cultural policy in the entrepreneurial city

The relationship between local development models and cultural policy is one of the key points of discussion on the role played by culture in cities such as Glasgow (García, 2004a,b), Liverpool (Connolly, 2011), Bilbao (González, 2011) and Barcelona (Rius-Ulldemolins, Hernández, and Torres 2016, Rius-Ulldemolins & Sánchez, 2015). These cases have been considered a model for other towns wishing to project themselves as a global cities (Scott, 2008; Williams & Currid-Halkett, 2011) or creative cities (Comunian, 2011; Krätke, 2011). The growing importance of cultural policy and instrumentalizations in drawing up local policies has been highlighted in these analyses (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008; Gray, 2007). This instrumentalization consists of addressing the objectives of other domains of public policies, such as economic and urban development - and to a lesser extent social cohesion - based on cultural policies. This policy attachment -in terms of Clive Gray (2002)- allows the cultural sector to capture more public resources in certain cities but at the same time has led the local cultural sector to have less control of its objectives, organization and strategy (Rius-Ulldemolins et al., 2016).

The evolution of the post-industrial society has led to a new relationship between economy and culture, with the latter increasingly shaping the former in Western societies (Mommaas, 2004; Pratt, 2008). The breakdown of the Fordist system of industrial organization and the crisis of the Welfare State and its Keynesian mode of regulation has led

to a profound reorganization of the political system and the production system. In the context of these changes the local level takes on a renewed prominence, with governments gaining weight and assuming a new role. Thus, local governments have gone from being passive implementers of central and regional policies to being active promoters of local development (Blanco, 2009). Since the dawning of the 21st Century, they have played the most important role in cultural policy developments (Menger, 2010).

The so-called entrepreneurial turn (Harvey, 1989) of local policies that focuses on urban revitalization based on large architectural projects and spectacular events, development of services and new industries, has a major cultural element, which often takes the form of creating artistic neighborhoods or clusters of cultural industries (Rius-Ulldemolins, 2014b,d; Scott, 2000, 2010; Zarlenga, Rius-Ulldemolins, and Rodríguez Morató 2013). Thus, it states that cultural strategies are key to the survival of cities (Zukin, 1995: 271). Among these cultural strategies catalyzing urban development is the generation of mega-events (García, 2004a,b; Rius-Ulldemolins et al., 2016) and construction of flagship museums (Bianchini, 1993, pp. 1–19; Paül, 2014; Rius-Ulldemolins, 2016) or European City of Culture nominations (Balsas, 2004; Mooney, 2004) or most recently the UNESCO Creative Cities. From these strategies, a new cultural policy has been drawn up, as the cases of Liverpool and Barcelona show. This policy aims to combine urban change, economic development and social transformation (Connolly, 2011; Rius-Ulldemolins, 2014b, d). This model is part of

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: mariapatriciomulero@gmail.com (M. Patricio Mulero), joaquim.rius@uv.es (J. Rius-Ulldemolins).

a more profound change in cultural politics, of which Great Britain and Spain were major exponents. Thus, from the eighties, local cultural policies in these countries have been seen as driving the economy of cities and a lever for the regeneration of urban centers (Landry & Bianchini, 1995; Martí-Costa and Pradel i Miquel 2012; Novy & Colomb, 2013).

From the nineties, with ‘New Labour’ sweeping to power in Britain, culture and creativity were seen as both an engine of economic and urban development, and as a tool for social cohesion. This was followed by a growing tendency to instrumentalize cultural policy for purposes other than public ones (Gray, 2007; Hesmondhalgh, Nisbett, Oakley, & Lee, 2015) — even though there was no evidence that such an approach worked (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007). This concept was later imported by continental social democratic governments, with the Socialist Party in Barcelona led by Pascual Maragall being a case in point (Degen & García, 2008, 2012; McNeill, 2003). In this context, there has been a sea-change in the objectives of cultural and social policy, backed by a conceptual shift in which redistribution is replaced by the notion of culture as a factor of social inclusion (Connolly, 2011). This new orientation stresses local governments as leading cultural policies rather than federal or national cultural entities, which traditionally focus on redistributive objectives (Menger, 2010).

However, not all changes in cultural policy are interpretable in terms of instrumentalization. Some are explained by endogenous and historical factors such as the trend towards greater interaction between the private, public and third sectors (Rius-Ulldemolins, 2016). In the local context and taking into account the growing complexity of contemporary cultural dynamics, policy is increasingly framed within a systemic and strategic perspective (Cherbo & Wyszomirski, 2000; Mommaas, 2004). It is in the cities where this trend is most tangible (Comunian, 2011; d’Ovidio & Pradel, 2013), expressing new forms of cultural governance for fostering inter-sectorial fertilization. The aim is to create local cultural value in a context of global competition among creative cities (Menger, 2010).¹ In this context, the dilemmas of cultural politics (Bianchini, 1993, pp. 1–19) raised twenty years ago are still valid: final effect versus cultural value, great events versus small actions, international projection versus local development.

In this sense, it seems relevant to study the case of Barcelona, a city pioneering this model of entrepreneurial cultural policy and that has its own contradictions (Degen & García, 2012; Rius-Ulldemolins & Sánchez, 2015; Zamorano & Rodríguez Morató, 2015). Also, the article begins with the assumption that far from instrumentalizing culture, the Barcelona model of cultural policy has tried to overcome the cultural policy dilemmas posed by Bianchini (*opus cit.*). Barcelona has taken a more systematic approach to cultural policy, which one can describe as local governance oriented to the generation of cultural value (Rius-Ulldemolins, 2005; Rius-Ulldemolins & Zarlenga, 2014) or, in the words of Pierre-Michel Menger (2010) “a cultural

¹ Cultural value is a controversial concept in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Sociologists have developed several definitions from a non-substantive angle. From Pierre Bourdieu’s structuralist standpoint, cultural value is created from competition in the cultural field (Bourdieu, 2002). Other theoretical perspectives have more micro-sociological and institutional perspectives on cultural value — for instance, those of Randall Collins (1989) and Howard Becker (1984). For these two authors, cultural value is the result of the rituals of value construction of the co-operation chain among cultural agents. In this paper, we will adopt Becker’s (*opus cit.*) interactionist perspective given that it includes intermediaries (such as technical and management staff) involved in the creation of cultural value. This theoretical framework and the contributions of the neo-institutionalist school in the Sociology of Culture field — here, one should mention Peterson and Anand (2004) and DiMaggio (1991, 2000), the French Sociology of Art’s interactionist school (Moulin, 1983, 1992, Menger, 2009 — shed light on the growing role of cultural institutions and the State in the creation of cultural value from the end of the 20th Century to now. Finally, in this line of research Pierre-Michel Menger suggests that cultural policy is shifting from national cultural dissemination to a productivist paradigm (which he calls ‘generative’) for creating cultural value (Menger, 2010). More recently some authors have analyzed the links between cultural value oriented cultural policy and instrumental cultural policy (Behr, Brennan, & Cloonan, 2016).

generation paradigm”. This cultural value is understood as the ability of the local cultural agents to draw attention of local and international audiences to the city’s cultural output and identity. Furthermore, Barcelona’s strategy can be understood as an attempt (marked by some signal failures) to avoid the negative effect of a branding cultural strategy based on a standard global culture pushing mega events and flagship cultural institutions (Evans, 2003; Rius-Ulldemolins et al., 2016). The local cultural strategy is based partially on local resources thereby taking advantage of local oddities such as the language, architectural heritage, urban design or production of local artists (d’Ovidio & Pradel, 2013; Julier 1996, 2005).² This strategy has been pursued with varying degrees of consistency in various cultural sectors, including the literary field, where the new paradigm has been developed in a more systematic fashion. Barcelona’s candidature for the UNESCO City of Literature project was crowned with success in December 2015, vindicating this strategy.

This paper begins by analyzing the phenomenon of creative cities and, in this context, the rise of cultural policy paradigms orientated to generating cultural value. Specifically, we will focus on policy expression in the UNESCO City of Literature award, whose purpose is to combine international promotion with boosting literary creation, reading practices and prizing and capitalizing on local literary heritage. Second, we will study the scope and implementation of cultural policies and the promotion of literature in Barcelona from the 1980s onward. Our analysis will focus on the content of the City Council’s plans, strategies and annual performance reports and include personal and semi-directed interviews of the person in charge of local cultural policy³ at a given moment. Third, we analyze this new paradigm of public policies in culture as a new form of packaging, governing and interpreting literature and literacy and their role in the city’s socio-economic development. Finally, we will make an assessment of the new paradigm’s achievements, potentials, limitations, contradictions and spill-overs.

² One of the peculiarities of cultural policy in Barcelona is the city’s status as capital of Catalan culture. Hence the importance of cultural policy in resisting the efforts by successive Spanish governments and their political and economic elites to undermine Catalan and to promote Spanish (Rius Ulldemolins & Zamorano, 2014a,b; Rius Ulldemolins & Zamorano, 2014a,b). While the nation-building dimension is of great importance in Barcelona’s cultural policy, it will not be discussed here. One reason for not doing so is because it has already been discussed by other authors (Barbieri, 2012; Villarroya, 2012). A second reason is that it would distract the reader from the main focus and purpose of the paper (namely, to show the paradigm shift in local cultural policy). Finally, we are aware that it would be interesting to study how national conflict affects the literary field and writers such as those studied in France and Belgium — Pierre Bourdieu and Pascale Casanova (Casanova, 2001; Bourdieu, 1985, p.3–6).

³ Barcelona’s local cultural policy of Barcelona has been studied by analyzing the documentation in the archives of the Institute of Culture, the local agency of cultural policy. The Annual Reports of Barcelona’s Institute of Culture (from 1995 to 2010), Barcelona’s Cultural Strategic Plans (1999 and 2006) and the documentation project of UNESCO City of Literature project were analyzed. Between 2010 and 2012, we also interviewed: Ferran Mascarell (former coordinator and former alderman of Culture of the City of Barcelona, 1995–2006); Jordi Martí (former manager of the Cultural Institute of Barcelona, 2000–2011); Jaume Ciurana (former Councillor for Culture and Education of the City of Barcelona, 2011–2015); Marta Clari (manager of the Institute of Culture of Barcelona, 2011–2015); Jose Manuel Lara Bosch (President Grupo Planeta). The literary city has been studied from 2012 to 2015: we interviewed the Professor of Literary Theory at the University of Barcelona, Alex Matas; the journalist and curator of the Year of the Book and Reading, Sergio Vila-Sanjuán; the director of programs and cooperation of the Libraries of Barcelona, Juan Arranz; and Juan Insua, the director of Kosmopolis Festival of Barcelona Center for Contemporary Culture (CCCB). Those interviewed were either still responsible for drawing up the City Council’s cultural policy or had performed this role in the past. The heads of local cultural policy between 1995 and 2010 were interviewed on the main objectives, the development of cultural policy and the role that UNESCO City of Literature played in setting a new paradigm in cultural policy. The academic experts and major agents in the literary field were interviewed on the genesis, development and outcomes of the UNESCO City of Literature. All these interviews were held using the semi-directed methodology, recorded, a transcript produced and analyzed with Qualitative Data Research software (Atlas.ti).

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