



Social innovation and creativity in cities: A socially inclusive governance approach in two peripheral spaces of Barcelona[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Culture and creativity make two contributions to sustainability in cities: (1) Economic impact, related to the economy and the marketing of the city, involving consumers, jobs, creative clusters, technology, mobility, infrastructures and (2) urban regeneration concerned with social cohesion, socially creative initiatives and local citizenship with sustainability objectives. We provide a critical appraisal of the first and concentrate on the second. The paper focuses on how collective actors are capable of creating new spaces for public debate and daily practices that reinforce community life and citizenship. In some cities creation of spaces for cultural creativity has been the result of 'bottom-linked' innovation. Two examples are examined in two peripheral districts of Barcelona. These are: **Ateneu Popular de 9 Barris (AP9B)** and **Fabra i Coats**. Both are currently managed by a hybrid partnership between public administration and civil society organizations. The 'bottom-linked' approach to social innovation recognizes the centrality of initiatives taken by those immediately concerned, and also stresses the need for institutions that enable and sustain such initiatives through sound, regulated and lasting practices and through clear citizen rights, guaranteed by the functioning of the democratic state (Pradel, García, & Eizaguirre, 2013).

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1. Introduction

There are at least two distinctive traditions of 'seeing' cities, one focuses on human development, individual and collective creativity/humanity. In this tradition the city as an agora includes active citizens and offers possibilities for innovative responses to social and economic needs. In other words, the *polis* constitutes the arena for claims for new political and social rights (García, 2006; Isin, 2000; Sassen, 2010). An Alternative view sees the city as a machine for the production of economic wealth and consumption, where individual creativity is a key engine for competitiveness and –more recently– where cultural expressions in central spaces are elements of city branding (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Pratt, 2010; Scott, 2008). This view of the city has been contested (Pratt, 2011; Pratt & Hutton, 2013; Zukin & Braslow, 2011) and the present contribution seeks to intervene in the recent debates published in

this Journal.

In this article we focus on how collective actors have transformed urban spaces for cultural creativity in two traditional working class neighbourhoods in Barcelona. We argue that these acts of citizenship and the type of governance of these collective spaces constitute 'bottom-linked' social innovation. As previous research has concluded, 'bottom-linked' social innovation develops when citizens' collective initiatives result in agreements with local institutions that enable and sustain such initiatives through sound, regulated and lasting practices. In some instances such practices evolve into citizen rights, guaranteed by the functioning of the democratic state (Pradel, García, & Eizaguirre, 2013).

There is a considerable literature on urban governance (Pierre & Peters, 2012). It is arguable whether this literature should be simply applied to the various approaches to cultural governance. But it would require another paper to enter into this discussion. More relevant to this contribution is the analysis of governance of urban regeneration that develops in inner-cities and in modern peripheral neighbourhoods in post-industrial cities (Buck, Gordon, & Harding, Turok, 2004; McCarthy, 2006; Healey, 2004; Landry, 2000; Miles & Paddison, 2005). This goes in particular for the governance of innovative practices.

In a recent publication Degen and García (2012) analysed the

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transformation of the relationship between the use of culture and modes of governance in the urban regeneration of Barcelona. A city that “took an urban-design, cultural-planning and creative-quarter approach” as a way of regenerating industrial spaces with a particular governance style based upon strong citizen support also used culture as a method of social cohesion and as an expression of citizenship up until the mid 2000s. Citizens maintained a constructive dialogue with institutions in culturally led urban regeneration in the 1980s and early 1990s although by the turn of the century local residents contested the urban renewal of the ‘creative district 22@’; denouncing signs of gentrification (Benach, 2000; Marti & Pradel 2012).

Centrally located creative districts attract ample attention in urban literature in general, and in Barcelona in particular, but there is a lack of studies on cultural and social innovation with organized citizens as main actors in non-central districts of Barcelona. For this reason we present two cases: the *Ateneu Popular de 9 Barris* (AP9B) in *Nou Barris* and *Fabra i Coats* in *Sant Andreu*. We argue that collective creativity linked to culture and urban regeneration has also developed in these two peripheral districts of Barcelona favouring social cohesion and sustainability. We think that there are lessons to be learned by examining these alternative models of governance and cultural regeneration practices initiated by active citizens and later supported by the local administration. These cases contrast with top-down and prestigious, high-culture intervention in the types of activities they create and provide for the neighbourhood. Moreover, these cases show alternative governance strategies and therefore offer a useful contrast of governance approaches to cultural regeneration showing that not all cultural and urban regeneration needs to be the same.

As has been pointed out elsewhere (García & Judd, 2012) there is a strong emphasis in the literature and in policy discourses on the importance of human capital and more specifically on the emergence of a “creative class” as a key factor in urban regeneration and economic development. Urban creativity – although intrinsic to the prosperity of historic Athens, Florence, Vienna or Paris to mention some European cities with distinctive creative historical landmarks – has become the central concern of two debates worth remembering here. One critical debate concerns the innovative work of Richard Florida (2002) of what comprises the ‘creative city’, on who are the main actors of creativity and on what are the consequences of incorporating Florida’s assumptions – the power of culture and the creative class-in policy making; the most familiar being the promotion of heritage in attracting tourism (Pratt, 2010, 2011). The other debate questions the desirability of implementing the competitive-city assumptions derived from Florida’s work for guiding urban regeneration in cities since the use of artists’ clusters for urban renewal touches land values and often results in gentrification that threatens traditional communities as well as the low-income cultural producers (Zukin & Braslow, 2011).

In line with these critical debates we look at alternative creative actors that have appeared from within traditional working class urban communities. The power of culture these actors embody contrasts with Florida’s vision since they have not distinguished themselves as members of a professional cultural class; secondly, what they do is largely orientated to the collective needs of the neighbourhood and thirdly, they are supported by the workers communities from the start and continue to be acknowledged by them. Therefore, the creativity these actors manifest is socially, culturally and economically embedded. As Pratt has argued this notion challenges the universalistic notion of creativity and of the creative city (2011, 124).

We see the cases presented in this paper as in line with the UNESCO declaration of cultural diversity (Pratt, 2011) and the programs supported by this international organization. UNESCO,

promotes culture as a key resource to address economic and social dimensions of poverty and to provide innovative solutions to complex issues. According to this organization, in a globalized world culture and creativity become key drivers if they are used as opportunities for exchange and mutual enrichment. Culture is seen as a force for sustainable development because it helps promote social cohesion and youth engagement.¹ In Europe, the European Union programme for the culture and creative sectors 2014–2020 highlights the importance of these sectors for the European economy in generating growth and jobs.² Thus creativity, culture and sustainable development have become acknowledged as crucial for social cohesion in cities.

Of late, the notion of sustainability has come to the fore in European cities, and not only there. Global summits and world-wide reports have advanced recommendations on life-style changes, the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and the necessity to make economic development, social justice and the environment work together. These messages from the UN World Commission for Environment and Development (Brundtland Report) also address urban sustainability, which –it says–requires not only more effective use of technologies and mobility systems to achieve environmental imperatives, but also demands creating social cohesion in neighbourhood communities and addressing political issues of social justice (Cook & Swyngedouw, 2012, 1961–1963).

Urban sustainability, in the sense used in this article, means the support of institutions for the persistence of communities and involves applying urban regeneration strategies such as the preservation of open public space, the enhancement or creation of public spaces for collective uses and access to housing. An urban sustainability agenda raises issues that concern active community groups involved in urban struggles and in the exercise of bottom-up strategies in the cultural sphere. These strategies may evolve from the values and experiences of inhabitants of neighbourhoods (including those peripherally located), whose voices are not always incorporated in top-down city regeneration agendas. Empirical studies show, however, that urban sustainability policies that rely on building ostensible politics of consensus can easily ignore the living conditions of minorities or marginalised groups. In their examination of urban sustainable development in Worcester Krueger and Buckinham argue that economic and environmental concerns should ‘sit completely within social justice concerns’ (Krueger & Buckinham, 2012, 486–501).

However, consensus is not always present throughout. For example, bottom-up initiatives in culture infrastructure that involve occupation of spaces by members of local communities may go through a period of tensions with local governments. These tensions, however, may evolve into cooperation in bottom-linked practices if institutions develop the capacity to deal with conflict, making room for dissent (Eizaguirre, Pradel, Terrones, Martinez-Celorio, & García, 2012).

In the following sections of this article we discuss first the role of culture in urban sustainability, then the importance of social

¹ The potential impact of culture and creativity is large. Culture and creative industries are among the most rapidly growing industries in the world representing an estimated global value of US\$ 1.3 trillion (UNESCO). <http://en.unesco.org/post2015/power-culture-development> (accessed 21 June 2014).

² Creative Europe provides €1.46 billion over seven years to strengthen Europe’s cultural and creative sectors. Along with international and European institutions, national, regional and municipal institutions provide support in different ways –from direct finance to tax exemption. <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/creative-europe-pbNC0113437/?pgid=y8dIS7GUWmDSROEAIMEUUSWb0000WRgV009r;sid=13Kg3VXilOagngZF1Z8-ejfh0KGMdhiByQA=?CatalogCategoryID=ANIKABstUgUAAAEjCJEY4e5L> (accessed 22 June 2014).

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