Kiezkulturnetz vs. Kreativquartier: Social innovation and economic development in two neighbourhoods of Berlin ☆

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ABSTRACT

Local economic development in European cities has been based on the strengthening of innovation and creativity through culture-based urban renewal. Nevertheless, artists and creators have often played a residual role in the definition of these processes. This article analyses the role of artists in urban renewal through the analysis of two socially innovative initiatives oriented to the economic development and social inclusion in the city of Berlin. Social innovation is understood here as a way to fight social exclusion providing resources and empowerment to communities, and promoting new ways of participation. The paper analyses two neighbourhoods in the districts of Wedding and Kreuzberg in Berlin, showing how apart from being 'early gentrifiers' artists can develop socially innovative processes with the rest of the neighbourhood to empower the whole community and to redefine the urban renewal processes taking place in the city. This role is better understood if we take into consideration the local governance system and the long history of counter-culture of Berlin.

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1. Introduction

This article analyses the role of artists and creators in the configuration of the creative city, focusing on the case of Berlin. More specifically, it focuses on the role of artists in neighbourhood regeneration initiatives, and their autonomy to intervene in the development of 'creative neighbourhoods'. In the last 20 years, culture, creativity and innovation have become key elements for economic regeneration in cities, as they are considered the cornerstones of economic growth once the industrial production has been partially delocalised to other parts of the world. This has brought the emergence of culture-based initiatives for economic development in industrial cities and neighbourhoods, encouraging the generation of new economic activities and providing measures for social cohesion (for instance in the fields of education and employment) in order to ensure quality of life. These initiatives are often criticized as cornerstones for urban renewal leading to gentrification. The role of artists and cultural policies in the shaping of 'the creative city' has been widely analysed (Jakob, 2010; Zukin, 1995; Zukin & Braslow, 2011) stressing the role of culture-led

projects in gentrification and often depicting artists as early gentrifiers. However, artists are far from being a homogeneous group. Recent literature shows that artists, as vulnerable actors in the process of city development, can use arts, culture and their creative profession as tools for social change, becoming involved with wider communities (Martí-Costa & Pradel, 2012; Novy & Colomb, 2012; Tremblay & Pilati, 2013). Working with cultural dimensions, these actors want to redefine the identity of the urban system, reinforcing social identity and the sense of belonging, which can bring empowerment to communities and individuals.

This article focuses on the role of artists in two different neighbourhood regeneration projects in Berlin. As part of the overall strategy of the city, neighbourhood regeneration strategies are relying on arts and creativity to reshape the image of deprived neighbourhoods and to boost their economies. The comparison focuses on how artists fit in these projects and how can they develop their own views, often against the normative idea of the creative city. The research, based on participatory observation and interviews with key actors[1], seeks to understand how arts and culture are articulated and their potential for questioning the creative city, and promoting other forms of urban regeneration with

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[1] The fieldwork consisted on six interviews to representatives of the associations, Quartiersmanagement staff of the two neighbourhoods and other actors involved in the two projects. This was complemented with participant observation of events and assemblies in both projects.

the involvement of neighbourhood actors.

The article develops as follows. The first part analyses the role of artists and the transformation of cities. The second section focuses on how the idea of the 'creative city' has been shaped and how is being deployed in Berlin, stressing how alternative forms of innovation and creativity are used in different ways to promote economic growth. Section three analyses the initiatives in the neighbourhoods of Südliche Friedrichstadt and Soldiner Kiez, focusing on the role of artists and creators and the possibilities for neighbourhood regeneration. Finally some conclusions are drawn on neighbourhood policies based on culture and creativity as a motor for economic and social changes, and their consequences.

2. The creative city and social innovation

The conception of the 'creative city' and the emergence of culture and creativity as cornerstones of the new economy must be framed in wider economic development policies oriented to the creation of the correct conditions or 'environments' for economic growth. These approaches aim to reinforce endogenous growth creating spaces that foster social relations and trust, elements considered as a precondition for innovation. For that reason, urban centres have re-gained relevance as economic spaces as they entail density, diversity and proximity, the basic conditions to create networking and agglomeration (Scott, 2008). To revitalise these centres, culture-based initiatives have become central, trying to make them attractive to qualified middle-classes. These policies are based on the idea that 'jobs follow people' (Florida, 2002) even though this idea is controversial and facts seem to show the contrary (Storper, 2013; Storper & Manville, 2006). Behind the 'creative city' idea lies the promise of resurgent and cohesive cities in which skilled middle classes develop creative and innovative jobs and enjoy the cultural atmosphere, what attract new people that want to join this creative environment.

Nevertheless, these approaches have brought increasing urban segregation, as differences between old industrial working class neighbourhoods and refurbished city centres grows and neighbours are expelled from renewed neighbourhoods through processes of gentrification. This processes must be framed in a context of increasing lack of consensus with residents on the transformation of the neighbourhood. In coherence with the consolidation of new multi-level governance arrangements (Jessop, 2002, 2004), cities have increasingly involved non-state actors in decision-making, with the introduction of private actors in economic development policies as well as the involvement of (certain) civil society actors in the promotion of policies for social inclusion. However, this openness hasn't been neutral: it has legitimised some actors over others and has limited the scope and possibility of local policy-making, relying largely on the role of private actors (Mayer, 2003a,b; Swyngedouw, 2005).

In order to ensure the involvement of civil society, national and supranational governments are promoting the concept of social innovation (Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010) as a way to face social problems without questioning the neoliberal agenda[2]. The idea is that in some arenas, communities can organise themselves to provide new answers to social problems without a central role of public administration. As opposed to this normative view, a line of research understands social innovation as sets of practices linked to certain forms of social justice and the transformation of existing power relations (Moulaert, MacCallum, Medmood, & Hamdouch,

2013; page 17). Following this, the concept is related to the provision of needs, but also to the transformation of social relations and the provision of empowerment. Consequently, it is understood as a process that is embedded in the local context and thus, relative, even though it takes place in a multi-level governance context that frames possible action of local actors (Pradel, García, & Eizaguirre, 2013).

In fact, despite general trends towards the generalisation of neoliberal models for city growth, empirical analysis shows that in some cases marginalised local actors are able to create counter-hegemonic consensus and alternative projects for city development, that seek for some forms of social justice and empowerment (González & Healey, 2005; Moulaert, 2009). These actors often create forms of collective organisation oriented towards providing new forms to conceive and tackle social problems and creating mechanisms for social justice. These socially innovative practices (Moulaert et al., 2013) focus on the provision of material and immaterial resources to a part of the population that cannot provide it through the market or the state approaches. Contrary to mainstream uses of social innovation as collective solutions from civil society that do not necessarily question the current status quo (Murray et al., 2010), this understanding of social innovation entails pushing for a more just city, that is, balancing relations of power through fostering diversity, equity and democracy (Fainstein, 2010).

As residents in cities and neighbourhoods, artists can contribute to these counter-hegemonic practices as individual members or as a group in a neighbourhood or city. This is the case of many protest movements such as *Mediaspree Versenken* in Berlin (Novy & Colomb, 2012) or *Salvem Can Ricart* in Barcelona (Martí-Costa & Pradel, 2012) amongst others. As the case studies will reflect, artists can play different roles: they participate directly or indirectly in gentrification processes, but they can oppose to such dynamics opening the debate for desirable urban development and rethinking models for growth, aligning themselves with local communities.

3. Berlin urban development model relying on creativity and (social) innovation

Since the fall of the wall in 1989, the city of Berlin is relying increasingly on innovation and creativity in order to revamp its economic growth model and to tackle increasing social segregation. Soon after its reunification, Berlin became one of the poorest Lands of Germany, and the one receiving more funds from the rest[3]. Since 1989 the city saw a rapid economic transformation towards de-industrialisation and unemployment. The collapse of the political and economic system of the DDR and the end of subsidies to companies in West Berlin brought the closure or relocation of companies to other parts of the country or in the neighbouring Land of Brandenburg[4]. The national project for the city was to

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[2] From an analytical point of view this concept lacks a precise definition and is being used from different perspectives and sectors, becoming a trendy concept with multiple meanings (Oosterlynck, Kazepov, Novy, & Cools, 2013).

[3] Berlin and Hamburg are the only cities in Germany that are also states (Länder) within the German federal system, having the regional and local levels merged into a single senate. In Berlin, the Land has a legislative power in the senate and an executive power shared by the mayor (direct election) and members of the senate. This structure is complemented with the district councils, with direct elections and some attributions, for instance in urban planning or local social policies. As Strom (2001) and Colomb (2012) show, this has allowed the development of local policies in the districts and the promotion of practices for citizens participation.

[4] In former East Berlin the industrial jobs declined rapidly as formerly public companies were unable to compete in the private market whereas the integration of public administration into the federal republic of Germany brought a decline in the number of personnel, as most of the state apparatus of the GDR was concentrated in Berlin. Following calculations by Häussermann and Kapphan (2004) between 1990 and 1992 80 per cent of the employment in East Berlin had disappeared.