Creative cities and/or sustainable cities: Discourses and practices

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the intercept of the notions of creative city and sustainability, aiming at conceptual clarifications of debates on combining these topics and related urban policies. Firstly it explores the emergence of creative city's discourses and practices and their significance, then the conditions of sustainability of the urban development, and finally the arts' role in achieving urban creativity and sustainable development. While acknowledging the importance of the environmental-ecological aspect, the focus of this article is on the social and cultural aspects of sustainability in the development of creative cities. The main argument is that different approaches to the issues of creativity and sustainability as well as different strategies for developing the sustainable creative city depend not only on various levels of urban space and agents considered but also on values they share. While claims to scientific objectivity are common, most approaches towards these issues are not merely descriptive but necessarily normative. Therefore, the ideological assumptions and implications of these topics are relevant. The debate is exemplified by Scott's polemical meditation versus Florida on the nature and significance of the creative city, highlighting not only its positive but also its "darker", i.e., non-sustainable dimensions. The article concludes by showing that the creative city concept does not only re-produce the dominant market order (as it is the dominant objective today) but could instead relate to communal identity, social belongingness, and a deeper sense of place as formulated by the broader demands of sustainability.

Introduction: Concepts of creativity and sustainability and the city

Artistic creation is certainly a very ancient topic of reflection in philosophy as well as an area of public policy intervention (along with preserving and promoting the cultural heritage) since the rise of the strategy of "cultural democratization" in the late 1950s. Yet, as noticed by French sociologist Moulin, following the movements of 1968, this strategy has been contested and complemented in the 1970s by that of "cultural democracy". While cultural democratization is founded on a narrow and hierarchical definition of culture, based on the high arts and solely on creative undertakings of the professional artists, thus presumably limiting the enterprise of democratization, cultural democracy promoted instead an anthropological and relativistic definition of culture which extends the concept of art beyond the "fine arts" and recognizes the equal dignity of all forms of creation by contesting the privileges of elitist high culture and eventually contrasting "creation" and "creativity" in the cultural field (Moulin, 1997: 90–95). Once the process of creation is no longer considered as an exclusive and rare attribute of the professional artist, creativity is socially acknowledged as a universal quality, an ontological capacity of the human subject.[1] However, the image of artistic creation by an individual with outstanding abilities has not lost its aura. The cardinal values of the artistic competence have been transposed towards other economic sectors, infiltrating these sectors by metaphorical contamination as well as by contiguity, inclusion, and exemplarity (Menger, 2002: 7). The wide spreading of this 'model of artistic creativity' does not only shift our understanding of arts and culture, it also significantly changes ideological, technological and organizational structures of the worlds of production.

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[1] This topic was explored in the ESA-ARTS Conference *New Frontiers in Art Sociology: Creativity, Support, Sustainability*, held in 2007 at Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany, notably by Reckwitz, "The Creative Subject and Modernity: Towards an Archeology of the Cultural Construction of Creativity". See Reckwitz (2007), and Reckwitz (2012) for further development of this topic. See also Ratiu (2011: 34–35).

Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005 [1999] have shown that the increasing generalization of the new exigencies of the artistic and intellectual professions – singularity, flexibility, adaptability, creativity, inventiveness, self-expression – as 'new models of excellence' is strongly related to "the new spirit of capitalism" (the ideology that justifies people's commitment to capitalism), isomorphic with a globalized capitalism implementing new technologies and new modes of organization (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005: 8–11, 422–424). It is worth mentioning that Boltanski and Chiapello understand 'capitalism' through the logic of dynamic capital accumulation and the organization of wage-earning labor and distinguish both from the 'market economy'; from the various characterizations of capitalism they retain a minimal formula stressing "an imperative to unlimited accumulation of capital by formally pacific means, competition and employment" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005: 3–4; Ratiu, 2011: 29). The debates on the issues of creative cities and sustainability would gain in clarity if explored in connection with these new challenges facing both present policy-making and research, that of the cultural globalization and the imperative to creativity. For instance, Florida has noticed the pervasiveness of "the creative ethos" since the rise of what he hailed as the "Creative Age" or "Age of Talent" (Florida, 2002: 21, 2005). Other authors refer more critically to 'the creative turn' in the so-called 'new/creative economy', which is positioned as the cutting-edge of post-industrial knowledge economy (Pratt, 2009: 12), or alternatively to "the cognitive-cultural capitalism", a recent particular version of capitalism and urbanization (Scott, 2007: 1466). I will approach these issues not empirically but in the tradition of practical philosophy, i.e., by investigating concepts and assumptions that are prior to empirical research.

Cultural globalization here refers, according to Crane (2002), to the transmission across national borders of various forms of arts and ways of life: it "is no longer conceptualized in terms of the emergence of a homogenized global culture corresponding to McLuhan's global village. Instead, cultural globalization is recognized as a complex phenomenon consisting of global cultures, originating from many different nations and regions" (Crane, 2002: 1). Basically, cultural globalization challenges the idea of culture seen as a problem to deal with in the single context of the nation state and poses the need of global cultural policy-making, and research centered towards the development of trans-national approaches. There is also a new and increased interest in the spatial insertion of creativity, especially in the urban space, and thus in the interactions between creativity and urbanization. As Scott observes, (creative) cities have emerged as distinctive elements of the contemporary global scene, and "the fortunes of these cities are tied up with an escalating process of globalization in four distinct but interrelated senses": reinforcement of urban agglomeration, along with an opposing trend toward decentralization; increasing tendencies to adopt varieties of monopolistic/imperfect competition and, as a corollary, to build international networks of creative partnerships (Scott, 2006: 1–2, 12–13). All these transformations imply a shift "from a state to a city-centered perspective on cultural generativity", hence local, regional, and national cultural policies and approaches to cultural development are likely to increasingly differ with

respect to how they set their respective priorities (Menger, 2010: 1, 8).

Creativity

Within the context of (cultural) globalization and its impact on urban development and on cities, the so-called imperative to creativity or the "creative ethos" turns out to be another challenge of great significance. Identified by Florida as "the fundamental spirit or character of [today] culture" that is the emerging Creative Age, it is defined as the overall commitment to creativity in its varied dimensions: "the creative ethos pervades everything from our workplace culture to our values and communities, reshaping the way we see ourselves as economic and social actors – our very identities" (Florida, 2002: 21–22). Since the creative turn in the new economy, concepts of creativity – creative economy, creative industries, creative class, and creative city – have become predominant in the debate about economic development and urban regeneration. Creativity is valued more highly than ever and is cultivated more intensely as observed by Florida in his influential but highly debated book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002 "Part One: The Creative Age": 21–82). According to him, "creativity is not the province of a few selected geniuses who can get away with breaking the mold because they possess superhuman talents. It is a capacity inherent to varying degrees in virtually all people" (Florida, 2002: 32). Thus creativity appears as an ontological capacity at least of a new class, the "creative class", even though it is not completely democratized or socially generalizable. The elitist argument put forward by Florida in several books (Florida, 2002, 2005, 2007; Florida & Tinagli, 2004) is that human creativity, or talent seen as "creative capital", has become the principal driving force in the economic growth or its "ultimate source", and that the competitiveness of cities, regions, and nations is increasingly rooted in the capacity to attract, retain and nurture talented individuals, i.e., the creative elite.[2] Following this line of argument, "creativity – the ability to create meaningful new forms [···] – is now the *decisive* source of competitive advantage", and artists (along with scientists, engineers, educators, designers, architects, and writers etc.) have a prominent position in this elite of the "super-creative core" (Florida, 2002: 5, and "Counting the Creative Class": 72–77; 2005: 1, 22, and "The Creative Capital Perspective": 33–36). Thus, 'creativity' surpasses 'creation' in the fields of arts and culture as an extended potential capacity of all everyday people (although not actualized in all cases) versus a limited or rare (but actual) capacity of an individual artist.

Other critical points in this distinction are the respective roles of the spaceless individual and the spatially appointed collective within this creative process which is inescapably

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[2] In publications following *The Rise of the Creative Class*, such as *Cities and the creative class* (2005) and *The flight of the creative class: the new global competition for talent* (2007), Florida has tried to defend the creative class concept against those criticizing it as elitist and exclusionary, by stressing the idea that *every human being is creative*, creative capital being thus a virtually limitless resource (Florida, 2005: 3–4, Florida, 2007: 34–35). Yet the disturbing facts that currently its membership is below one-third of the workforce and inequality is actually highest in the creative epicenters of the U.S. economy, also noticed by Florida (2005: 4, 2007: 36), have not find satisfactory answers by him in terms of strategies for more sustainable patterns of development.