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## BROADENING THE PUBLIC SPHERE THROUGH CREATIVE SHADOW PLANNING

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**Key words:** cultural policies, urban regeneration, social practices, artistic experience.

### Abstract

Cultural policies have become an important segment of strategic city planning and cultural interventions have assumed the role of flagship projects within the urban regeneration schemes. The shift from the old consumption-oriented model to production-oriented cultural policies is linked to the rise of the paradigm of “creative city”, with creativity as a decisive driver of attractiveness.

But, if carefully analyzed, this paradigm clearly shows some evident paradoxes. In fact, the so called “creative milieu” cannot simply be pinned down in a ghetto or in bureaucratic regulations. How can urban planning and development – which are primarily oriented towards imposing and regulating – be expected to come up with an effective response to something like the fostering of creative *milieus*?

The article suggests a possible contaminative (and tentative) path towards a more effective involvement of cultural activities within planning practices moving from a concept of art as experience. On the other hand, the case-study, which is at the basis of the conclusive findings, clearly shows the hardships in leading these highly experimental practices within a unique model, also highlighting the limits in terms of innovation of the so-called “best practices” as a methodology in urban studies.

### 1. Reasons and aims of a research

This essay lies in the intersection of three different interests. The first concerns the theoretical shift from the regulatory approach of (especially Italian) spatial planning to the «soft» (Faludi, 2010; Haughton *et al.*, 2010) and *synaptic* (Scoppetta, 2011) dimension of planning theories due the spread of European policies and visions. This interest involves the way in which planning theories and discourses, deriving from post-positivist and post-structuralist studies and, more generally, from the *paradigm of complexity* (Prigogine and Stengers, 1979), despite their aims towards a broader idea of democracy, can end to support the *urbanization of capital*

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(Harvey, 1985) of contemporary neo-liberalism, since planning practices are *intricately involved in framing and re-framing property markets* (Adams and Tiesdell, 2010). Such a perspective considers physical and social aspects as strictly inter-connected and assumes as obvious the political nature of planning.

The second interest concerns the “stellar” distance existing between urban planning and social practices, formal projects and true life, official and “shadow” «production» (Lefebvre, 1974) of urban space, and the continue irreducible re-emerging of what formal planning tends to exclude (de Certeau, 1980): in this sense, recalling Rimbaud, and also André Breton’s Manifest of Surrealism, both quoted in Kundera (1992), one could say «*la vie est ailleurs*» (“life is elsewhere”)...

The third interest is related to the «planning imaginary» (Scoppetta, 2004), which is historically strictly connected to the image of «St. George killing the dragon» used by Bernardo Secchi (1984; but see also Tafuri, 1973) to allude to the need of self-legitimization of the discipline as a tool to answer – through the well-known catalogue of spatial “devices” (such as schools, urban parks, hospitals, and so on) constituting a «material and positive welfare» (Lanzani and Pasqui, 2011) – the social needs generated by the (old) industrial city, which are not the same of post-modern social needs emerging from the relevant changes occurred in the still ongoing re-structuring of the contemporary urban space/society. In this sense, this third interest involves the relationships between planning and the notion of “citizenship”.

These three interests are “put under tension” around the topic of the cultural turn in urban regeneration of the last decades. It is suggested that their re-connection through the “grafting” of a more holistic and inclusive concept of “culture” in planning theories and practices may contribute to broaden the public sphere, which is supposed to be no longer identifiable with that of the Keynesian State of the past century.

The first part of the essay provides an overview, based on literature, on the role of culture in improving the competitiveness of cities and in urban regeneration processes. This first part is aimed at highlighting both rhetoric and shadows (emphasised theories and worrying evidences) as well as the emerging of the absolutely new post-modern social needs, clearly expressed and reflected by the paradigm of the “creative city”.

In the second part of the essay the contradictions of the paradigm of “creative city” are shown as they are highlighted from the point of view of “shadow” planning practices, whose distinctive features and dynamics are analytically explored moving from a field-work research carried out by both collecting data on European “free-zones” and a five-years direct experience in establishing and developing a network of free-zones in the city of Rome.

Finally, a third and more constructive part consists of the main findings resulting from a larger and detailed chronicle of the Roman experience and, therefore, it more strictly refers to the Italian context, that is: to both the Italian (often problematic) organization of public administrations, based on an over-passed idea of social needs, and the still traditional regulatory Italian planning imaginary, directly deriving (differently from other European countries) from architectural “schools”.

A possible experimental path – rather than a “best practice” – is proposed as a tentative (and not easy) way to re-lead “shadow” experiences within the planning processes without denying their alternative vision.

## 2. Contemporary city and culture as post-modern social needs

### *2.1 On the new role of art and culture in regeneration policies of European cities: lights and shadows*

The social and economic regeneration policies in European cities have been at the centre of an intense debate, which intensified during the '90s, on the effects of globalization and the transition to a post-Fordist development regime (Amin, 1994; Castells, 1996, and many others). Indeed, from the '70s onwards, cities changed their skins for the falling of the social economic regime that had marked their development over a long period of time: the concentration of service providers and industrial activities with the decisive support of the State and the national economy (Cheshire and Hay, 1989; Hall, 1993). This lengthy and complex transition, which in many ways is still largely incomplete, greatly influenced the political agenda of most of the larger (and, successively, the medium and small) cities during the '80s and the '90s. In this context, urban cultural policies have assumed a role of growing importance and their nature has substantially changed compared to that they originally played from the post-war period onwards.

Until the '60s, cultural policies in Europe were not considered a priority by the local governments. Cultural policies, which were connected to a traditional perception of art and cultural heritage, were substantially neutral and of a “non-political” nature. In contrast, from the second half of the '70s, they became an instrument that was charged with strong political and social connotations. The influence of the post-'68 debate gave cultural policies a complementary role in the democratization process promoted by the mayors and progressive municipalities who were called upon to govern various large European cities. In addition to the interest for urban cultural heritage, there was also a new attention for “cultural activities” and these initiatives were often intended in a symbolic and anti-elitist sense and implemented to contrast social exclusion.

During the market-oriented phase of the second half of the '80s, cultural policies were given an important space in the political agenda of the urban governments: their function shifted towards fighting the economic decline that began to strongly affect several European industrial cities. Many mayors became aware that the intrinsic communicative and symbolic nature, typical of cultural and artistic form (especially contemporary), could easily be applied to urban regeneration policies, which were becoming more and more oriented towards international aperture and city marketing (Garcia, 2004). Cultural policies became an important segment of strategic city planning and many of the cultural interventions assumed the role of flagship projects within the urban regeneration schemes, with the creation of new museums and exposition spaces (often realized in decayed areas or disused industrial sites) as powerful communication tools for affirming a new post-industrial identity (Cochrane, 2007).

Figure 1. Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao



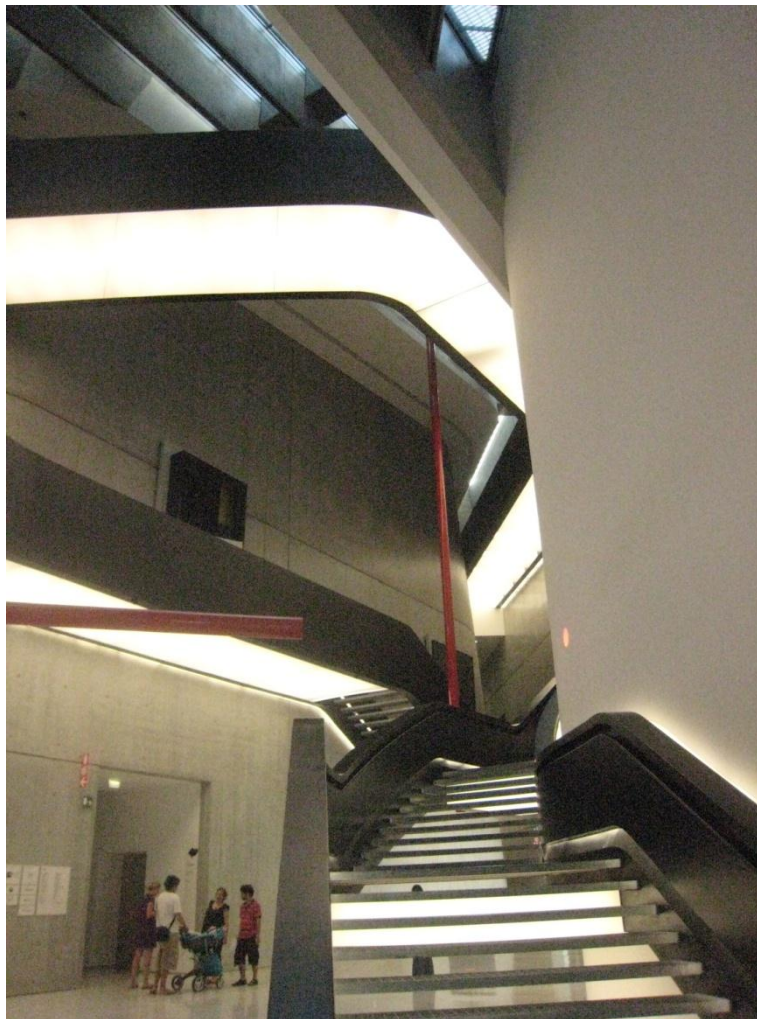
Source: Photo by the author.

This relevant change of roles and meanings is also supported by a number of decisive mutations in the social behaviours and lifestyle of the urban population (Zukin, 1995). The increase of free time and available money for recreational activities represents an important foundation for evaluating the economic, social and political impact of the huge investments in cultural facilities that some of the European cities faced between the '80s and the '90s (Scott, 2000). As a consequence of the tourism increase, due to the low-cost airlines, many medium-sized European cities now demonstrate a growing interest for culture-led and tourism-led regeneration strategies, often attempting to reproduce the successful initiatives of the '90s, such as Glasgow, Bilbao and Barcelona.

Finally, with the Lisbon Strategy's objectives towards the construction of a «knowledge-based economy leading» (EU, 2007), cultural policies, as a factor of competitiveness, have explicitly become a priority in European territorial strategies.



Figure 2. Maxxi Museum in Rome



Source: Photo by the author.

All these factors have led to a «culturalization of entrepreneurialism» (Ribera-Fumaz, 2009) in which urban development is strictly linked to promoting partnerships between public and private actors, who choose to invest in the speculative construction of places rather than in the improvement of the general conditions of the territory as a whole.

Such an approach clearly deals with the idea that cities' integration into the global economy can also be discursive: it can have as much to do with how that city is written, spoken, and imagined. In other words, we may say that cities have to be intended as discursive constructed places. On this background, Zukin (1995) has argued that, although the symbolic economy of cities is not a new phenomenon, there has been a shift in methods used in the construction and promotion of particular images of the cities and in the intensity of commercialization of their spaces since the onset of the transition in global capitalism.

By recalling the Debord's critical works (1990; 1994), this trend may be framed within the concept of «spectacular urbanism» (Lindsey, 2007), based on the double nature of cities – as both a place and an idea – and on the discursive construction aimed to appeal to and convince multiple audience of a city's world class credential and to sustain a city's reputation as a centre for the arts, fashion, and commerce.

Figure 3. **People waiting for a low-cost fly in the airport of Eindhoven**



Source: Photo by the author.

Time has shown how the widespread “culturalization” of economic strategies – the «convergence of economic and culture» (Garcia, 2004) – presents a number of political and social implications that is leading to the need to reconsider the models of urban governance related to cultural policies. Many observers (Evans, 2001; Miles, 2007; Scoppetta, 2009) have underlined how the instrumental use of cultural policy, with the sole aim of fostering urban competitiveness, can increase the phenomenon of social and spatial marginalization in various ways.

In fact, on the background of the idea of city as a discursive construction, the main issue is related to what privileged descriptions, ideological imperatives, or symbolic representations go into the composition of the proposed “images”, and who is responsible for their development and deployment. This leads to «the systematic exclusion of undesirable or unprivileged communities» (Lindsey, 2007), and this exclusion is manifested both physically (within the actual space of the city) as well as discursively (within the space the city occupies in the imaginary).

Last but not least, it is to be said that, if simply intended as aimed at competitiveness, the cultural dimension completely loses its meaning of empowerment (in the sense used by Friedman, 1987), which becomes nothing but an “instrumental” objective. This means that – as well as the dis-connection between Capital and Labour, which characterises the so-called “knowledge economy” (Bauman, 2002) – culture becomes a mere instrument to achieve goals established in a different sphere than where it is produced and, therefore, it simply becomes Capital (and not social capital).

## *2.2 The rise of the paradigm of the “creative city”: two different theories*

It is possible to distinguish between consumption-oriented and production-oriented cultural policies. Consumption oriented cultural policies mean the creation of museums, theatres, concert halls, facilities for leisure activities. The direction taken by several European cities in this field all share a number of common characteristics: first of all, the tendency to integrate “high” cultural facilities with conspicuous investments in physical regeneration, which include flagship projects in order to provide economic sustainability, to reimburse the municipalities and to constitute an attraction for investors of the private sector. A second common feature is the tendency to associate a cultural policy with marketing strategies in order to consolidate the international profile of the city (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990), for example through the candidature for events (universal exhibition, sporting meeting) or entrusting an architectural “star” (Cochrane, 2007).

Especially urban policies oriented towards cultural consumption have become more widespread over the last two decades. In fact, the exponential growth of tourism and the role attributed to cultural vitality in urban marketing have provided a concrete economic legitimization for such investments (Evan, 2001), with the consequent increasing of the tendency to include cultural facilities in regeneration schemes, due to a diffuse strong political consensus.



Figure 4. A street in the “tourist ghetto” in the historic centre of Amsterdam



Source: Photo by the author.

On the other hand, production-oriented cultural policies rotate around cultural industry in all its various forms: publishing, music and theatre, television and cinema production, fashion and design, artistic production and art market. In particular – although the importance of creativity for urban and regional development is not a new invention, but rather a rediscovery (Kunzmann, 2004) – production-oriented cultural policies are related to the rise of an innovative paradigm of “creative city” moving from two main different theories.

The first is to be led to the economist Richard Florida (2002) and its basis-concept is that cultural policy can intervene to consolidate the identity of a «creative *milieu*», through actions and policies to reinforce the competitive advantages of the cultural sector and the capacity of cooperation between the principal stakeholders in the sector (Scott, 2000). This theory is to be framed in the current «cognitive capitalism» (Moulier-Boutang, 2007) or «cognitive-cultural economy», «which involves all those sectors of the modern economy [...] specializing in the production of goods and services whose consumer appeal is derived pre-eminently from the fact that they transmit non-utilitarian aesthetic and semiotic signals» (Scott, 2007).

The second theory concerning the paradigm of “creative city” is that elaborated by Charles Landry and related to the project called “The Creative Town Initiative” (Landry, 2000), developed since 1997 in Huddersfield, an English medium-sized industrial town. Differently from the Florida’s theory, according to Landry a “creative *milieu*” is not a “class”, but it is a “place” that contains the necessary preconditions to generate a flow of ideas and inventions.

On the same line Scott (2010) underlines the role of place – and of the city as a «creative field» recalling Bourdieu’s «*habitus*» (1980) – in materializing creativity and producing innovation through a learning process through social practices: in fact, creativity is not a «sort of inchoate manna that descends on gifted individuals, whether poets, or scientists, or members of the “creative class”, and that is then transcribed by these individuals into ground-breaking insights for diffusion to the sublunary world» (Scott, 2010).

This place-based approach recalls the research line related to the industrial districts of the so-called “third Italy” (Becattini, 1989) implying the spatial dimension of “clusters” but referred to a profoundly transformed economic pattern that generates changes in urban contexts. «Creative clusters» or «creative fields» (Scott, 2006) are proposed as «favourable contexts» for «concomitant innovations» that are not «frozen in time and space» but rather mutually influenced by the innovations that they produce. Furthermore (and very important), creative clusters are the expression of *local culture*, and culture itself is intended, according to Williams (1975) as strictly linked to *social practices*.

Moving from the needs of regeneration of an old industrial city to a service-based one, Landry argues that «soft factors» are to be added to the «hard» ones towards an innovative and vibrant environment intended as a crucial and successful ingredient. It means *integrate* strategies and, consequently, developing an *interdisciplinary* language.

Thus, the «art of city making» implies an innovative attention not only towards the objective dimension of knowledge (which normally characterizes planning) but also towards *subjective* and experiential visions. In this sense, culturally planning allows «to be more inclusive, pluralistic and democratic and to see more opportunities and problems, whether economic or social, as you have a clearer map of interactions». Therefore, Landry underlines the need of a «cultural literacy», that is «the skills we need to participate effectively in daily life, such as communication, critical thinking, and social skills. Literacy also means having a greater control over life and situations».

Over the last ten years, although – despite this flowering of successful theories – creativity still remains a fuzzy concept that leaves much space for interpretation (Balducci *et al.*, 2004; Kunzmann, 2004), the paradigm of the “creative city”, intended as a mixture of the two theories, has had a growing influence particularly in the UK, where several cities attempted to promote “cultural districts” by encouraging the growth of enterprises and activities related to the cultural sector (Landry, 2000).

Nevertheless, the fragile economic impact (Evans, 2005 ; Imrie *et al.*, 2003) of some of these initiatives clearly indicates that public policy can only partially influence the development of this sector (Evans, 2001; Scott, 2000). In fact, it is evident that the factors at the root of success of

the cultural industry – and, therefore, the distribution of economic benefits on a local level – are not so easy to reproduce over time.

According to many scholars, the risk of oversimplifying the connection between the new post-Fordist development model and the spatial dimension of the city – between «flows» and «places» (Castells, 1996) exists, as well as that of underestimating the powerful global «dis-junctures» (Appadurai, 1990) and the circulating and not territorializable forces of a globalized cultural production (Lash and Lury, 2007), in which innovation mainly flows through the internal channels of international companies and firms rather than the sharing of physical spaces (Amin and Thrift, 2005) – not to mention the (not irrelevant) impacts on individuals, especially in terms of precariousness of employment (Sassen, 1988; 2002).

Furthermore, an urban strategy oriented towards attracting creativity talents in the form of new district or cultural quarters could have negative effects on a social scale (Zukin, 1995). In fact, in the last few years, in Europe, the rising debate concerning the culture-led urban regeneration experience – both consumption-oriented and production-oriented – has underlined the economical (Scott, 2000) and social (Zukin, 1995; Miles, 2007) limits of such initiatives. The poor results in term of employment in several cultural districts, but also the spatial and aesthetic impact – “Disneyland effect” – produced by several regeneration initiatives are all factors that have been fueling the debate on the need for alternative cultural regeneration models.

In light of these remarks, therefore, one could say that the emphasis, aroused around both Landry’s and Florida’s theories, about the possibility of cultural resources to act as a lever of urban development are to be interpreted more as a sort of “symptom” of current mutations of the economic system (Lash and Urry, 1994) rather than as the expression of an intrinsic character of the contemporary city (Amin and Thrift, 2007).

### 3. Official vs. “shadow” city

#### 3.1 *Is it possible to plan creativity?*

As illustrated, creativity has become a decisive driver of social welfare, general well-being and hence the attractiveness of the city. On the one hand, it implies that economic growth and competitiveness do not just depend on the presence of high-value production, services or flows of goods and investments in the city, but also rely on the city’s innovativeness and creativity. On the other hand, it suggests that economic competitiveness could also bind creativity to it by offering work and developmental opportunities, which in turn attract creative people and innovative knowledge environments.

But, if carefully analyzed, the paradigm of the “creative city” clearly shows some evident paradoxes. According to Florida, there are just three criteria which are of crucial importance for the development of creative *milieus*: technology, talent and (social and political) tolerance. And, according to Landry’s theory, a creative *milieu* moves from («is») a (physical) space. It means that another factor also turn out to be crucial: the availability of suitable niche, and the possibility of improvised, self-organizing networks. In fact, creative environments do not spring into being as a result of top-down measures: the key lies in the bottom-up, spontaneously germinated

initiatives which contribute to the genesis of creative environments. This requires space and freedom from constraints, which cannot be planned or designed in advance.

It is to be said that the same structural changes that led to the emerging of the new approach to cultural policies in the so called "new economy" are also the origin of a visible change in urban morphology. Indeed, the European and North American cities that were invested by the processes of industrialization, are now dotted with "urban voids" following the process of de-industrialization. The large urban containers, emptied of their previous functions, remain unused for a long time and caught between the complexity of decision-making and speculative expectations dictated by market expectations. Thus, they end up being both resources diverted from cities and places of insecurity. These abandoned and unused areas are now gradually repopulated by spontaneous, creative and often temporary actions reflecting the self-organizing capacity of urban communities and their minorities.

These "free-zones" are often located where living and working arrangement have momentarily run wild: areas of illegal building, residual spaces and demolition areas, red-light districts, temporary occupations etc... They are characterized by permanent elusiveness, guerrilla tactics, fundamental uncontrollability and relative isolation, and they also often deal with the ever-shifting relationship between what is legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorized and unauthorized.

Furthermore, although such free-zones activities may take shape in specific locations, since its informal nature the so-called "creative class" is not so much organized around places but around autonomous networks of like-minded participants: the condensation of free-zones activities is not particularly determined by physical conditions, but rather than societal and informal forces in local and global networks of innovators.

The continued growth of the city turns out to put pressure on precisely these aspects. Often, they fall victim to economic pressure for improved returns, the minimization of safety risks or the need for a precise definition of public space, and often even for its privatization. In this sense, booming creative cities and metropolises often prove to be devouring their very economic basis. It is also to be underlined that Florida has pointed out the crucial significance of a tolerant and open climate for the city's creative and innovative capacity. This has much to do with the acceptance of a multiplicity of compatible or conflicting outlooks, lifestyles, codes of behaviour and urban expressions which are a prerequisite for innovation. However, especially in recent times, this tolerance has often been at odds with another challenge facing metropolises, namely how to guarantee sufficient basic quality in areas such as safety, restricting anti-social behaviour, preventing street garbage and so on. The strict rules on city use and zero tolerance for wild-side activities that this is often accompanied by can snuff out inspiring innovations and even lead to the migration of creative potential.

But over all, the hallmark of the creative class is precisely the fact that it cannot simply be pinned down in a “breeding-ground ghetto” or in bureaucratic regulations. How can urban planning and development – which are primarily oriented towards imposing and regulating – possibly be expected to come up with an effective, appropriate response to something like the fostering of creative *milieus*? The belief thus forms that creative *milieus* simply happen, and basically cannot be planned.

Paradoxically, creative *milieus* rather tend to appear in those areas (and related to those themes) which are deliberately left unplanned, revealing a sort of “shadow planning” which involve niches and disadvantaged or neglected zones: contested and “waiting” spaces between different options regarding uses, different life trajectories, between different and may projects and often between different city ideas.

How should policies respond to bottom-up movements and how should the desired free-zones be facilitated in a way which preserves their own dynamics and characteristics?

### *3.2 Free-zones in Europe: a brief overview*

Free-zones are strictly connected with the practice of squatting – or, using the term invented in Berlin, “*instandbesetzen*”, a conflation of “*instandsetzen*” (“renovating”) and “*besetzen*” (“occupying”) – that is: living in or using otherwise a building or a dwelling without the consent of the owner, although, in the Netherlands the term is sometimes used for people who inhabit a flat with the consent of its owner but against the municipal low-income housing allocation rules (Priemus, 1983). Obviously, because of both the often illegal nature and the variety of these experiences (and since observers tend to project their various hope or fears), interpretations of the phenomenon significantly diverge.

Anyway, it is possible to identify different typologies of squatting based on characteristics of people involved, type of building, framing, demands and organization forms (Pruijt, 2004). The oldest types of squatting involved poor people having housing needs. Examples are given by the family squatters movement in the UK in the late ‘60s (Bailey, 1973) or by the Action movement in contemporary Rome (Sebastianelli, 2009).



Figure 5. A squat in Rigaerstrasse (Berlin)



Source: Photo by the author.

Differently from the first kind, squatting as an alternative house strategy involves people who fall outside the category of poor people suffering for housing deprivation and whose profile is similar to that of creative urban innovators: in fact, even if this configuration does not exclude people who have been experiencing severe housing deprivation, this kind of squatters generally are unmarried and without children, young and well-trained. They often lived in a rented room or a student dormitory, and wanted to move into an apartment, or they want to live in a group and cannot find legal accommodation that makes this possible. It is also the case of people who may be middle class in origin (but now downwardly mobile), and have chosen to dedicate themselves to activities that bring few financial rewards (artists or musicians). More generally, squatting offers individuals opportunities for gearing their housing situation to their chosen lifestyles.

This kind of squatters do not present themselves as unlucky souls who require assistance neither they stigmatize themselves as losers: they rather derive their pride from self-creating housing solution, which may be not into a flat but rather in commercial or industrial spaces that were never intended to be used for housing or tenements that were officially taken out of the market (for instance: for planned demolition), since the basic desire of this kind of squatter primarily is to be left alone and in peace. In this sense, empowerment can be considered as a consequence of establishing squats. Squatting breaks through a certain attitude toward (not) being cared for by the State, at least in the area of housing. In fact, squatters distance themselves from the bureaucratically regulated way of home making.

This means that by occupying a building and making it inhabitable squatters by themselves take care of their housing needs.

Although it may also be a promising field of action for those who are engaged in radical anti-systemic politics and who may, tacitly or explicitly, identify with revolutionary or "autonomous" ideas, by giving a high importance to power – that is: counter-power vs. State – squatters' movements are part of a «left-libertarian social movement family» (Della Porta, 2005), including, for example, the ecology and the new peace movement. The movements within this family have organizational overlaps. One of the appeals of squatting is that it promises an immediate tangible result in the form of a realized squat. This is different from political participation through official channels, mainly based on division of labour, hierarchy, and also compromises.

As regards this kind of squatting, according to Van der Raad (1981) Amsterdam housed around 9,000 squatters in 1981. Duivenvoorden (2000) estimated that in the Netherlands as a whole, between 1965 and 1999, 50,000 people lived in squats at one time or another. But longevity is another variable of the squats. In this sense, there is a relation with quality because a longer life expectancy makes it possible to invest more in repairs, construction and maintenance. For the UK, Wates (1980) has estimated an average of three months. For Amsterdam, Pruijt (2004) estimates an average of several years.

Some squats became permanent through legalization, as in the case of Amsterdam, in which the Municipality bought two hundred of the buildings that were occupied by squatters (Duivenvoorden, 2000), thereby legalizing them. Officials turned most of these buildings over to established housing associations, which concluded lease contracts with individual squatters (Draaisma and Hoogstraten, 1983). In this way, squatters could consolidate what they had achieved. The flip side is that legalization takes away the alternative edge (Bussemaker, 1986). Because legalization entails repairs and sometimes a conversion to the level required by the building code, it tends to increase costs, putting an end to the situation that money matters little. In Berlin, however, there were a sizeable proportion of squatters that refused to negotiate for legalization.

Squatting offers opportunities for setting up nearly any kind of establishment, without the need for large resources nor risking to get mired in bureaucracy. Examples (whose scale significantly varies) are neighbourhood centres, squatters' bars (proceeds of which going into actions and charity projects), bicycle repair shops, women's houses, restaurants, print shops, theatres and movie theatres, and tool lending services, alternative schools, day-care centres, party spaces, art galleries, book and info shops, food shops, saunas, workshops (e.g. for bicycle repair or car or boat restoration). Often social centres, free spaces or breeding places are established together with housing. In the Netherlands, squatters promoted combination of functions in one building as an asset in its own right (Duivenvoorden, 2000).

Although entrepreneurial squatting projects are practical (and, therefore, not dependent on ideological framing), there is some ongoing debate that focuses on two issues. The first is whether legalization – whose arrangement vary in terms of the level of control that occupants can retain (Breek and Graad, 2001) – results in the loss of the oppositional edge. On the other hand, some projects did originally have an oppositional identity and lost it completely and abruptly after legalization (Groote Keijser), or gradually (NRC-complex in Tetterode), sometimes

retaining a role in alternative culture (such as the Poortgebouw in Rotterdam, that remained a punk rock venue). However, there are also projects that retained an oppositional edge after legalization, such as the Mehringhof (Berlin), and Vrankrijk (Amsterdam, bought by the squatters themselves). Additionally, it is worth noting that various legalized projects, such as Kulturzentrum Lagerhaus in Bremen or the Fabrik in Berlin never had an oppositional identity: from the beginning they focused on (alternative) culture.

The second issue is whether it is possible to escape from the trade-off between, on the one hand, having a counter-cultural/political identity and because of this only attracting members of a highly exclusive "squatting scene" or, on the other hand, attracting a wide range of people at the expense of becoming culturally mainstream and non-political. In this sense, Italian "centri sociali" ("social centres") – although restricted, in demographic terms, to young people – seem to be less exclusive than others, since they are described as «the central gathering places for the anti-capitalistic part of the population while also appealing to a wide variety of people» (Marco, 2000), who can enjoy and develop social life in a non-commodified environment (Maggio, 1998).

They also allow unemployed people to engage in productive activity (concerts, cd, magazines, T-shirts; there are strong links with the alternative music scene). The centres provide contacts, access to resources and opportunities for acquiring skills that are relevant in the job market (Ruggiero, 2000). Most of the visitors come to the centres for their social contacts and for concerts and art (Ruggiero 2000). However, the Social Centres are also «social and cultural hubs» in a network that supports mobilization against, for instance, capitalist globalization.

Managing the Italian centres entails walking a narrow line between "ghetto mentality" and «possible normalization as social enterprises» (Wright, 2000). Perhaps predictably, some criticized the Centri Sociali for having become commercial enterprises. Several Centri Sociali drew up a plan, the Charter of Milan, to leave behind self-chosen isolation, confrontations with the police and «prejudice-ridden, anti-institutional discourse» and, instead, to develop a «more subtle infiltration of local institutions, a dialog that is not subservient but attains a new quality of antagonistic practice» (Maffeis, 2002).

Finally, we also have the case in which squatting is a tactical tool used in the preservation of a cityscape or landscape (for example: against the construction of roads or office blocks) by occupying those places where original inhabitants and users have already been displaced. In neighbourhoods that are under threat of function change, opportunities exist for coalitions between squatters and "legal", traditional inhabitants that share the same interest in protecting their dwellings. These coalitions can be extended to cover the issue of quality of life in the neighbourhood. Wider coalitions, across neighbourhoods and across social groups, are possible as well.

In Amsterdam, squatting played a role in most of the major protests in the '70s that substantially thwarted the planners' program to modernize the old city. The 1979-1981 squatting wave in Berlin started as conservational squatting: in 1979 in Kreuzberg, the community action group "SO 36" occupied an empty fire station to prevent demolition. The activists proceeded to occupy houses that were slated for razing, because they wanted to preserve both useable housing stock and the structure of the neighbourhood.

Historically, squatters have also played an important role as initiators of community groups, as in the case of the neighbourhood committee in Amsterdam's Bethaniën district, the first neighbourhood group to resist city development. Also, protesters against the destruction of a cityscape or landscape deliberately occupied houses that were in the way of a planned subway line (Amsterdam, Nieuwmarkt, 1972-1975), a motorway (UK, the No M11 Link Road campaign in the 1990s) or railway (Betuwelijn, Netherlands, 1998-99).

## 4. Culture(s) of the city as a social context

### 4.1 Temporality

The brief overview on squatting experiences highlights that the establishing of free-zones derives from temporary actions that may have different lifetimes, visibility, opening and closing effects, may result in improving or deteriorating the physical conditions of the area, may produce involvement or mimesis, cohabitation or conflict among actors. Anyway, opening and cleaning, designing and changing, imagining and adapting residual spaces can be intended as a creative activity that requires actors' organizational and relational skills and may be defined as "re-activation devices".

By analysing such re-appropriation of urban spaces as a process, it is possible to clearly distinguish different phases corresponding to specific behaviours, tactics and roles of actors. The first phase may be termed as "colonization", for which well fits the geological metaphor of the earthquake, flooding space with new activities and communication codes, upsetting established local balances and activating energies and competencies that are able to re-organize the area but also to arouse strong oppositions and turmoil. It may take the form of an "event", which can be a planned action and have different durations: the rave parties are the extreme version of this tendency to such rhapsodic constructing of temporary and mobile places that leaves a trace only in the local imaginary.

*Vice versa*, the event can become a pioneer tactic when some temporary uses redefining the abandoned site are able to settle and become permanent. Ephemeral actions can then trigger new uses and practices permanently subverting the semantic codes of that space by staying as symbols of a project and, finally, becoming a rooting place. In this case, seems appropriate the botanic metaphor of the "graft", understood as a practice with different transformation stages: sowing, flowering, and harvesting.

In fact, the beginning of temporary activities results in a start-up phase disseminating new uses and populations; then a waiting time to flowering, in which practices may die or germinate to root and, finally, to be collected and cared for by a «community of practices» (Wenger, 1998). Such communities are spontaneous groups of individuals whose identity is defined from a common interest or a shared activity and who interact in an informal and not hierarchical way through a process of socialization of forms of knowledge that are not easily transferable or formalizable through traditional learning procedures.

Therefore, the gradualness of such a process of creative re-appropriation allows time to root activities, and this rooting is a premise in constant care, which is not simply public and civic maintenance of spaces – even necessary – but a guarantee that the re-activation process will continue over time.

When a temporary action stops a permanent use or an established practice (for example, by occupying spaces as a political action), this addresses the need for networking with other organizations and/or finding the support of media. Otherwise, it will be a practice of short lifetime, which, anyway, will show how that space can host other creative activities.

It also may be the case of coexistence (or clashing), in the same abandoned spaces, of different actors and temporary uses, which can be understood in two ways: the first concerns the possibility that the same space is contested by groups with different goals. There will then give rise to conflict or to negotiation and possible co-habitation. A form of co-existence is, for example, the persistence of temporary uses even after the settling of new permanent activities, as in the case of an abandoned area that "officially" becomes a parking, but continues to host an informal market on certain days of the week.

Anyway, the consolidation of re-appropriation practices can occur after a long period of negotiation with the institutions, but especially by building consensus around temporary activities through the establishing of the new informal uses within the collective imaginary and, then, by formalizing them. In this sense, information and communication are active devices in witnessing the existence of activities and actors in the residual spaces: both short neighbourhood and longer networks may accompany the transformation. At this stage, the artistic expression and experience can play a relevant role.

## 4.2 Art as experience

Moving from the link connecting art and society (Dewey, 1989), the metaphorical "natural" (not rational, not "scientific") language historically allowed a constant creative reinterpretation of spaces, in which the artistic experience played a crucial role in self-representation of communities: think of religious or popular celebrations and events that defined urban hierarchies and structured public spaces.

In this sense, artistic experience can be seen as strictly (re)linked to social practices. This leads to focus on the articulated field of the contemporary urban art, especially on those artistic experiences based on an overcoming of the concept of form: from the dadaist, surrealist and situationist research to the Public Art of the end of the 60s, to the «new genre public art» (Lacy, 1995), and, finally, to the relational art. These kind of artistic expressions are based on an interpretation of space as inter-relation and on practices, which are intended as *«la partie la plus vivante qui se joue sur l'échiquier de l'art»* (Borriaud, 2001).

Therefore, it is possible to intend contemporary aesthetic approaches as a contested field of perceptions, experiences, lifestyles and values which articulate cultural practices, research of meaning, processes of individual or collective identification. It means that the artistic experience



constitutes a sort of potential multiplier of sensitive experiences, also by those are not definable as belonging to underground urban movements.

Not by chance, such artistic approaches are more and more being used within some alternative processes of construction of urban spaces, especially if oriented towards a more holistic and culturally sensitive approach, based on the involvement of local inhabitants and on a more effective integration aimed to avoid the sectoriality of actions and the standardization of projects. Not surprisingly, an important difference from the other “creative” and culture-led regeneration processes lies in their localization, which is not only in central areas of the city, but mainly in marginalized peripheries. With respect to the traditional processes of re-use, which are often much more complex and less transparent (and not always successful), they have the advantage of a closer integration with the already settled community and allow a broad rethinking of urban space in terms of sharing.

Such low-impact and reversible “re-appropriations”, which use art as a communicative tool and act on the urban fabric as an «acupuncture» (Oswalt, 2000), seem also able to create micro-economies, as witnessed by experiences such as “Bricolage Plantage” in Bremen, “No Longer Empty” or “Mutual Housing Association” in New York, “Micronomics” and “Micromarchè” in Bruxelles, and many others. These projects are to be framed within the emerging deliberative planning theories focusing on the need to elaborate new forms of interaction and innovative not codified answers and solutions to urban (social) problems. This research field focuses on an interpretation in which city is not only intended in a physical (material) sense, but also as a complex plot of inter-subjective emotional inter-relations which involves places. The attention is oriented towards the effects of social representations and actions on urban spaces in order to allow the construction of a local (not global) «actionable knowledge» (Argyris, 1996) enlarging the objectives of planning to the production of social capital.

The reference to Landry’s concept of «cultural literacy», although not appropriate at all, perhaps can be helpful to recall the fracture historically determined between languages – between the objective, scientific (“modern”) language of planning and the subjective, metaphorical and symbolic (“pre-modern”) language of «natural» (Alexander, 1975) historical cities – used in the construction of public spaces. In this sense, Landry’s «cultural literacy» could be intended as close to the Sandercock’s «new literacies» through which planners should plan «by negotiating desires and fears, mediating memories and hopes, facilitating change and transformation» (Sandercock, 2003).

Also moving from the evidence of the relevance of free-zones – «micro-utopias under construction» (Paba, 2004), «spaces of insurgent citizenship» (Sandercock, 2003), «places of possibilities» (Lefebvre, 1968) – in the achievement of an international status, the challenge is to involve in planning theory and practices these interstitial, molecular and often invisible micro-movements without erasing their distinctive features. Sensitivity thus needs to be developed in urban and planning policies regarding the conditions under which spontaneous bottom-up initiatives arise. The formal, regulatory, ossifying, territorial-based aspect of urban policy needs to be complemented with a greater attention to informal, self-managed, pioneering, elusive, network-based free-zones issues.

Re-connecting “shadow” to official planning, inter-acting with the always changing free-zones, understanding the role of creative temporary activities within urban regeneration strategies delineate a subtle and contaminative path, which is difficult to lead within a model since “shadow planning”, free-zones, ephemeral artistic activities can assume diverse forms and intensities. Furthermore, because the terrain of some particular artistic experiences is that of a playful dimension, it is implicit that rules are in turn determined by the players. In addition, the difficult to lead them within a model lies in their strong relationship with the specificity of places and problems. But, surely, such an approach may constitute an interstitial experimental space, open to free expression, and also to errors. It need time to be spent, an inter(trans)-disciplinary and contaminative attitude, investment on social capital and also a sort of renewal of planning imaginary.

## 5. Learning from practices

### 5.1 Visionary leadership, integrated approach, temporary re-use

The following remarks are the findings resulting from a five-years field-work carried out as both a planning scholar and a «reflective» (Schon, 1983) professional (and also as an active member of a political collective: a sort of “Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde” situation...) involved within the negotiation process related to a spontaneous and «rhizomatous» (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) self-appropriation of former industrial spaces in the city of Rome and the consequent establishment – also through creative and cultural activities – of a network of free-zones in a neighbourhood currently involved within an early-stage gentrification process due to the settlement of the Third University as an (also cultural) actor in urban (physical) transformation, strictly linked to the Municipal administration, according to the slogan “from industrial to cultural factory”.

Figure 6. The former industrial area on the left side of the river Tiber (Rome)



Source: Photo by the author.

Despite the aim of the University to “confuse” itself within the historically working class neighbourhood (conceived in the Twenties as a “garden city”) with a high architectonical and political identity (potentially, a perfect “creative cluster”), its settlement resulted in a general increasing of rent prices (especially for students) and in subtracting cultural spaces to the already existing local uses and cultural demands.

This local struggle was also connected to the larger issue of the (national) increase of costs for public education and generated the (illegal) occupation of certain empty industrial spaces,

where alternative expression of culture and creativity (and also education) could be experimented.

Figure 7. The network of re-appropriations on the left side of river Tiber in Rome



Note: In blue: the former industrial areas close to the river Tiber (in some cases restored and used by the Third University of Rome); on the right, in red: the “garden city” working-class neighbourhood of Garbatella; in yellow: the network of (more or less temporarily established) free-zones.

Source: Elaboration by the author (overlapping “shadow” and official planning).



Figure 8. Architectural features of public houses in Garbatella neighbourhood (Rome)



Source: photo by the author.

Obviously, the main finding from such experience consists of the fact that the co-evolution of both actors and spaces directly involves the capacity of public administrations (in this case, not the Municipality of Rome, but the local administration of the urban district) in overcoming traditional and codified procedures and practices: this implies a «visionary leadership» (Sandercock, 2003), which is able to decide to assume and manage all the (inevitable) risks in terms of political consensus, also related to the time factor, strictly linked to this particular kind of artistic experiences.

In fact, a not irrelevant aspect is that this kind of experience almost always starts by spontaneous phenomena of appropriation and often illegal occupation by «communities of practices» (Wenger, 1998) in order to develop self-interested actions that – once proved effective with respect to a wider circle of people – end up to attract the attention of the institutions. Therefore, the latter come into play later, by making themselves available to negotiation paths that result in agreements and partnerships not initially considered and sometimes defined through incremental and even conflicting processes.

This also implies a shift from an only “material” renewal of spaces towards a broader meaning of regeneration intended as empowerment, which also includes the “immaterial” dimension. Last but not least, problems and risks related to the ambiguities connected to «processes of construction of images» (Scoppetta, 2006; 2009) – as observed in many cases of gentrification – are not to be excluded.

Such an approach allows to tackle in an integrated way physical and social aspects that – despite the evolution of planning discipline from the rationalist and functionalist spatial planning, now finally passed – continue to be pointlessly considered as opposite spheres. It shows, on the contrary, that one can be functional to the other: physical aspects, in fact, may be an opportunity in new ways to tackle social aspects, while the latter may be in turn a diriment criterion for rethinking the first ones.

Furthermore, the contrast between the regeneration purposes expressed by the local institutions – inspired by traditional models and oriented to the demolition or renovation of spaces in order to set up traditional functions and/or conventional services – and the aspirations of the informally settled groups (also carrying out their own informal experimentations) generates an inter-active space that becomes an opportunity for collaboration and creative planning developing new frames within which mobilizing additional skills and expertise (architectural, technical, commercial, management...).

In this sense, ideas for project cannot derive from pre-established patterns, but they rather may be the innovative outcome of both the area and the long rooting process of new activities. Even the identification of possible managing models, moreover, can only derives from the practical organization and functioning of spaces, by involving multifaceted and different expertise, knowledge, experiences and interests.

From a more “technical” point of view, what is sure is the loss of meaning of certain traditional categories, such as that of “destination of use”, which is well adapted to a no longer feasible model of government alluding to an unidirectional and pre-structured assignment of functions. On the contrary, the category of re-use can be more easily traced back to an idea of planning as an articulated and incremental process resulting of the intersection and overlapping of multiple forms of rationality and dynamics among the actors.

The way in which the temporal dimension is tackled and perceived by the actors also becomes crucial since it concerns the possibility of sedimentation and rooting of actors, knowledge, interactions, images and imaginary, mutual learning processes, policies and projects. In this sense, difficulties lie in the fact that public institutions and social groups generally have different routines, needs and time horizons: while the former are stable organizations that base their ability to act and their legitimacy on standardized procedures responding to internal logic, the latter usually act according to different times and priorities, which are related to the achievement of specific goals. Therefore, two different needs are to be reconciled: on the one hand, to construct inter-active spaces that will enable the institutions to move according to their specific abilities; on the other hand, to allow social groups to develop their potential by following appropriate times.



Finally, it is more than evident that re-connecting “shadow” to official planning implies a radical shift in public administration not only in terms of a greater inter-sectoral and integrated approach, by re-organizing the internal structures. Neither the involvement of creative resources of the society can be intended (as commonly happens) as a strategy of conflict anticipating/mediating or as an action aimed at building consensus in advance on institutional initiatives (to be, eventually, reviewed and modified through consultations with stakeholders).

This goal seems not to be reached through the now well-established practices of the so-called “participatory planning” – or «collaborative planning» (Healey, 1997; and many others), «deliberative democracy» (Forester, 1999; Elster, 1998; Friedmann, 1987; Bohman, 1996; Gastil and Levine, 2005), «communicative planning» (Sager, 1994; but also Yftachel and Huxley, 2000), «community planning» (Wates, 1998) and «community architecture» (Wates and Knevitt, 1987), and so on – in which, too often, in spite of significant investments in constructing of listening and consultation processes, the emerging ideas and proposals are often trivial and obvious (more green, more security, a playground, a parking ...).

Not to mention the fact that the comforting recipe of standardized and self-referential participatory “best practices” is frequently seen by spontaneous (and mistrustful) social movements as corresponding to the first five – «manipulation», «therapy», «informing», «consultation», «placation» – of Arnstein’s (1969) «ladder of citizens participation» since it suppose mainly cooperative interactive networks and deny the existence of conflicts. Thus, it is consequently interpreted as embedded in a «system maintaining» and not in a «system transforming» (Chawla and Heft, 2002) approach, revealing the «suspicious intentions» (De Carlo, 1980) of rhetoric on civic engagement in planning processes.

## 5.2 Broadening the public sphere

All this implies, of course, a radical shift in urban planning (in fact, already occurred, at least in part) and forces to rethink the role of planner: although – as Faludi (2000) suggests – many planners still like to see themselves at the centre of the action, controlling or reining in other actors, in the globalization age they can no longer play the “mythical” technical role of the origin of a discipline founded to address the problems due to the Industrial Revolution by clearly separating functions and designing “modern” orthogonal grids.

Time (and post-colonial studies) raised, moreover, the veils that concealed the essentially political nature of certain “technical” solutions. And, on the other hand, European policies have definitively sanctioned the shift from government to governance, that is: from a model centred on the exclusive role of the public actor to another based on collaboration among different and multifaceted subjects.

Furthermore, policy analysis has a significant tradition – which has exerted a relevant influence in planning theory – of understanding antagonism and conflict as constructive elements of social relations, as source of its strength and ability to innovate (Lindblom, 1965; Hirshmann, 1994), but also of posing the question of the conditions under which antagonism and conflict can be turned into a positive, constructive transformative dynamic, or rather threaten to exert disrupting effects in the social fabric.

It means moving on to consider citizens not only as passive recipients of services but as active agents, with knowledge, experiences, skills and abilities that are no longer exclusively concentrated within the institutions. Such an approach requires the experimentation of innovative configurations of the relationship between institutions and society by exploiting the specific resources that both are able to offer in different situations: for every actor involved, this means to be ready to play different, sometimes multiple and not pre-defined roles, with the institutional as a potential point of reference.

More generally, it is to be understood – by both public administrators and planners – that re-connecting “shadow” to official planning does not deal with the need of subtracting urban spaces to irregular, anti-social and dangerous activities according to a pervasive (presumed) “safety” demand (too often hiding not explicit interests of specific groups). It rather deals with the possibility to enlarge and re-conceptualize the public sphere by intercepting the new and not always easily decipherable social needs (Amin and Thrift, 2005) that have added to the well-known traditional ones, which are (were) normally faced by conventional services.

In this sense, considering free-zones as a not irrelevant factor in the production of urban space means to keep the public sphere anchored to social changes by abandoning the traditional (but no longer useful) logic based on the old concept of “needs” (which requires direct strategies) and rather privileging the opportunities for action, which refers to indirect strategies through which the new emerging needs may be intercepted.

As delineated, this experimental contaminative path may be added to the existing typologies of relationships between culture and planning towards a more comprehensive concept of “culture”, intended as «capacity» (Sen, 1999), positive freedom and awareness.

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