

The cultural resources and the re-design of places: the importance of public space in successful creative regeneration

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Introduction

The concept of the “creative city” has its origin in the research into reasons why several cities have become more attractive and competitive in recent decades. Such cities seem to have worked on how to improve the interaction between urban regeneration, economic development and social renewal in order to achieve more comprehensive development of the city. The cultural resource, if appropriately inserted inside planning able to create employment and new occupations as well as economic development, constitutes the trigger of a process of evolution of the territorial system and of all social actors and, at the same time, a process of creation of a network of culturally sustainable development. Indeed, a type of approach based on the acquisition of the cultural heritage in its meaning of creative resource represents a substantial change in the management of a territory because rather than being viewed as a commodity, “cultural heritage”, culture is seen as a resource able to offer added value to the territory. In the perspective provided by these approaches, culture in its broadest sense assumes a decisive role in constructing a system of interventions where employment, tourism, and social and sustainable development become the product of the integration of places, people, economies and traditions.

Looking at the experiences of creative cities, it may be observed that they revolve around the design, promotion and activation of urban areas established due to their particular local characteristics. Those areas become creative clusters, in accordance with the evolving definition of clusters which has changed in recent years from the traditional view, which saw them as containers conveying production flows, to a broader definition which identifies new features, directly related to the history and culture of the areas in question. These clusters are a result of economic and structural innovation, which is related to the execution of innovative projects achieved with the help of local development strategies based on the economy of excellence and territorial qualities. Two main types of clusters may be recognized within the creative city: cultural clusters and event clusters. Cultural clusters are created around activities such as fine arts, music, cinema, architecture and design, which are encouraged and planned by the local administration. The intangible resources and skills of the actors depend on the local authorities that through local planning aim to restore the whole region. Examples of cultural districts include: the Ciudad of Valencia, the Guggenheim of Bilbao, and Liverpool’s Albert Docks and Tate. Public support for the cultural cluster serves in the start-up phase to give credibility to the project, and allows visibility at the international level.

Urban policies are devoted to creating the social and economic conditions to develop an urban environment that attracts culturally interested actors.

The second cluster type is that of events which is fuelled by the interconnections of innovative resources in cities. This cluster intercepts new cultural flows and leads to new cultural infrastructures being built. Its origins lie in the organization of great events or different kinds of recreational and cultural activities which are bound together by the importance that the city gains in connection to these events. The cluster of events includes Expos (such as Zaragoza, Sevilla, Lisboa, Milan, Shanghai, etc.), the Venice Biennale, the European Capital of Culture (Marseille, Matera, Helsinki, etc.) and the Olympic Games (Athens, Beijing, etc.). The manufacturing and services “machine” which is built around the event is active throughout the year, while the event has a limited duration. To ensure a cluster of urban creativity a system of governance needs to be created to support the network of players who must cooperate so as to generate new resources and enhance those already existing, as well as contribute to embedding the results in the area.

The risk of losing the positive long-term effect of such operations at the conclusion of the event is thereby avoided. The creation of suitable urban policies represents a fundamental element which enables the process of creative transformation to start. Participation, which has to be activated from the initial stages of the process, assures the good development of the project.

The creation of an urban environment which encourages setting up innovative activities requires, at the local level, the construction of a specialized production system and the establishment of an urban environment which can support the testing of consensual practice of regional government. In order to obtain this goal, new alternative strategies and urban policies should be considered. Its guiding principle is placemaking rather than urban development, in which the creation of liveable public spaces, mixed uses and sustainable innovation are important factors. Accordingly, the transformation of cities has been accompanied by changes in the urban design and planning tools, modifying those already existing and creating new ones. These tools must be suited to interpreting new processes and should not be guided by market forces.

Starting from these premises, the paper will illustrate two cases of urban regeneration which are mainly focused on public spaces, namely Milla Digital project in Zaragoza and Marseille Méditerranée in Marseille, both in the framework of the cluster of event. The methodology used for the collection of information and materials will be explained in the following section. Conclusion will illustrate the main questions which, starting from the two case studies, can be observed and considered of general interest for the creative city.

Methodology

The study which is presented in this paper is part of a wider C.N.R. research project focused on European creative regeneration, carried out by the author. Research into the best practices of urban regeneration involved reading the specialised bibliography and consulting web sites featuring regeneration projects, using key words to retrieve data not available in the works consulted. It also involved carrying out on-site inspections with photographic documentation, meeting participants in the process and gathering specific materials. It was decided that the case studies should focus on

medium-sized cities in Europe where the regeneration process has meant redefining the identity not only of that particular place but of the city as a whole. This was the case of the Abandoibarra river in Bilbao, the area between the old El Portillo station and the new Delicias station in Zaragoza, HafenCity in Hamburg, Marseille Euromediterranée in Marseille, Lyon Confluence in Lyon. As a first step, the cases were divided up according to the project's underlying motivation: great cultural poles and major events. The cultural poles comprise buildings with a cultural use - museums, concert halls, aquariums, etc. - which become landmarks for the territory and are in general designed by internationally renowned architects. Such projects ensure that the part of the city undergoing regeneration gains in appeal and contribute to increasing the area's economic value. Major events constitute another important factor in starting up a regeneration process, both for the financing they generate and for the international fame associated with the event. Many regeneration projects have begun from an international event: in many cases, the success of the event gives credibility to the local authorities and ensures subsequent funding. In all the case studies materials have been gathered in order to verify: urban projects, socio-economic regeneration and participation. In particular, the urban project is an important element in the process because it represents the objective physical transformation involved. The methodology used identifies the various phases, features, scheduled implementation times, objectives and measures adopted. The surface area of the operation and the designated uses in percentage terms - residential, public spaces, buildings for culture, vegetation - constitute an important factor in assessing the urban sustainability. It is useful to collect plans on the territorial scale which lie behind the projects, guidelines and strategic orientations. The investigation also seeks to identify the issues encountered and the state of advancement. Furthermore the information on the urban projects can be extended by analysing three aspects of the area surrounding the city: geography; historical evolution; projected image and new identity.

The public and private financing received for each project is another important information, together with the institutions involved and the company set up to oversee the investments. In general this company coincides with the institution that creates and manages the web portal containing the principal information on the project. Finally, participation is another fundamental factor investigated. For the transformation process to be achieved with success, consultation with the various categories must be held from the outset and at each stage. The investigation looked at ad hoc or national legislation, preliminary and mid-term consultations, listening modalities, results of consultations and contribution to the construction process, newsletters, communication modalities, any ad hoc logos, etc. Accordingly with the aim of the paper, the two case studies which will be presented are mainly focused on the aspects related to the relationships between public spaces and creative regeneration.

The case studies

Zaragoza's Milla Digital project

Zaragoza is a city of about 700,000 inhabitants and is the capital of the Aragón Region with a cultural heritage with an old tradition of architecture and urban public spaces. The city now has

a growing industrial base and very good socio-economic indicators within the Spanish average. Zaragoza's Milla Digital project is focused on the creation of new public spaces, cultural facilities and new media technologies with the aim of creating or boosting a successful innovative ecosystem. The general aim of Milla Digital is to build an innovative environment to become part of the city's identity. This environment, which consists of new digitally-mediated places, will provide a new generation of public facilities able to develop a sustainable network of innovation and creativity. "Milla Digital" is converting the area between the old "El Portillo" station and the new "Delicias" station of Zaragoza and the Rivergate River into an area of technology parks and development. El Portillo, apart from being the old station, also represents one of the most historic sites of Zaragoza with the Aljafería Moorish palace, while Almozara, which is located close to the Delicias Station, is the most visible landmark in Zaragoza. Rivergate is on the banks of the Ebro River, at the main entrance of the 2008 Expo and is remained a strategic point even after Expo, a sort of gateway to the *high technology business zone and recreational amenities*.

The project falls within the Strategic Plan of Zaragoza and its Metropolitan Area which was approved in June 2006 by Zaragoza society, represented by the members of the association Ebropolis, which was in charge of drawing it up. The City Council has collaborated on this project with a public-private partnership including: a research team from MIT; the University of Zaragoza; a group of experts including W. Mitchell, P. Hall, M.Castells, S. Sassen, D. Frenchman and M.Joroff; companies including Siemens, Samsung and Telefonica.

The project, conceived by the Mayor Juan Alberto Belloch, has the following goals which are aimed at achieving a strategic urban and economic development: "activate public spaces that are currently underutilized; to create a global identity for Zaragoza; assert the city as a regional centre for technological innovation; build local skills in using and developing information technology; and express the evolving history and culture of Zaragoza". In accordance with these goals, these specific actions include: *activate inactive spaces within the city*, by creating new public spaces which knit together old divided sections of the city; *provide public spaces and amenities for neighbourhoods through which they can interact and express themselves*, by both attracting new visitors and enhancing the daily life of the people residing in the residential neighbourhoods; *build up the local skills base to help people find jobs in the growing technology industry*, by engaging and educating the local citizenry in the use of information technology; *make Zaragoza a regional centre for technology industries and culture* by making the city a central location for technology firms and the production of culture. The design themes of the Milla Digital project are based on two kinds of approaches: the "open source approach" and the physical one. The latter refers to environments that interact with their users and change to provide for different activities with the aim of both favouring interaction among citizens and helping them to reveal past and present narratives about the city. The final aim is to create a sense of belonging between citizens and their public realm and facilitate a positive approach to new technologies. The former is related to the physical features which represent historical and identity elements of Zaragoza. These include: *water*, meant in its functional and aesthetic qualities (e.g. the Ebro River where the city has its origin, the irrigation channels, and the gardens of the Aljafería palace), able to link natural landscape as well as urban spaces and life; the *bridges*, old and new,

which have linked over the years the different parts of Zaragoza, and which will link the new places and ideas; the *towers*, which shape the historical city's skyline and which, with the construction of new ones which will mark the public spaces, will give the city a contemporary image; new light and water system will be added to the *walls*, which from the Roman to the Christian era have marked the growth of Zaragoza. The walls will be able to define new urban edges and create a new gateway; and the *layers*, meant as the different inhabitants of Zaragoza who have lived out their memory over the centuries through a continuity of culture, will be used as a tool to create sets of activities, buildings and digital media for different groups.

The Milla Digital has created urban places which connect the cultural heritage of the city to its future through elements which are part of the city's history and identity, such as the above-mentioned water, bridges, towers, wall and layers, transformed innovatively. The people-scale urban spaces, the mixes of activities and the pedestrian connections, which are peculiar characteristics of Zaragoza, represent the model of a traditional city to both conserve and transform by the project in contemporary fashion. This is provided for a finely scaled fabric of livable places and activities able to attract people and users from inside and outside the district. The urban places to be created will be flexible and able to change their visual quality and content, making them *responsive to different circumstances, thus forming a set of event places, rather than fixed places*. In this way it is possible to accommodate different needs for different kinds of users. These include: residents and locals of Zaragoza, technology commuters, school children and elders seeking recreation, social services, conveniences, and spending time with friends and family. Interaction and integration is achieved in this project in different ways. First of all, with the use of wireless technology, Internet connectivity and digital media have been incorporated into street furniture and lighting in order to provide information and enable users to participate responsively. Then, with the creation of an efficient landscape able both to reduce energy use and work as a recreation space, with the twofold aim of creating sustainable and liveable places and showing the locals the lesson in sustainability.

The starting points of the Milla project are the new arrival of the high-speed train (AVE), and new projects which included the 2008 Zaragoza Expo and the vast logistic platform of PlaZa. In particular, the Expo, which is now closed after a great success in terms of visitor numbers per day, covers a surface of 25 hectares near the Ebro river, within an area which is included in the Water Metropolitan Park. As a first result after the Expo, there were about 5.5 million visitors and this created about 16,000 jobs. The current aim is to create, through the Milla Digital project and the construction of the digital PlaZa, 12,000 new jobs, to establish 300 *creative* businesses - both in the cultural and high-tech sectors – and to increase the attractiveness of Zaragoza for local inhabitants and foreigners.

Marseille Euromediterranée

Marseille is situated in the south of France, capital of the Bouches-du-Rhône department and of Provenza-Alpes-Cote d'Azur region. A great industrial and service industry centre, it is the second city of France for inhabitants, it counts around 900,00 inhabitants; established 28 thousand years ago, it boasts a long port history so much that the port system and the multimodal bases still represent a strategic element of the economy of the city.

Marseille started its transformation process in 1992 with the Masterplan of Marseille (Schéma de cohérence à l'horizon 2015) that reported the neglect of the population, above all of the middle class, in the central part of the city which was getting poorest. In 1995 Marseille started a project of urban regeneration, Euroméditerranée, with the objective to face this situation and restore the local economy through the creation of new public spaces, the enhancement of the waterfront deteriorated districts, and to face the competitiveness with other international metropolises through economic development based on sustainability, quality of life and on promotion of tourism. The finishing of this process of transformation was the moment when Marseille was designated the European Capital of Culture 2013. The project which brought about this candidature is "Atelier de l'Euroméditerranée" that it revolves around the dialogue of the cultures and the rebirth of the city through culture. Marseille offers itself as a candidate because of its point of contact between the Mediterranean culture, and extra-European Countries, and continental Europe; setting itself therefore as a real door of Europe on the dock of the Mediterranean. The city of Marseille, according the idea of mayor Jean-Claude Gaudin, has assumed a central role in the Mediterranean, preserving the activity of the seaport and modernizing the image of urban landscape without twisting its characteristics. The guide idea which was carried out by the Euroméditerranée project, as regards the city, has also played for the candidature of the European Capital of Culture 2013, to make international its seaport and enhance its identity heritage. The strategy to assure a sustainable development of the city is founded upon the Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale (SCT), elaborated by Agence d'Urbanisme de l'Agglomération Marseillaise. The scheme defined Euromed as a project of "geostrategic" dimension, looking at its future projected in its "international development". The SCT demands attention on the "rebalancing" of the districts; the holistic development is elaborated in a declaration of EuroMeds objectives called to establish "social inclusion", "the reduction of poverty", "to improve the quality of urban life", "creating the conditions to welcome new residents" and "associations of districts incorporated in the development of the project and in social, economic and cultural life of community". The transformation of the coastline marks the reopening of the metropolis on the sea, the retraining of the interface with the seaport and the renewed economic dynamism. The strategies programmed for retraining the city of Marseille are economic development, urban development, the launching of the city, the restoration of its districts and the environmental improvement of the waterfront.

Euroméditerranée started in 1995 on an area of 310ha and in 2007 the area was extended by 180ha, to be converted to shops and productive buildings. The urban development has a principal objective to retrieve the city centre for its inhabitants, and to restore its districts, create new public spaces, and regenerate the buildings, thanks to the Centre Ville Project.

The regeneration of Vieux Port was realized because of the contribution of the Plan Lumière: the new setup of the benches, the reduction of vehicular traffic, and the improvement of accessibility achieved by the increase of public transport. In addition Marseille owes its profits to a large extent to its designation as terminal of transit for the high-speed railroads of the region. The environmental improvement of the waterfront has been guaranteed by action promoted by Plan Bleu that has brought the touristic seaport to the citizen through the elimination of the pre-existing

barriers. The area to be recovered has been divided into the 5 principal zones: the zone concerned by the project Cité de la Méditerranée, whose principal scope is to increase the accessibility to the sea and the waterfront; the new directional and residential centre Jolitte; the pole of the culture Belle de Mai, realized with the re-conversion of pre-existing buildings; Saint Charles which includes the railway station; and Rue de la République, the central street. Joliette district is situated opposite the coast and has a strategic position among the seaport and the centre, is well connected with the airport, the railway station, the highways, the urban lines of the new subway and the line of the streetcar. The construction of the benches of Joliette was started in 1992 and completed in 2002, while the development of Place de la Joliette goes back to 1998. From the moment that the district is turned into a dynamic and attractive business district, it has become a real area of international business of the service industry; currently it entertains 12,000 employees in 800 firms in the trade sectors, international commerce and telecommunications. The uses and the functions of the business district tend to make this place an authentic place to live between seaport and city, with new structures and public spaces. Belle de Mai is situated on the perimeter of the area interested by Euroméditerranée, next to the multimodal centre, the airport and the highways, where the old tobacco factories have been reconverted for industries including multimedia and digital culture. The development is structured around three buildings: the pole of the Federation with the Town File, the reserves of the Museums of Marseille and the Interregional Center of Restoration of Works of art and INA; media cluster, centre that contains audio-visual studies, installations for the technical industries, and offices for multimedia producers, publishers, and broadcasting stations. This centre also houses the hatchery of multimedia national education and culture, promoted from the Office of the Education the Search and of the Technology. The media centre is now almost completed, and currently it includes 80 firms and 600 employees. The centre of arts and of show, managed by the Wasteland Association System Theatre that it is already a centre of over 300 artists.

Gare Saint-Charles district has begun its metamorphosis with the arrival of the TGV Mediterraneo high-speed train. The zone interested by the restructuring continued around the station, becoming a centre of exchange between the multimodal railroad, the bus station, the urban buses, the subways and the motors. The realization of Victor Hugo square connected to the University of Provenza and the embellishment of Narvik square were part of the programme.

For Porte d'Aix, the greatest change has been represented by the closing of the highway A7. Freeing the area from the traffic, this district is reborn with the residents mostly represented by students, soon this area has been followed by residences, shops, parks and public structures. Heart of Euromediterranée project, this great residential and commercial artery, is one of the greatest zones interested by urban regeneration in France; 200 trees have been planted and new roads are being installed; in total more than 14 hectares have been turned into parks.

Among the results from 1995, the year in which EuroMed was legally put in action, the project of retraining Euromediterranée has produced around 28,000 places of employment, it has added 35,000 new inhabitants, has converted 400,000 mq of buildings to residential use and produced 800 corporations.

Conclusion

This paper has illustrated two emblematic case studies of creative urban regeneration, namely Milla Digital in Zaragoza and Marseille Euroméditerranée in Marseille, mainly focused on the creation of new and attractive public spaces. Some key points can be observed which can be of general interest for the creative urban transformation operations, including: the presence of a general plan which give particular attention to the question concerning the public spaces; a balanced mix of cultural resources, historical memory and technological innovation; the mixed uses with particular attention to the presence of public spaces which are attractive for both locals and visitors and act as social and urban connectors; the presence of public-private partnerships capable to assure the continuity of the project (and independent from the administrative changes); the construction of a good system of communication which is active during all phases of the project and acts as a part of the participation process which is important in order to nourish the sense of belonging of the new part of the city in to citizens. In any case, it is necessary during the period of project completion to ensure that public policies do not only focus on the potential of developing culture. To achieve the long-term success of urban and cultural regeneration it is important to attain throughout the process the involvement and integration of the local community at all levels, and enhance and consolidate place identity, all in respect of economic, social and environmental sustainability.

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