

The role of culture in urban contexts

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1 THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN URBAN CONTEXTS

The role of culture in urban areas and of cultural institutions in the restoration of cities is analyzed in a growing number of books and scientific papers.

Examples like the city of Bilbao in Spain, which has enjoyed real success, have helped researchers to study this issue and to create several different analytical models based on specific scientific methods.

The paper presented here aims to examine the contribution that the following disciplines have provided, and still provide, to the study of local development in general and of the urban environment in particular. Specifically, it briefly investigates the contribution of some disciplines in urban contexts: public art, a tangible manifestation of the cultural expressions of a city implying a certain orientation of cultural policies at the urban level; urban sociology, critical in order to better understand the ways in which human interactions and relations, both individual and collective, shape the urban environment; geography, from which the analysis cannot be separated, to rigorously define the space-time context of reference; and local economy, fundamental and necessary to ensure that culture also determines the economic growth of the city.

These elements, taken and explored together, lay the foundations for interpreting culture as a possible local development strategy for urban contexts.

This short paper will take several academic disciplines into consideration, while also creating connections among them. How many different disciplines look at the same goals? What is their level of heterogeneity? Which are the convergence problems which may arise? Which kind of approaches? These are some of the questions which this research tries to answer.

2 PUBLIC ART IN URBAN CONTEXTS

In modern urban contexts, concepts like art and culture are very important for the development of contemporary cities. Indeed, they represent the core of the policies of the city and for the city itself (Salone, Crivello, 2013).

According to Atkinson and Easthope (2009), implementing policies aimed at attracting tourists and investments is essential, as is the goal of organizing or hosting cultural events. These factors can be used to reconvert and redesign cities or parts of them; this method is called the "Cultural Economy of Cities".

The intellectual and creative components, with their strong symbolic meaning, make culture a strategic resource, and its positive impact can also be seen in other sectors like tourism and the environment (Salone, Crivello, 2013).

If we accept that art is part of culture, it will also be true that the relationship between economy and art is connected to the increasing dematerialization of the economic system. Moreover, Scott (2000) defined culture as a typical urban product: urban cultural policies have begun to be credited with very diverse goals and benefits, encompassing immaterial and material effects on the external image of the city, its functional and physical fabric (Cuesta, 2004), and its econom-