

STRUMENTI  
PER LA DIDATTICA E LA RICERCA

– 94 –



# **Brand-building: the creative city**

A critical look at current concepts and practices

*edited by*  
Serena Vicari Haddock

Firenze University Press  
2010

Brand-building : the creative city : A critical look at current concepts and practices / a cura di Serena Vicari Haddock. – Firenze : Firenze University Press, 2010. (Strumenti per la didattica e la ricerca ; 94)

<http://digital.casalini.it/9788884535405>

ISBN 978-88-8453-524-5 (print)

ISBN 978-88-8453-540-5 (online)

Cover illustration @ Phil Haddock, City of Words, detail.

The publication of this book was made possible by a financial contribution coming from the EU Research Training Network: *Urban Europe between Identity and Change (UrbEurope)*; Contract nr: HPRN-CT-2002-00227 (01-09-2002 - 31-08-06), and from the EU Coordination Action: *Growing Inequality and Social Innovation: Alternative Knowledge and Practice in Overcoming Social Exclusion in Europe (Katarsis)*; Contract nr: CIT5-CT-2006-029044 (05-01-2006 – 30-11-2009).

Progetto grafico di Alberto Pizarro Fernández

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Università degli Studi di Firenze  
Firenze University Press  
Borgo Albizi, 28, 50122 Firenze, Italy  
<http://www.fupress.com/>

*Printed in Italy*

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E. Mingione\*

## Foreword

The essays in this volume are the final result of work carried out by young researchers within the Research and Training Network known as *UrbEurope*, financed by the European Commission for four years between 2002 and 2006. The network, for which I served as coordinator, involved the following Departments: Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale, Università di Milano-Bicocca; Department of Social Policy, Helsinki University; Humboldt Universitaet Berlin, Institut für Sozialwissenschaften Stadt- und Regionalsoziologie; Istituto di Sociologia, Università degli Studi di Urbino; Sciences Po Paris – CEVIPOF (Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po) and OSC (Observatoire Sociologique du Changement); AME – Amsterdam study centre for the metropolitan environment, University of Amsterdam; Sociology Department, London School of Economics.

*UrbEurope* provided grants to young European researchers – PhD students and Post-doc fellows – allowing them to spend periods in one of the universities of the Network in order to pursue research and training projects on urban change in Europe in areas of interest specified below. The working of the network was mainly based on strong interdisciplinary competences on urban issues, which in the participating departments often also find expression in strong PhD programmes on urban social change in Europe. In the case of the Sociology department of the University of Milan – Bicocca, which acted as the coordinating institution, a strong synergy has been developed between *UrbEurope* and the development of the Doctorate Programme on European urban and local studies, *Urbeur*, which began in the academic year 2001/02.

Over the four years the project involved 98 young researchers who spent some time in another university, attending Summer schools and

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classes and discussing their research topics with professors from a range of different disciplines. Except for the case of Summer Schools, the network privileged long periods of stay (up to one year) on the assumption that the young researchers would require a considerable amount of time, not only to strengthen their theoretical background, but also to carry out empirical fieldwork, which is time-consuming in its organization, especially when conducted abroad.

During this same time and to the benefit of these young researchers, *UrbEurope* organized a two-day seminar every six months in the participating universities. In these seminars specific topics of interest were presented and discussed by leading scholars; the researchers were then asked to present their own work, in order to benefit from the collective discussion and from the participation of experts in the field.

The aim of the *UrbEurope* network was to map, integrate and update the results of international and national research projects on urban-related issues in Europe, within a broad framework. The three main areas of analysis were:

1. how global changes and local impacts are conceptualised in theories and through which methods they are investigated;
2. how such changes impacted the built environment (gentrification, suburbanization and segregation);
3. how the changes impacted the role of local social policies and governance.

The main objective behind the investigation of these three areas – highly interrelated with one another – was to attain a better understanding of the tension between identity and change in European Cities (the local-global link), of the existing differences and of the directions of change (the convergence-divergence hypothesis). During the project seven thematic subgroups were founded and developed around the following themes:

1. housing and land use;
2. local welfare;
3. middle class;
4. urban policies;
5. poverty and social exclusion;
6. cultural cities;
7. neighbouring effects-segregation.

This book is the result of the work undertaken by the Cultural Cities group. In order to provide a general background to these essays we offer a brief presentation of the contents and results of the research conducted by the group.

Though attitudes to the city always seem to have been ambivalent – they have been viewed as centres of both civilisation and corruption – one side of this has emphasised their particular and active role in promotion



of culture and creativity (e.g. P. Hall 2001). This idea is hardly limited to the observation that these activities have been disproportionately more important in large cities than in smaller settlements, or that the major developments of an era were concentrated in specific places rather than across all urban areas in a nation or continent. On the contrary, such creative developments have been stimulated, produced by and have matured in the circumstances of particular cities, both reflecting and shaping the distinct characters of these places – in economic, social, political and physical terms, as well as culturally.

Among the more general explanations as to why this should be so, three arguments have been deployed:

- the power of traditional elites/communities to contain diversity, deviance and originality – the underpinnings of ‘rural idiocy’ – tend to be much less in larger, expanding, externally linked settlements with shifting economic bases;
- cities, as seats of governance/authority and major markets, have traditionally housed large concentrations of potential patrons/customers for novel, specialised and luxury products (both tangible and intangible); and
- agglomeration economies, including what Storper (1997) calls untraded interdependences, pools of specialised skills, and tacit knowledge, together with reputational spillovers, are of particular importance for non-routine kinds of production/consumption subject to high levels of uncertainty.

It can be argued that these factors operated with rather less force in the context of industrial and especially Fordist cities than in other economic contexts. Over the past 30 years or so, however, their salience for European cities seems to have been greatly heightened, through a combination of:

- de-industrialisation;
- globalisation;
- mass higher education; and
- post-Fordist flexible specialisation.

These developments have brought about:

- a strong incentive in advanced economies to switch toward competitive strategies based on the development and marketing of specific, distinctive qualities, rather than price (or even price/quality), requiring greater investment in creative innovation, underpinned by access to high quality factors of production, including labour and specialist services (Porter 1990);
- greater emphasis on market-based forms of co-ordination, restoring the importance of face-to-face contact within city-regional clusters/labour

markets, and thus on the ability of territories to attract and retain key factors including talent for non-routine 'creative' functions of various kinds);

- more intense territorial competition for investment flows, prestigious events and shares in product markets, increasingly tolerated and encouraged by national governments because of its cross-national dimension;
- increasing use of image promotion, and (particularly following Florida [2002]) of higher profile, dynamic and/or bohemian cultural environments as city marketing tools in relation both to inward investment flows and the attraction/retention of 'talent' (bright, ambitious, young, unattached people with marketable specialist skills required by the cultural industries), increasingly seen as sensitive to such locational factors.

Some of these elements of the 'new conventional wisdom' about the relation between urban resurgence and the 'new economy' and what this requires may be more in the nature of hypotheses (encouraged by some interested parties) than established research findings. But they point toward several new/revived roles for cultural/creative activities in (at least some) cities of advanced economies:

- as core elements of economic activities with rapidly expanding markets (in leisure, entertainment, tourism, media and cultural production/distribution);
- as sources of added-value/competitive advantage in a much wider range of activities dependent on innovation, fashion and quality-based niche markets; and
- as integral to the marketing of places as sites of production, residence and consumption, through cultivation and/or representation of distinctive qualities offering elements of monopolistic advantage as protection against 'race-to-the-bottom' tendencies.

The creative/cultural city theme has been the object of interrelated research projects by young RTN researchers in relation to each of these three 'new' (or rather intensified) cultural roles of cities, addressing questions related to:

- the role of urban institutions, communities, resources and policy initiatives for 'cultural' production, in sectors such as fashion, fine art and popular music;
- influences of urban design/architecture, and regeneration initiatives on residents' use and experience of the city/neighbourhoods; and
- representations of the city and their manipulation for marketing, policy and political purposes – including that of 'the creative city' itself.

This thematic grouping was not foreseen in the original design of this RTN programme, but rather emerged from an interaction between the ar-

ray of research proposals submitted by some of the strongest applicants for fellowships and the specialist interests/resources of particular nodes in the network (including e.g. the presence of a city-design programme and of established researchers working on both 'cultural industries' and cultures of urbanism at the London School of Economics). In fact this set of questions clearly relates to and links all three of the thematic areas identified in our 'calls' for fellowship applicants.

The specific configuration of this research area emerged from discussion among and with the young researchers during the early workshops of the programme, and this clear 'ownership' of this theme by the researchers themselves represents a particular strength; it also confirms the value of the programme in developing synergies and cross-national collaborations among researchers at a much earlier stage in their careers than would otherwise have been likely.

In fact, fourteen of the researchers had active research interests in this theme, with a core group of eight developing an agenda for their common activities in these terms. Although the cultural cities group consists of young researchers dealing with different fields of urban culture, there is nonetheless a strong connection between each individual research project. They all deal with different aspects that represent the necessary elements of urban culture, and moreover, be it the built environment, cultural politics, creative industries or cultural flagship institutions (among others), they are the modules that form the so-called 'creative city'.

The interdisciplinarity (as well as internationalism) of the core group can be seen in their respective statements of thematic interests and areas of expertises, viz:

- urban cultural studies and translocalism (Giacomo Botta, Helsinki University);
- socio-economic features of creativity, cultural economy, fashion industry (Marianna d'Ovidio, London School of Economics and Sciences Po – Paris)
- culture and entertainment, built environment, cultural policy, media and urban space, spatial theory (Hanna Harris, Università di Milano-Bicocca);
- urban governance, cultural regeneration, built environment, urban planning (Jussi Kulonpalo, Sciences Po – Paris);
- public space, urban landscapes, use of 'culture' in urban renewal (Philip Lawton, London School of Economics);
- multicultural cities, urban regeneration, public space, local actors (Ugo Rossi, University of Amsterdam);
- arts-led urban renewal, public and creative city, urban design (Bettina Springer, University of Amsterdam);
- images of the city, landscape, urban hierarchies and polycentrism (Alberto Vanolo, Helsinki University).

The network has provided a framework enabling these young researchers to develop a collective research agenda, from initial exchanges in workshop/conference sessions to a shared project in the later phases of the network on 'the cultural city', culminating in the production of several papers. Serena Vicari Haddock, professor of Urban Sociology at the University of Milano-Bicocca, provided further feedback to these papers and subsequently edited and arranged for publication of the present study.

It should be stressed, however, that the development of the book has been entirely the responsibility and achievement of the working group of young researchers. This has been a major success in terms of the professional development of this group of both doctoral and post-doctoral researchers, reflecting very positively on their growth, maturity and consciousness of themselves as leading members of a new cohort of researchers within a cross-national European urban studies community.

M. d'Ovidio  
S. Vicari  
Haddock

## Introduction

When Sir Giles Gilbert Scott built the Bankside Power Station on the South bank of the Thames in 1965, he could hardly have imagined that forty years later the site would house paintings by Picasso and Warhol, installations by Damien Hirst or sculptures by Anish Kapoor, flagship works held by the Tate Modern as part of Europe's largest collection of modern and contemporary art. In Milan, the Ansaldo steel mill underwent a similar transformation and today hosts a set design laboratory for La Scala and a showroom for Giorgio Armani. Comparable rehabilitations of former industrial sites can be found in all major European cities, where factories, emptied of machinery and equipment, have been occupied by new types of production whose most important component is immaterial: knowledge, ideas, signs, meanings. Spectacular new structures built to house such production and related consumption are the most visible signs of the transformation of contemporary cities into centres of innovation, creativity and culture, and are perceived as icons of the emerging knowledge-based urban economy.

With the decline and failure of manufacturing-based industries as the traditional engine of urban economic and social development, efforts to revamp city economies have focused on feeding the new cultural industries in the hope they might become the engine of renewed urban growth. Cultural industries are a hybrid set of activities comprising production and services in science and technology, design and fashion, arts and culture. Each city attempts to find its own distinctive path of development, investing in a particular combination of local industries in order to foster economic growth and to attract visitors and inhabitants wishing to enjoy the buzz and the beauty of urban life; for all cities the crucial factor has become the spark of new ideas, in whatever field they may find application. Indeed, creativity seems to have become the ultimate asset of every city in the construction of what makes a city special, or, preferably, more special than other cities.

Creativity and the making of the creative city have generated a great deal of interest, policy debate and action, particularly in the last decade. The concepts are popular with politicians, who use them to highlight the cultural assets of their cities and thus to enhance the city's image in the context of international competition. Behind the scenes, scholars in many fields concerned with urban development have tackled the issue of creativity, noting in particular its roots in the social and urban context; many have sought to identify effective ways to promote creativity as a means to foster the development of cultural industries. A primary focus of interest in the scientific literature has been the definition and analysis of the creative city, with questions ranging from «what makes a city creative?» to «what makes a city attractive to workers in the creative industries?».

In brief, inquiries into creativity and the creative city have led to a wider examination of the nature and workings of the new urban economy on the one hand and its social and spatial context on the other. This examination has been accompanied by an animated debate on urban policies and their alleged (in)ability to enable, encourage or enhance creativity and amplified by a large number of analyses and evaluations of creative practices. Much attention has also been devoted to the representation of the new city as a whole—its economic and political make-up, its socio-spatial order and, in particular, the image-making and branding processes that have developed in parallel with the evolution of this type of post-industrial city.

The essays presented here aim to contribute to this broader debate in two directions. The first four essays focus on key concepts associated with the creative city discourse; the following three make use of case studies of specific cities – Manchester, Milan/London, and Dublin – to illustrate the ways in which these concepts are translated into policy and practice.

S. Vicari Haddock's opening chapter provides a road map for the exploration of the creative city as a conceptual construct, a normative ideal and a set of policy practices. The exploration begins with the positioning of city marketing and branding in concepts and theories originating in the business world, and goes on to highlight the difficulty of translating and applying these ideas to cities in general and to the creative city in particular. The author goes on to argue that city marketing and branding effects are most often linked to specific urban policies and practices that have been shown to be particularly attentive to selected city-stakeholder interests while expunging more general concerns from the public discourse.

In chapter two A. Vanolo introduces the concept of the 'creative city imaginary' and discusses the process of image-making. By presenting city marketing materials from different European cities he illustrates how these cities have shaped their images in accordance with different interpretations as to how to promote the creative city. In particular, the process of producing and promoting different post-industrial images and ideas is illustrated by the case of Turin, where a new image was built to replace that

centred on the city's Fordist industrial past. The process is seen as involving the probing of different 'alternatives' (where the image of the city refers first to its natural endowment, then to technology, to culture, and finally to creativity) and the related construction of different images by local government and other local public agencies in Turin. In conclusion the author questions whether the city, under the pressure of global urban competition, has produced little more than a sequence of standard promotional policies or has found a specific way to advance its heritage and identity and, as a result, to promote its distinctiveness.

In the third chapter, B. Springer connects public space and image-building, focusing on site-specificity in public art and architecture. Notwithstanding the need for distinction and uniqueness of locational identities, the use of site-specific works of art and architecture is subject to tensions and results in ambiguous outcomes. The author argues that 'decorating' a city with such works is more likely to blend it in with a common 'creative city' image than to differentiate it. In order to illustrate the paradox of site-specificity and reproduction patterns in public art, she presents several works by the architect Frank O. Gehry and the artist Richard Serra, used by cities to create (or re-create) public spaces, and discusses the conflicts arising from such use.

In the fourth chapter J. Kulompalo bridges the city-image analysis with a discussion of the cultural economy and creative industries. He explores the main building blocks of the new discourse of the creative city that emerged during the late 1990s and early 2000s, using the city of Helsinki as an illustration. In particular the author describes two parallel phenomena: he looks first at how the new discourse is shaped by notions of creativity and innovation that, although based on local urban culture and related phenomena, remain rather vague and not always able to build on the development path of the city. He then discusses the discourse of the creative city and the concept of the creative class and places them in the contemporary theoretical debate, stressing that creativity and innovation leading to economic success more often result from the efforts of innovative, hard-working individuals and firms with – often very limited – public sector involvement and investment.

The following chapter by G. Bottà, is the first of the essays focusing on a specific city. Bottà studies a specific cultural industry, popular music, and explores the relationship between popular music production and the promotion of Manchester as a creative city between 1976 and 1997. The formation of the local music scene as a 'creative milieu' and its development is presented with emphasis on the link with the city's industrial heritage. The author shows the connection between the regeneration of some areas of Manchester and the consolidation of the local popular music scene through bottom-up and autonomous projects. The focus is on the creative qualities of local entrepreneurialism and its effects on the city. Bottà goes on to

examine the modalities of the municipality's intervention, its difficulties in recognizing the city's creative capital and its ambivalent attitude towards the production and consumption of popular music.

Further developing the analysis of the relation between the urban environment and the creative industries, M. d'Ovidio focuses on the interactions among fashion designers based in Milan and London, showing that the high concentration of creative workers in the two contexts leads to frequent face-to-face interactions that support the fashion systems in the two cities. The author identifies two divergent patterns of interaction in the two cities: despite the strong economic performance of this industry in both cities, the 'creative field' is perceived to be much more vibrant in London than in Milan; a tentative explanation for the relative weakness of the Milanese creative community highlights the absence of strong links to other fields of creative production in the city.

In the final chapter, P. Lawton discusses the creative-city imaginary and its role in urban planning, closing an ideal circle and returning to the city image and image-building. The author focuses on the impact of the 'cultural turn' on urban form, the definition of the public domain, and the changing meanings of place in various parts of Dublin. He notes that the association of a particular city image with 'the creative city' has itself devolved into a formulaic vision of what city life should be—at the expense of the diversity of uses the creative city discourse claims to promote. Lawton presents a number of examples of Dublin city planning since its year as European Capital of Culture in 1991, showing how the public domain is increasingly ordered in a specific manner that upholds Dublin's 'creative city' image through a growing commercialization and control of public space.



S. Vicari  
Haddock

# Chapter 1

## Branding the creative city

### 1. Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a road map for the exploration of the ‘creative city’ as a conceptual construct, a normative ideal and a set of policy practices. I take as a starting point the concept of city marketing and the economic and political changes that brought about the application to cities of marketing and branding theories; in the following section an attempt is made to provide a clear definition of city marketing and a concise discussion of the problems related to the assumptions supporting city marketing strategies. In the third session I tackle the concept of branding, in the corporate world and as applied to cities, showing the relation between branding and a new orientation in urban policy-making that serves as the framework within which branding activities take place. Turning to the core of the argument, the post-industrial city is positioned in the context of the new urban economy and subsequently in dialogue with two bodies of literature concerning the role of the cultural industries at large; I argue that branding activities are constructed on the basis of a selective interpretation of these two bodies of literature and are integrated into two different sets of urban policies, each with its own tensions and internal contradictions. In the final section I present a number of problems related to the evaluation of branding.

### 2. City marketing

In Europe the economic restructuring that followed the extended recession of the 1970s and 1980s resulted in the decline in the manufacturing base of the old industrial regions and cities and the emergence of new types and loci of economic activity, mainly in the service sector. Much of the effort by local governments to regenerate the economic base of regions

and cities was focused on the objective of attracting inward investment in terms of new industry, in order to ensure the revival of declining economies. These efforts faced a highly competitive environment, as the accelerating spatial mobility of capital, its internationalisation and the demand generated by the process of market globalisation made competition to attract investment more and more intense. It is in this framework that the marketing of cities has drawn increasing attention as a means of enhancing their competitiveness.

While in Europe the term 'city marketing' became widespread in the 1980s, such a notion has been popular in the USA for considerably longer. In American cities local public finances depend to a large degree on locally generated wealth and much less on contributions from the federal government, putting local economic development at the centre of local governments' political agendas. 'City boosterism' was the label applied to the promotional activities of local entrepreneurs and politicians aiming to bolster the local economy, push up real estate and land values, and increase the profitability of local commerce. While there is nothing fundamentally new about this activity, it has taken on a different and more structured form in conjunction with the process of de-industrialisation and the accompanying transformation of the role of local governments, which are forced to look for new ways to foster local development and enable growth in employment. Harvey (1989) places this trend towards "entrepreneurialism", as he terms it, in stark contrast to the "managerialism" of the welfare state of earlier decades, in which urban governments were preoccupied with their redistributive role, i.e., the local provision of services and facilities to urban populations. Driven by the need to regenerate the urban economy, today local governments take a more pro-active stance, mobilising a whole complex of forces – local chambers of commerce, local financiers, industrialists, property developers and so on – in the formation of coalition politics devoted to economic recovery and growth. Local government is thus transformed into local governance. This fundamental shift in the philosophy and practice of local government is anchored to a dominant neo-liberal orientation in economic policy, which translates into an urban policy giving priority to competition, deregulation and privatisation. The ethos of public policy in general has been transformed: previously centred on entitlements and the provision of collective goods, it has shifted to the creation and growth of exchange values. Macro-economic change, new forms of governance and neo-liberalism form the backdrop for the rise of city marketing, which in turn reflects a new orientation of the public sector towards the market.

But what is city marketing? Put simply, city marketing is the application of marketing techniques and tools developed to help sell goods and services to the promotion of the city, and, more in general, the use of marketing as an instrument for urban policy. Van den Berg *et al.* (1990) describe urban marketing as the set of activities intended to optimise the supply of urban

functions to the demand for them from inhabitants, companies, tourists and other visitors. As in the broader business context, the notions of exchange and the market and the meeting of consumer needs through the conduct of research, market segmentation and targeting are central; the objective of marketing activities, however, differs. For companies the primary goal is to achieve a return on investment acceptable to the company's owners/shareholders, while for cities there is no single overriding objective, but rather a series of different but related objectives reflecting the needs of a diverse range of stakeholders. Such needs may include improvement of the city's competitive position, attraction of inward investment, and enhancement of the city's image, but are by no means limited to these.

The concept of marketing is based on the notion of market exchange between producers of products and services and consumers, as collective or individual actors, whose needs and wants are to be satisfied. Let us begin with the producer. Cast in terms of the city, the notion is not without problems. First, the city is a complex material and symbolic system resulting from historical development: redefined as a 'product', it is clearly a used one ('second-hand'). Lacking polish and packaging, a 'used' city (not to mention its inhabitants) may well prove resistant to its transformation by the marketing process. A wide range of new infrastructures is necessary, for example, before a city formerly dominated by manufacturing can plausibly present itself as an arts and culture centre. Resistance should also be expected with regard to symbols and signs inscribed in the city, which may prove harder to change than the physical built environment. Second, there is a problem of defining who is in charge of 'producing' the city: the term 'city marketing' seems to imply that the marketing effort is to be organised at the municipal level. The 'production' of the city, however, particularly certain goods and services, cannot be considered solely as the outcome of local government action. Other levels of government are implicated, as are other non-municipal agencies and authorities responsible for local economic development; when co-ordination of the marketing activity is sought at the metropolitan level, for example, many territorial actors are conflicted – caught between the need to collaborate in the larger effort and to compete for investment in their own jurisdictions.

As for consumers: who are they? For the inhabitants, the city is a place to live, work and relax, as well as a supplier of a wide range of services, including education and health care. For companies, the city is a place to locate, to do business and to recruit employees. For tourists and other temporary visitors, it offers a combination of culture, education and entertainment. Marketing responds to these different demands with the help of market segmentation and targeting, but can the same procedures be applied to consumers of the city? The move from marketing to city marketing is problematic in at least two respects. First, consumers' demands may be conflicting among themselves, thus the city marketing strategy

may easily be forced to choose among them; this selection involves choices which have distributional implications and as such are necessarily political. Second, treating a city's inhabitants as consumers implies they are perfectly free to satisfy their needs and participate in the exchange. If the marketing strategy is successful, more persons will, the theory goes, 'buy' the city as a product, take up residence or visit as tourists, and more businesses will choose to locate offices or production there. The implied freedom of choice is not applicable, however, to a large part of the city's population, namely those who live in the city as 'captives', due to lack of either resources or alternatives. These inhabitants are 'forced consumers' of the city and as such are likely to be overlooked by a marketing strategy explicitly designed to attract companies, fresh capital and new residents to the city. Thus a large proportion of a city's population does not figure among the city marketer's target groups; it may well be in the nature of the city marketing project to select its most valuable consumers, but in doing so it contradicts its own claim to be operating in the interests of all aspects of societal welfare (Van den Berg 1990).

Finally, we come to the discussion of the city as a product. What kind of product is it? City marketers are confronted with a product whose definition is vague and contradictory at best. Particularly at the level of the city as a whole, the product/city is open to infinite interpretations, which the marketing strategy must shape into a unique image, necessarily accentuating and unifying selected positive elements into a coherent symbolic artefact. The operation of projecting a dominant image of the city has significant political implications, as it implies and requires choices in the reconstruction of its past and in the representation of potential future development. In practice this operation often results in city images from which many residents feel excluded, in cultural, political, and economic terms.

On the other hand, if the city is not considered as a product per se but as a product line, marketing has to deal with other difficulties, mainly stemming from the nature of these products. First, many different players are involved: the production of office space, for example, assumes the availability of land appropriately zoned for development and offered by public planning authorities, construction involving private and/or public real estate actors, and investment in mobility infrastructure on the part of public and private agencies. Second, like many other urban products, office space is highly interdependent and difficult to isolate from the environment: suitable space depends on various qualities of the urban environment (or their absence).

The complexity of the urban place product and the consequent difficulties in its definition and delimitation remain challenging and highly debated topics in the city-marketing literature; many experts believe that more effective use of marketing concepts in the context of the city will require substantial modification of general marketing theory and techniques. Marketing models prescribe that sufficient weight be given to different

stakeholders, but cities have vastly more varied ‘users’, ‘owners’ and ‘governors’ than do commercial products: consequently, the goals of producers and the uses made of the city by consumers are likewise manifold. How is it possible to consider the needs of all city stakeholders? How are these needs to be weighed and prioritised in the absence of a goal comparable to profit making in its ability to motivate and unify participants/stakeholders? Although these are largely rhetorical questions, the effort to discover effective answers must remain on the city marketer’s agenda.

### 3. Branding the city

Taking advantage of continuing advances in marketing theory and methods, city-promoters have adopted the latest corporate branding techniques for use in selling cities, which are now said to require a powerful brand if they are to compete successfully in a globalised economy.

Citing examples from the 19th century and earlier, the Oxford English Dictionary presents the literal sense of the verb ‘to brand’ as:

To mark indelibly, as a proof of ownership, as a sign of quality, or for any other purpose [...] to mark (cattle or horses) with a brand.

Used figuratively, to brand is “To set a mental mark of ownership upon; also, to impress (a fact, an event) indelibly on one’s memory”. The 20<sup>th</sup> brought further refinement and the widespread application of related terms to the broadest possible range of goods and services, and branding has since been extended from products to the companies responsible for their manufacture, setting the stage for its adaptation and application by city marketers.

The latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of tools enabling the measurement of corporate reputation and consumer attitudes, accompanied by the emergence of branding as a professional field populated by brand managers and, more recently, corporate officials concerned with reputation management. Several factors contributed to the spread and success of the branding process. The emergence and consolidation of global markets and transnational corporations generated increased demand for marketing, and corporations began to deploy significant resources in the effort to build global brands. The shift to branding was also driven by marketing, advertising and public relations professionals who brought novel creative and scientific expertise to the construction of brands and thus became primary producers in the emerging knowledge economy. In contemporary culture, where social classes and political parties have become less relevant forums for the expression of identity, brands are said to serve as a source of identification, recognition, continuity and collectivity, allowing people to identify each other as members of a specific community, a “tribe” sharing a particular lifestyle (Mommaas 2002: 34).

Today, brands are a ubiquitous feature of everyday life. According to the American Marketing Association a brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler *et al.* 2002: 469). The use of a brand is thought to create value: branding is conceived as a process of forming and projecting an image onto a product; a measurement of its success lies in the perception on the part of consumers that the product is ‘worth’ the price asked by the seller (irrespective of the aggregate cost to the manufacturer of producing and selling it). Brand management techniques used by contemporary luxury goods makers, for example, regularly convince consumers to part with hundreds or thousands of Euros for branded items of clothing, shoes, handbags, watches, etc. that cost a small fraction of their retail price to produce.

Traditional product branding assigns a brand name to a particular type of product, which may or may not coincide with the name of the company that produces it; the products and not the producer are the focus of marketing and branding activities. In the case of corporate branding, individual product brands are subsumed under the name of a company, which comes to serve as an ‘umbrella brand’ for a range of different products. Corporate branding activities aim to create the perception that value resides in the corporate brand and is transferred by association to the company’s products: it is the brand that confers value upon a particular product, not the attributes or quality of the product itself. Thus clothes or fashion accessories carrying the Giorgio Armani brand command higher prices than lesser-known brands of comparable quality, while purveyors of low-quality knock-offs need only sew in a luxury-brand label to profit from instant value creation. Thus the brand ‘adds value’ to the branded products; the added value finds expression in a price premium with respect to no-name goods.

The attempt to extend corporate branding from companies and products to places has brought the application of brand strategy and marketing techniques to the economic, social, political and cultural development of cities, regions and countries. The journal *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* provides a forum for the new discipline and the large numbers of professionals working in this field.

Before discussing the application of branding to cities it is worth noting that the diffusion of branding activities signals a further consolidation of a neoliberal orientation in urban policy, as it stands on a number of assumptions which are legitimised within the neoliberal framework. Proponents of city branding assume that cities are not able to generate their own wealth, that it is only by attracting investment and people from outside that cities can stave off decline and return to prosperity. The focus of policy shifts from a stance favouring, say, the mobilisation of endogenous resources, to an outward-looking view in which market presence, visibility and positioning are of paramount importance. Second, cities are seen as players in

a global market in which competition is all; interurban competition, rather than the result of a political choice, becomes an imperative from which the city cannot escape. Competition has its own costs, however, a point which tends to be ignored or downplayed. Moreover, competition is a zero-sum game in which all urban systems engage in a free-for-all; as such, it has few winners and many losers for whom the branding model leaves no role to play. While a corporation that is no longer competitive may eventually be liquidated and disappear, 'loser' cities have no such option and may find themselves, once the branding campaigns have come and gone, with drained public coffers and more severe social problems than before. Finally, we do not possess clear evidence that it is cities rather than firms that compete (Amin and Thrift 2002: 58); in other words, we do not have a precise answer to the question: is the vitality of the local economy a result of the competitiveness of the city or of the firms located in it? City branding efforts fuelled by the idea that cities must necessarily compete with each other thus rest on shaky ground.

Just as corporate branding represents the effort on the part of a corporation to construct a distinctive identity and competitive position in the marketplace, city branding aims to create a distinctive identity and competitive advantage for the city as a whole. City brand managers engage in selective "story telling" (Sandercock 2003) about the city, a discursive process by which evocative narratives with a strong spatial reference are created from a number of coexisting urban representations and imaginaries (Vanolo 2008 and chapter two in this volume). In practical terms, city brand builders select 'core values' they wish to see associated with the city's identity, articulate a vision for the future of the city and choose a logo to symbolise that identity. The decisions taken in the course of this process create a specific frame within which some urban policies achieve legitimacy while others become less relevant because lacking justification within the chosen frame.

In the prevailing marketing discourse, a city's brand identity must prove appealing to the city's different consumers so that different city products, such as a place to live for residents, a destination for tourists or a place of opportunity for investors, receive added value from the city as umbrella brand. Keeping in mind these different consumers, the process aims to produce a unique and consistent city image and reputation through coordinated actions by public and private actors giving form and substance to a broader strategy of economic development. The image is designed to "put the city on the map". Obviously, cities have always been on maps, but implicit in the slogan is the idea that a mental map is to be constructed anew, one where only branded cities are present and visible, while the others, invisible, are thus condemned to oblivion; the map is to be constructed in the minds of investors, consumers/tourists and businesses, who will make their choices accordingly.

Compared to city marketing, city branding operates on a larger scale and as a longer-term activity; it takes a very long time to establish a

brand, both within the city and beyond (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, no date): city branding responds to the need to achieve visibility at a global level, thus requiring media exposure at national and international levels; it also requires significant capital investment to fund high-profile brand-building campaigns and hire professional brand consultants and managers to run them. Last but not least, branding must be integrated into broader city policies, diverse programmes and infrastructural planning projects that function harmoniously within a shared framework.

All we shall see in what follows, these complex operations, in particular the construction of a successful image and the selection of the overall objectives to be achieved in terms of development, are fraught with conflicts and problems, which the notions of city marketing and branding tend to downplay.

#### **4. Knowledge, cultural or creative city?**

The nature of the post-industrial city and its economy is not discussed in this chapter; in order to understand the specific responses that branding offers to problems of the new urban economy and development, however, we must consider two major economic trends.

Since the seminal work of Lash and Urry (1994), countless analyses have deepened our understanding of a) the growing importance of immaterial and symbolic production in a globalised economic world and b) the renewed role and significance of cities as the privileged location of this production. In the words of Scott (2008: vii):

Sectors like technology-intensive production, financial and business operations, fashion-oriented manufacturing, cultural industries, personal services and so on play an important role in the great urban resurgence that has occurred over the last two decades all across the globe.

By 2003 cultural industries in large metropolitan areas like London comprised the third largest sector of the city economy (GLS Economics 2004). The most important implication of these two trends is that the enormous concentration of arts, cultural knowledge and capital, media and design in European cities has the potential to function as an anchor for the production of creative and cultural added value in many industries.

To these two trends a third should be added: cities play an increasingly important role as sites of consumption in conjunction with a growing and increasingly differentiated demand for products and services directly or indirectly connected with culture and the arts (Lash and Urry 1994: 216). The contemporary city has become a stage and prime site for consumption-related activities related to tourism, sports, culture and entertainment (Hannigan 2003). Responding to these new types of consumer demand re-



quires a transformation of urban space such that behaviours previously pertaining to different domains of experience such as shopping, leisure, education or entertainment, are blended and re-combined in new forms. Thus new urban spaces are devoted to extending the range of experience and multiplying the corresponding processes of identification. The demand for such spaces of multiple consumption is also fuelled by the increasing mobility of people and the growing flows of urban tourists and visitors who are attracted by the multiple facets of the urban experience and to whom the city presents itself as an entertaining spectacle.

These three trends characterise a new economic logic that has come to be known under a variety of labels: “knowledge-based economy” (Lundvall and Foray 1996); “information economy” (Castells 1996); “knowing capitalism” (Thrift 2005); “cognitive-cultural capitalism” (Scott 2008); “the experience economy” (Pine and Gilmore 1999); “the Warhol economy” (Currid 2007). Each approach highlights particular components of the new urban economy and assesses their respective weight and potential to generate economic growth. As sites of knowledge or cultural production, cities are assumed to favour a synergic interaction of institutions, firms, knowledge workers and people with the particular skills and sensibilities necessary to the production of knowledge, information, ideas and culture.

In the building of a successful image, branding strategies are meant to establish a distinctive place identity capable of erasing a previous industrial identity associated with images of the city in decline and replacing them with ‘renaissance’ images built around the new engines of the urban economy. Branding activity is expected to focus on and impact the consumption front as well, by incorporating into the new image of the city such spaces and events as are thought necessary to enable an effective response to a new, extremely varied demand of consumption. Of particular importance is the city’s ‘experience value’, which must be created through the transformation of urban space into places with newly constructed meanings and functions.

Two bodies of literature have helped to shape contemporary city branding practices. One is the literature on the role of the cultural industries at large in the new economy of cities; its focus is on knowledge production and the connection between innovation and creativity on the one hand and the urban context in cultural production, presentation and consumption on the other. The second body of literature is concerned with creative, innovative and highly skilled workers as drivers of local economic development.

As far as the first body of literature is concerned, in the framework of the more general analyses mentioned above, concepts such as “cultural cluster” or “district” (Mommaas 2004) and “creative-innovative field” (Scott 2000) have been devised to explain the functioning, in particular places and cities, of interdependent networks of firms, institutions and individuals in different systems of cultural production, both in the strict sense of old and new media, design, publishing, fashion, etc. and in broader terms inclu-

sive of nanotechnology or bioinformatics, for example. Recent analyses of the cultural or creative industries have investigated the role of frequent face-to-face interaction among actors in the production chains of different industries, showing the importance of local social ties and proximity in the functioning of some of these systems (see for example Pratt 2000 for the media industry, Pratt 2006 for the advertising sector or d'Ovidio for the fashion industry in the present volume).

Urban policy seeking to promote development in the cultural or creative industries may invest in higher and specialised education facilities and programmes designed to increase the supply of graduates, or target specific specialised industries in order to increase the demand for high-quality jobs. Most cities, however, have chosen urban policies focused on the agglomeration factors, i.e. the benefits deriving from the location of cultural activities in the same area: for example, high-profile cultural institutions or research institutes are developed and mixed with a cultural infrastructure of bistros, arts cafés, galleries and arts education and production centres; it is hoped that by sharing a culturally dense physical space, the more intense interaction among creative people will have a beneficial effect on their creativity and innovation. At the same time, so the theory goes, this mixture will attract customers who will find a wide variety of goods and services in the area; the vitality and quality of the neighbourhood will also increase, making it attractive as a site for residences as well.

In practice, policy and branding efforts have privileged interventions on and representations of the built environment: the response of urban policy-makers has been to build cultural facilities, mainly in the form of contemporary art museums and opera houses, in cities everywhere – on the assumption that the provision of high-quality infrastructures will benefit the creativity and innovation of not only new industries and their highly educated workers (from bio-tech engineers to new media artists) but of the general public of visitors and residents as well.

This response takes for granted that creativity and innovation will automatically develop through interaction in cultural quarters, despite the emphasis in the literature on other factors such as the role of institutions and human capital in the formation of specific creative communities. Second, by replicating the same model in different cities, urban policy of this sort fails to take into account the historical development trajectory of different sectors of the cultural industries in a specific city, on the assumption, very much disputed in the literature, that creative industries can develop in every city, almost irrespectively of the local endowment of resources. Third, this policy is expected to boost cultural production, but its focus is on consumption and on the production of buildings, spaces and events to be consumed.

Under this policy, branding campaigns have been tied to large-scale cultural projects purportedly intended to identify a city, make it distinctive and contribute to its development. Often accompanied by investment in

transport and leisure infrastructures and in (up-market) commercial activities and designed by superstar architects to house prestigious cultural institutions, these new buildings, renewed industrial sites and/or historical heritage buildings are conceived as icons meant to represent the new standing of the city as a cultural centre, and, at the same time, to differentiate it from all other cities.

The city of Bilbao paved the way with Frank Gehry's Guggenheim museum, which led to a proliferation of satellite versions of the Guggenheim in cities from Berlin to Abu Dhabi; a similar multiplication has occurred with the venerable Tate Gallery of London, with new museums in Liverpool and St. Ives. The siting of the Tate Modern in the Bankside Power Station in 2000 led to its becoming the most popular modern and contemporary art museum in the world, with over 5 million visitors in its first year. But the Tate was only the beginning of London's huge investment in museum quarters and facilities, and Paris, Berlin and Vienna have followed with both new construction and conversions of industrial buildings ranging from railway and power stations to hospitals and former palaces. The transformation of public space is part and parcel of a redevelopment process that implies its adjustment to new forms of entertainment and collective consumption; place-specific public art is used to enhance the distinctiveness of these new quarters (see Springer in this volume).

These 'iconic' or 'flagship' buildings are meant to form the core of cultural districts and to nourish the cultural industries of the city and, more generally, the local economy: it is hoped they will generate what has been called 'the Guggenheim effect'. Many objections have been raised with regard to this type of cultural regeneration policy and branding efforts based on it. First, it is doubtful that these cultural projects will be economically sustainable in the long run. While much is made of the extraordinary numbers of tourists and visitors, the proliferation of similar sites, along with diminishing interest as the novelty wears off, endangers their survival; often, additional (public) resources must be invested to stave off failure, the Millennium Dome in London being a case in point. There is thus an inherent tension between long-term city branding and the sustainability of the project with which the city brand has become identified. Second, in the words of Anthony Giddens:

Money and originality of design are not enough [...] You need many ingredients for big, emblematic projects to work, and one of the keys is the active support of local communities (quoted in Crawford 2001).

Local communities, however, are often only minimally involved in the planning of these projects, which are usually the result of a top-down approach. Since communities are often penalised by the impact of such projects on the neighbourhood as physical and relational space and on in-

dividual and collective identity, they often oppose such developments, the resistance to the Bilbao museum being, again, a case in point. Finally, there is a third problematic aspect, namely the undemocratic character of these developments and of the images of the city that are built around them. The public-private partnerships responsible for these projects rarely solicit/receive input from other local actors, apart from investors and the business community, and are often shielded from public scrutiny and political accountability. As a consequence, the culture embodied by these projects remains alien to large parts of the local community, deprived of voice and left with no tangible benefits, and the legitimacy and efficacy of the branding process is diminished.

The second body of literature that has shaped city branding can be traced back to the works of Laundry (2000) and Florida (2002; 2005) on creative cities and the creative class (see Kumpalo in the present volume for a detailed analysis and critique). Each theorist addresses the issue of the creative city in a distinct way. For Laundry, the focus is on bringing creativity into the practice and policies of urban regeneration in order to address the city's economic and social problems. For Florida, what makes a city successful is the presence of large numbers of people working in creative occupations, who form what he calls "the creative class". Urban policy is supposed to set in motion a virtuous circle by which the creative class is attracted to cities by good infrastructures, a high quality of life and a tolerant environment; once there, these workers provide innovation and creativity to fuel the engine of the urban economy; the developing economy is able to generate a technologically advanced and vibrant urban context, which in turn lures the next wave of creative people, and so on. Florida's theory is based on three assumptions: first, that the creative class is highly mobile; second, that it has high levels of self-employment which permit such mobility, and third, that the creative class's motivation to move to another city derives more from the social creative climate (in terms of amenities and lifestyles) of that city than from job opportunities of its labour market. Each of these assumptions have been variously criticised; for the purpose of the present discussion it is worth noting that assumptions about mobility have proven to be sound only for certain segments of the creative class, even in America (see Markusen on artists 2006), while recent empirical evidence suggests that in a number of European cities the creative class is not as mobile as Florida assumes (Musterd and Murie forthcoming; see also Andreotti and Le Galès 2008).

Certainly, the notion of the creative class has had an enormous impact on branding activity and policy: it can be argued that no other discourse of urban regeneration has been as influential on urban policy and implemented in so many cities worldwide. Urban planners and policy makers in cities well beyond the Anglo-American core have embraced the concept, and city branding campaigns in Europe have made creativity and the

creative industries increasingly common components of the urban development discourse. The widespread success of these ideas has inflamed debate across all the disciplines concerned with urban regeneration: Jamie Peck's 2005 article *Struggling with the Creative Class* was downloaded from the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* web site 2,600 times, more than any other article in the (electronic) history of the Journal (Seekings and Keil 2009). In this same article we find a comprehensive explanation of the success of the creative class theory and its use in branding strategy; Peck maintains that its impressive influence on policy makers around the world is due to the fact that investments in the soft infrastructure of the arts and culture are easy to make, deliver visible results in a relatively short term and are not especially costly, as in large part they imply no more than a re-allocation of existing cultural funding. Secondly, because they allegedly respond to the demands of the entire urban community and benefit all partners concerned, such investments are not particularly controversial. Thirdly, this type of cultural planning fits well with existing entrepreneurial schemes of urban economic development. All of these factors contribute to make Florida's strategy appealing to politicians of all stripes.

Branding strategies based on Florida's theory are designed to attract a wide spectrum of professionals with high levels of knowledge and skills; to appeal to this group, cities must foster a cultural environment rich in diversity and tolerance, high-technology knowledge infrastructures and amenities which guarantee a high quality of life and a cosmopolitan, 'buzzing' atmosphere. Policies are devised and implemented to cater to the needs and sensibilities of talented workers in specific quarters of the city, with actions ranging from the renovation or new construction of buildings (especially for arts production and consumption or geared to the tastes of creative workers as housing) to organic farmers' markets, from cultural events to street-scaping and public art, from outdoor facilities to parks. In addition to aesthetic improvements, neighbourhoods are to be characterised by social heterogeneity and different styles of life in order to provide the right environment for the creative class in terms of housing, working spaces and leisure facilities.

Investment in these neighbourhoods, however, produces contradictory effects in terms of the sustainability of the branding effort. New infrastructures and commercial venues transform places into consumption and entertainment spaces, making way for the 'disneyfication' of these parts of the city. Places lose their identity and authenticity in favour of "staged authenticity" (MacCannel 1999), thus undermining the image that the branding strategy seeks to produce. Moreover, this process is also challenged by gentrification; to the extent that the presence of artists and cultural workers enriches neighbourhood life and enhances the bohemian and avant-garde atmosphere, the area becomes attractive for more commercial activities and new residences, leading to an increase in real estate prices. The artists who were the first promoters of the area are thus penalized and often be-

come the victims of the same process of gentrification they unintentionally initiated. Moreover, as the area becomes attractive to developers who convert lofts into residences, small manufacturers are displaced, with the result that the local economy loses diversity and vitality and unskilled and immigrant workers are deprived of job opportunities (Curran 2007). The point is not only that artists, the core of the creative class, will leave the neighbourhood, but that by doing so the process of reproduction of that specific creative place will be undermined and will eventually fail altogether.

Attempts to foster post-industrial economic development based on innovation and creativity in the knowledge and cultural industries have put cities as sites of these resources at the centre of branding strategies. Policies and related branding activities, however, are confronted on the one hand with the extreme complexity of cultural production and the great variety of sectors involved, and on the other by the problems of stimulating creativity in the absence of a clear understanding of what it is, what it means for the different sectors and how it is related to the social and physical world of the city.

It is no surprise to find that such complexity tends to be reduced to generic recipes for urban development, such as those related to flagship buildings, or that policies and branding strategies have frequently responded with spaces and images more conducive to consumption than to creative production, as if by providing the 'right' environment one automatically sees increased creativity. This is akin to the *if you build it they will come* mantra, a sort of "creative cargo cult" (Peck 2005) by which it is assumed that once the myth and totems are created the expected phenomenon will result.

Thus far I have pointed out some of the tensions arising from the ways in which urban policies and branding strategies interact in the production of material and symbolic spaces. In what follows I will discuss some of the problems involved in the evaluation of branding activities.

## **5. Evaluating city branding?**

A thorough evaluation of city branding is beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, it is clear that attempts to evaluate the results of city branding efforts inevitably highlight the difficulties of the enterprise itself, particularly when we recall the promises made by promoters of city branding: first, the city will acquire a successful image; second, the city will prosper as a result.

In this final section I begin by discussing the promise to deliver to cities a new identity that will be supported by the city's stakeholders. In the case of corporate branding, management makes every effort to ensure that the new corporate image is accepted and supported throughout the company; with city branding efforts, universal support from stakeholders cannot be taken for granted and is much more difficult to achieve.

In cities, the task of image-building is confronted with the problem of constructing a unitary and distinctive image from the city's complexity and diversity, its conflicting interests and related discourses. Because the image contains a specific interpretation of what the city is and, in a vision of its desirable future, what it ought to become, the construction and presentation of brand-building stories is fraught with potential for conflict; in the course of defining the city's current and future identities, the process privileges powerful interests and forges a hegemonic image in which all identities not consistent with the latter are not represented.

Is city branding able to maintain its promise nonetheless? Challenges abound as different and often competing interests may render it impossible to identify and communicate a shared vision in consistent ways (Turok 2009). Counter-branding or anti-branding strategies demonstrate how the integrity and effectiveness of city brands can be jeopardised. A very early example of counter-branding was the media campaign 'Fear City' led by New York municipal unions in 1975, which portrayed a city of danger and crime as a result of the lay-off of some 50,000 city workers (Greenberg 2008). In Toronto, the branding process engaged in building a tolerant and open-minded city image attempted to make use of the gay community and to re-write its story, but was faced with resistance from the community itself (Grundy 2004 quoted in Jensen 2005). An example of anti-branding can be found in the Danish city of Randers, where an alternative logo for the city was proposed to counter the official branding logo and to give voice to protests against what was perceived as a socially exclusive branding process (Jensen 2007). More often, alternative discourses (and coalitions of actors) compete in the definition of the city image: Jensen (2007) applies a narrative approach to the study of the urban branding of Aalborg, Denmark, and shows the formation of two competing discourses, one centred on a pro-growth rationale of urban competition, and a second based on a less coherent mix of urban sustainability, anti-elitist culture and tax revenue issues; over time the former discourse prevailed but in the process different images of the city were constructed and re-constructed. There are also examples of opposition to branding initiatives that are perceived as ineffective in terms of solving concrete problems or as diverting resources from attempts to do so (Turok 2009).

The point here is that the image-making process never proceeds unchallenged and that instances of resistance expose the power relations at work, undermining not only the rhetoric of harmony at the basis of a unitary city image but also the effectiveness of the process itself.

Turning now to the promise that city branding will lead to successful economic development, the evaluation effort concerns the ability of branding to change perceptions and location decisions: are branding efforts effective? The city branding literature still seems more concerned with the complexity of the process of mediating among multiple stakeholders and

users of the city than with an evaluation of branding's effectiveness. We find a surprising lack of evidence regarding the effects of branding and are therefore short of material upon which to base even a tentative assessment. This is partly due to the relatively short history of city-branding exercises, but, more importantly, to problems deriving from the importation of branding from the field of product marketing.

In business, consumer research tools are used to ascertain the degree to which consumers are aware of advertising campaigns and change their purchase behaviours according to a perceived enhanced appeal of a product or brand. Such advertising studies are not expected to prove to a client that there is a direct, causal relation between a specific product advertisement and change in sales of that product. To justify the considerable expense of a city branding campaign, however, an evaluation of its impact is critical: it is important to determine whether or not, or to what degree, a change in the city's image results in more firms and individuals 'buying' the city; only by measuring this composite effect can the investment in the campaign be justified. Measurements of this type, however, have often fallen short of the expectations associated with the evaluation exercise.

We find a clear example of these different expectations in Greenberg's comprehensive analysis of marketing and branding strategies deployed in New York from the 1975 crisis to the present (2008); the author provides a meticulously researched account of the confrontation between the Department of Commerce of the city of New York and the State Comptroller over the measurement of the impact of the *I♥NY* campaign. The former was in charge of assessing the effectiveness of the programme and of proving to the State that it had made a wise investment in the campaign. In short, the report measured the degree to which consumers were aware of the campaign and correlated it with the appeal of the city among different publics; on the basis of a strong awareness and increase in appeal the report predicted an unspecified increase in tourism-related expenditure and their concomitant yields in terms of tax revenues and jobs. The State Comptroller, however, rejected the report on the basis that the data provided had to do only with awareness and image, not 'hard data' or standard indicators of economic growth, and that it therefore failed to substantiate any of its claims as to the benefits of the campaign.

Were the 4.3 million dollars paid in 1976 for the *I♥NY* campaign well spent? A good deal of evidence suggests that the decision to 'buy' a given city is influenced by a wide range of factors, some more important for business and others more significant for consumers, with the image of the city playing a relatively minor role. Even if we assume that branding activities are able to produce a dramatic change in the city's perception, an improved image does not automatically translate into changes in decisions to visit, move to, or invest in the city. To answer the question, it is more productive to consider the impact of the urban policies that accompanied the branding campaign, i.e. the building of flagship cultural infrastructures and of urban



quarters for creatives. In this final part I return to basic questions regarding who benefits from the two models presented in the previous section.

The critical literature on large-scale redevelopments has already pointed out their relatively limited impact on the local economy compared to the amount of public investment involved (Moulaert *et al.* 2003; Swyngedouw *et al.* 2004; Orueta and Fainstein 2008); the so-called ‘trickle-down effect’, invoked to justify such enormous expenditures, has distributed benefits predominantly within the ‘growth machines’ that promoted the projects; very little ‘trickled down’ beyond real estate and financial groups, construction companies and related services. Such growth machines function as exclusionary mechanisms, benefiting only a selected few. The trickle-down theory attempts to legitimise growth machines as benefactors of the city and its general development; the ideological nature of the theory was perhaps best summed up by Galbraith (1982) who referred to “the less than elegant metaphor that if one feeds the horse enough oats, some will pass through to the road for the sparrows”. Certainly the benefits of this policy have failed to impress the social groups most impacted by the negative consequences of contemporary urban change.

Mechanisms of exclusion also work through space, as these projects engender a spatial fragmentation of the city where specific quarters of the city receive large investment in terms of iconic structures while other parts of the city, already deprived, suffer further from lack of investment; it can be argued that such projects divert efforts to meet more general needs of collective services and safer, cleaner and more pleasant spaces for the common good. The projects, moreover, are often poorly integrated into the existing urban fabric, such that physical and symbolic barriers are created to exclude from the new cultural quarters those who do not ‘belong’ there, i.e. social groups that do not or cannot share the consumption habits of the middle and upper classes.

We turn now to the second model of branding and policy, the creative class. At first sight, the creative class is the main beneficiary of ‘creative city’ branding: everything is done to lure to the city and accommodate members of the creative class, in the hope they will enhance the city’s creativity. Examined more closely, however, the picture is more complicated, both in terms of the concept of the creative class in general and with respect to the importance of this class for local economic development and productivity.

Florida treats the creative class as a unitary subject in terms of value orientation, consumption tastes and personal aspirations; the assumption is unwarranted, however, as a number of critics have pointed out. Persons in occupations allegedly belonging to the creative class present a broad variety of value orientations and lifestyles (for a survey see Markusen 2006).

As in the example discussed by Bottà in this volume, not all members are awarded equal standing; evidence shows that local artistic communities may benefit from the new spaces for culture made available, but that

cultural experimentation and production have been afforded much less support in comparison with the resources devoted to the consumption of culture. Moreover, artists whose work does not respond to the market demand of cultural production for passive consumption gain little from the heavy investment in culture. It is no surprise that culture producers and artists have raised critical voices of dissent vis-à-vis the creative city image and policy (Miles and Paddison 2005). There is a selective process at work that benefits artists only in so far as they became cultural entrepreneurs of artefacts, performance and events to be consumed.

Despite the call for diversity and tolerance built into Florida's doctrine, the image of the city is built on a selection of specific cultural identities, even within the cultural producers at the core of the creative class. Thus, Zukin's questions: "Whose culture? Whose city?" maintain their significance and renew their pertinence in light of this selection process and the instrumental focus on consumption that this policy implies. This concern is valid both for those who see their culture marginalised or misrepresented and for the general public who experience the re-constructed spaces and their selected symbolic meanings. These new spaces are more readily defined by the culture of consumption associated with the new middle classes than by the cultures of production and labour. In Glasgow, for example, the reconfiguration of the urban landscape features references to Charles Rennie Mackintosh and to the arts school for which the city is famous, rather than drawing from the tradition of working class culture and social struggle which marked its history in similarly significant ways. In Bilbao, the Guggenheim museum represents the international ambitions of the city élite, while local artists concerned with giving voice and form to Basque identities have yet to find adequate representation.

Branding efforts and related policies for the creative class need to be justified on the basis of the benefits for local economic growth. In addition to the minimum economic spillover outlined above with regard to large-scale projects, however, there are doubts about the extent to which groups of creative workers can be said to drive growth, in general and in particular independently of organised business (Turok 2009). Moreover, there are concerns about the potential of these occupations to produce opportunities of sufficient scale and relevance to benefit all sections of society. What we see from cities ranking at the top of the creative city index is a development marked by strong intra-urban inequality and high levels of poverty, to which the creative class consumption patterns contribute: it is their demand for services, from restaurants and cafés to cleaning, that contributes to the swelling of what has been called the "cappuccino economy" (Mooney 2004) where poorly paid, often part-time jobs with few or no social benefits are the rule. Peck (2005) has advanced the argument that creativity and inequality may be mutually dependent, thus reinforcing the idea that the benefits of the creative economy remain confined within the boundaries of the creative class.

In conclusion, branding has worked as a framework within which specific development discourses and policies favouring only selected interests and social groups have gained legitimacy and wide implementation; as a result the use of public money to sell the city, as in branding campaigns, becomes a socially regressive form of taxation and has proven politically divisive (Zukin 1995; Pratt 2000). The argument advanced here is that branding has a logic conducive precisely to these selective and exclusionary outcomes; if the city is a product and citizens are consumers, the logic of branding involves the same distorting representation that is inherent in marketing, which necessarily seeks both to highlight the benefits of the product to be sold and to ignore its negative attributes. By the same token, it does not become an issue if the development process does not reach the unemployed or produces only low-income jobs, because the problems of the unemployed or of the working poor are not represented in the development agenda. Furthermore, the same logic negates the eminently political character of development choices and posits that such policies constitute obligatory answers to the needs of the new urban economy.

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## Chapter 2

# The creative city imaginary<sup>1</sup>

### I. The image of the city

A well-established tradition in urban studies has emphasised how cities are not just material spaces, but also objects of perception and representation: urban designers and planners develop ideas concerning the way cities should look, function and be experienced, for example, and the representation of cities plays a prominent role in literature, art and films (Bridge and Watson 2003). Such an analytical perspective is by no means limited to the visual form of the urban: the image of the city concerns the general meaning and idea of a place. In this sense, it is worthwhile to examine the symbols embodied in the material components of the city (roads, monuments, and buildings), immaterial components such as the habits, routines, institutions, and organisations regulating the life of the inhabitants as well as discourses about the city, stereotypes concerning the attitudes of the population, and descriptions from tourist guides, movies, slogans, and local marketing campaigns (see among others Shields 1991). Such an analytical perspective on the urban imaginary<sup>2</sup> is usually proposed under two different perspectives: the internal image, that perceived and reproduced by the local actors of the city (those identifying their geographical identities with that particular place), and the external image, the perception and representation of the city by (and for) people and organisations more or less extra-

<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of this paper has been previously published in the Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference of ISSEI, Helsinki, 28 July-2 August 2008, with the title *Urban images and the creative city*.

<sup>2</sup> The 'urban imaginary' as used here is understood to be a 'coherent, historically based ensemble of representations drawn from the architecture and street plans of the city, the art produced by its residents, and the images of and discourse on the city as seen, heard, or read in movies, on television, in magazines, and other forms of mass media (Greenberg 2000: 228).

neous to local culture and everyday practices (for example in Lutz 2004). External images are often particularly vague, abstract, and simplistic; for example, it is common to associate positive and negative values with unexplored or unfamiliar cities (a complementary example may be that of particular 'mythical' places: the less they are known by a person, the more they remain 'legendary' and positive). A quite common theoretical hypothesis is that these "metageographies", i.e. sets of geographical ideas and spatial structures through which individuals tend to order their knowledge of the world, are fundamental in shaping subjective geographies (or "myth-geographies") influencing our actions (Lewis and Wigen 1997). In other words, functional divisions (as those between good and bad places for tourism, investing or other social actions) are spatialised and labelled, much like deviant individuals, in order to play an anticipatory function, i.e. to build up expectations about different and uncertain situations. Such an image-building activity is by no means objective, but historically produced and actively contested or negotiated (for example by means of place marketing policies); using the vocabulary of Lefebvre (1974), this process involves the "space of representation" – the abstract space of "social imaginary" –.

The concept of the "tourist gaze", developed by John Urry (1990), presents many useful analogies with this discourse. Focusing on tourist flows, the author emphasises how tourist practices usually imply an "ideological framing": places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is anticipation (daydreaming and fantasy) of positive experiences; this anticipation is constructed through a variety of symbolic sources, for example films, literature, music. The "tourist gaze" is thus a culturally learned way of looking at a place, shaping what tourists expect to see when they reach their destination.

In the field of urban policy, this discourse is at the basis of urban marketing and branding practices, intended (also) as actions aimed at moulding social imaginaries and external images concerning a specific place; for example, by creating positive expectations in the eyes of a potential tourist or investor. Richard Florida (2002), who affirms that the "creative class" is attracted by 'cool' cities, fits implicitly into this framework. Such considerations are also important for post-industrial cities: one of their challenges is, for example, to make places attractive to specific target audiences, such as artistic communities, with their preference for vibrant artistic networks, a climate of support for arts, and a good and affordable quality of life (Gertler 2004). This implies the celebration of 'new' post-Fordist urban identities, economies, life-styles, forms of work and consumption (Scott 2000; Kneale and Dwyer 2008). In terms of promotional policies and urban branding, this may be considered as a set of practices of selective "story telling" (Sandercock 2003) aimed at trying to manage what sort of understanding and impressions of a place potential visitors, investors, members of the creative class, or even inhabitants might gain. Of course, such a branding practice does not imply constructing *tabula rasa* narratives; rath-



er, it epitomises a long articulation and framing process that must have a certain basis in the local identity and debates. Patently fake urban brands are destined to low credibility; the branding process must create evocative narratives with a strong spatial referent (Vanolo 2008b). Urban branding policies that do not take account of strong identity referents imply specific political perspectives and issues of credibility. Moreover, these involve many critical questions that will not be considered here: for example, who has the prerogative to define urban identities, and who 'lives the brand'? What are the political consequences of building up the image of a 'creative city'? This is particularly important considering that brands and images can operate as a legitimate vocabulary for justifying specific urban policies.

The aim of this paper is to discuss general trends in the field of urban image promotion in the post-Fordist Western European city. Part 2 discusses the crisis of the Fordist city in terms of a crisis in urban images, while part 3 looks at stereotypes and representations in the field of technology and creativity. Part 4 presents some examples concerning the way ideas of social creativity are represented in Helsinki, Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Bilbao.

## **2. The crisis of the Fordist city: a crisis of representation**

The 70s and the 80s have been generally characterised by academics and analysts as a period of deep transformation in the structure and organisation of the Western economy and society (Amin 1994), a period of discontinuity in the evolution of technologies, institutions, market and social forces that assumed quite different forms with respect to the post-war years. This sense of epochal transformation, or movement to a new distinct phase of capitalism, generated a number of academic expressions such as "post-Fordism", "post-industrial" and "post-modern". Such terms refer to parallel debates, based on different theoretical premises: for example the Regulation school in economics, the neo-Schumpeterian approach in interpreting technological paradigms, or the flexible specialisation/accumulation discourse in industrial economy, or even the wide idea of a new "disorganised capitalism".

In urban terms, Fordism deeply marked in a number of ways the development trajectories of Western cities, particularly in those strongly connected to industry: the imposition of an intensive regime of accumulation tied to Taylorist production techniques, the strong capitalisation of the economy, the diffusion of standardised mass consumption, the generalisation and diffusion of homogeneous social behaviours (Esser and Hirsh 1989). Regional structures have been regulated and dominated by the localisation of industry, with a dramatic decline of agricultural activities and their partial industrialisation. The Fordist city has been thus characterised by vigorous agglomeration and standardisation of the built environment. The diffusion of cars was accompanied by a remarkable differentiation of functional

space, implying phenomena of suburbanisation, growth of satellite towns, depopulation of specific areas, the end of several niche economic activities. The nuclear family, the car and television became symbols of a certain (Fordist) way of living the urban space, which also involved many negative aspects (for example the creation of peripheral dormitory quarters).

The crisis of the Fordist regime may be read, from our point of view, as a general crisis of the Fordist city, with relevant consequences for the urban imaginary (Lever 2001). Changes have reduced the importance of economies of scale, i.e. the centrality of large industrial plants in big cities, often accompanying the rise of clusters of flexible small and medium size enterprises (with the consequent fragmentation of the labour market) and the contraction of the industrial sector in favour of services (Scott 1988), with significant and far-reaching implications (Harvey 1989).

First, the centrality of the production of symbolic capital: on the one hand we consume more and more symbols, and on the other, cities are playing an increasingly crucial role in the economy, in part because they are cradles of knowledge, fashions, meanings (Zukin 1995). As far as the urban imaginary is concerned, it is important to note a peculiar side-effect: the Fordist built environment, Fordist gentrification processes, the celebration of the industrial histories of certain places are all connected, in the post-Fordist city, to negative perceptions of the city. For a city to be seen as still industrial is to be associated with the old, the polluted, the distressed and the outdated, and in this sense we may speak of a "crisis of representation" for Fordist cities (Short and Kim 1999). In order to move beyond the Fordist imaginary, many cities invest in a strategy of assigning 'new' functions and symbols to old industrial landmarks, in order to celebrate ideas of transition to a 'new' phase of urban life, less centred on factories, and more on culture: the transformation of an old power-station into the new Tate modern in London is emblematic of this trend.

Secondly, and partly overlapped, the role of the urban spectacle and the urban experience in general are more and more crucial in human life and economy: this is the case of the proliferation (and the support from urban policies), particularly in the 80s and 90s, of material structures and events promoting shopping experiences, mass entertainment and theme parks (Hannigan 2007). These imply transforming parts of the city into arenas for spectacles and entertainment, exacerbating social divisions between those who can and those who cannot take part in a spectacle and making cities less interpretable as loci of work and production than as sites of consumption and entertainment, nodes of a 'post-modern' life centred on hedonism, consumption and individualism (Featherstone 1991). Local customs, rituals, festivals and ethnic arts, for example, become "images" for tourist attractions, performed for consumption and produced for market-based instrumental activities (Gotham 2002). As different tourist attractions and cities increasingly compete with each other to attract tourists, the need to

present the urban with ever more spectacular, exotic and titillating attractions increases, moving more and more urban policies from the support of production and welfare to “entrepreneurial” activities such as image promotion, organisation of events and construction of public-private partnerships (Mayer 1994). According to critics, this ‘urban spectacle’ represents a tool of pacification, depoliticisation, massification and commodification of culture that seduces people using the mechanisms of leisure, consumption and entertainment under the rule of advertising and commodified media culture, and in this sense the urban imaginary seems increasingly to reflect the logics of capitalism and consumption (Gotham 2001), exemplified as well in the proliferation of expressions from business culture (such as marketing or branding) even in urban studies.

The broad debate on post-Fordism during the 80s and 90s opened a number of different discussions on possible scenarios for post-Fordist cities, without reaching a generally agreed upon conclusion. It is clear what a “Fordist city” is, but not as clear what a “post-Fordist” one is, apart for the obvious consideration that it is no longer (only) Fordist. Some authors have suggested, for example, that the suffix ‘post’ does not necessarily mean ‘non’ Fordist (Amin 1994). It seems probable that the period of economic restructuring that began in the 70s has gone much further than a crisis of the Fordist paradigm, overlapping with other social, economical, political, technological transformations which are still difficult to frame in clear conceptual categories and in theoretical terms.

It is clear that these transformations are having a strong impact on the urban imaginary, in the sense of the way we see, perceive and represent cities, shifting urban representations from the celebration of the Fordist, industrial city to something different.

### **3. From technological stereotypes to the creative city discourse**

We have noted above that the Fordist imaginary is generally perceived as a synonym of crisis. But – and this may be connected to the problem of the definition of what a post-Fordist city is – it is not easy to detect what kind of urban images may be attractive and sustainable over time, especially considering the variability of fashions and stereotypes. For example, it is evident that the abovementioned structures supporting shopping experiences, mass entertainment and theme parks were generally perceived as ‘fantastic’ some decades ago, while today they have lost much of their appeal: as discussed below, the “creative class” prefers neighbourhood art galleries and small jazz clubs rather than megaplex cinemas and shopping malls (Hannigan 2007). Moreover, once a stereotyped symbolism for urban success and attractiveness becomes clear for policy makers, a second problem appears on the scene, i.e. what David Harvey (1989) calls the trap of “serial reproduction” of promotional poli-

cies, when a city's message threatens to disappear in the crowd of similar urban images in the marketplace (Jessop 1998).

The problem of the imitation of a successful marketing idea in the framework of a dominant meta-discourse is certainly not new, and in recent years this has been particularly evident in urban studies. In summary, it is possible to detect a single paradigmatic discourse dominating the scene of urban marketing for industrial cities during much of the 90s: the technological city. During that decade, urban policymakers commonly believed (true or not) that global flows were attracted towards places associated with high technology. Numerous cities developed specific labels and slogans combining comprehensive approaches to urban planning with the objective of developing "high tech" cities (Hepworth 1990), such as Barcelona (*telematics city*), Amsterdam (*information city*), Manchester (*wired city*), and many others: in the case of Asia, the terms 'siliconisation' refers to realities like Singapore (*intelligent island*), Cyberjaya, Malaysia (*multimedia supercorridor*), and Zhongguancun, Beijing (*China's Silicon Valley*) (Jessop and Sum 2000).

The quest for the promotion of images linked to high technology seemed to be a panacea for many different urban problems, offering everything from the reversal of industrial decline to the promotion of social cohesion, from enhanced competitiveness to improved mechanisms of governance<sup>3</sup>. This general attraction towards high technology encouraged the promotion of such images even in places without specific technological vocations, and some authors introduced ironic expressions such as "high-tech fantasies" (Massey, Quintas, and Wield 1992) or "technodream" (Dobers 2003).

This trend towards a high technology rhetoric has changed slightly over time. Technology is evidently still appealing, and no urban marketing campaign ever misses an opportunity to celebrate high-technology research, but ideas of culture and creativity are gaining centrality: in recent years, slogans concerning technology and stereotypical images of scientists, computers etc. have often been replaced by the celebration of cultural and creative industries (Evans 2003). Of course, this is just a general trend, and many exceptions can be found. This trend is probably connected to the fact that capitalism itself is moving into a phase in which the cultural forms and meanings of its outputs are becoming critical and dominant elements of a productive strategy, and in which the realm of urban culture as a whole is more and more subject to commoditisation (Scott 2000; Hannigan 1998; Evans 2003). Moreover, at least in cities in the 'developed' world, we have to consider recent trends in the international division of labour and enterprise outsourcing: some years ago, the mainstream rhetoric in economic geography was that labour intensive industrial segments were going to be relo-

<sup>3</sup> Often linking those elements in a neoliberal framing (for example assuming that cohesion is functional to competitiveness), implicitly supporting a "new conventional wisdom": Buck *et al.* 2005.

cated in developing countries, while high-technology will stay embedded in Northern metropolises. Such a tendency is quickly changing: cities in China and India, just to name two popular examples, have become strong competitors (also) in the field of high technology. The 'new' dominant discourse is therefore that developed countries still maintain a competitive advantage in the field of creativity and culture, and cities are supposed to celebrate a cutting edge cultural milieu. Culture, in fact, is both an economic sector embedded in diverse growth industries (music, cinema, art) which contribute to increasing employment and to the regeneration of the local economy, and a resource crucial to the re-imagining of cities and regions as places for tourists, investments and mobile high-skilled labour, i.e. the creative class (Bayliss 2007; Landry 2000).

This discourse is dramatically important for the urban economy not only because these are nodes of the production of culture, experimentation, art, and creativity in general: in cultural production industries, the relation between the cultural attributes of places and the qualitative aspects of the final outputs is often evident, as in the case of Hollywood movies, or in many "Third Italy" industrial districts (Scott 2000; Santagata 2002). Place, culture, and economy are symbiotic, particularly in some key cities. This is an important topic for both the manufacturing and service economies; the more the specific cultural and economic identities of cities make their presence known on the landscape, the more they can exploit monopoly powers of place, i.e., place-specific process and product configurations which enhance their competitive advantage (Power and Scott 2004). In this sense, Molotch (1996: 229) stated that "favourable images create entry barriers for products from competing places".

To build a favourable urban image in the framework of this 'new' cultural narrative is thus the main challenge for all cities. Of course, it should not be thought that policies supporting urban creativity are based only on the construction of images; in fact, such policies include many interventions (from physical planning to the organisation of events) aimed at improving people's lived experience of cities, supporting a holistic view of the urban social and economic fabric, and enhancing an urban milieu capable of generating ideas. Moreover, it can be argued that such policies may hide many critical social problems, inequalities and non-transparent operations (see, for example, Hansen *et al.* 2001; Peck 2005; Scott 2006; Bayliss 2007). However, in the eyes of urban promoters, the main issue is that specific labels, symbols, and communicative stereotypes have to be created and must circulate through a variety of media at the international level. A classic example is to associate a place with a cultural icon in an attempt to imbue the site with a creative character: Gaudi's Barcelona, Dostoyevsky's St Petersburg etc.

Florida himself indirectly addresses the question of the image of the creative city. As discussed in the first chapter, his main idea is that capitalist development today has moved to a distinctive new phase, in which the driving

force of the economy is not simply technological or organisational, but human. The “creative class” (a vague category, including basically those engaged in knowledge-intensive works whose function is to “create meaningful new forms”, such as artists, scientists, analysts, business managers, opinion makers: Florida 2003: 8) is today the “dominant class in the society” (Florida 2002: ix), as it refers to the core of economic growth in developed countries. Moreover, such creative professionals are not simply motivated by material rewards (salaries), but want to live in “quality”, “creative”, “tolerant” and “exciting” places. Therefore, according to such a framework, a key question for urban planning refers to the possibility of promoting creative environments and “cool city” images (Peck 2005) in order to attract these professionals: key elements in developing such an image refer not just to technology, but to multiculturalism, tolerance, the presence of various and diverse cultural stimuli, socially and culturally ‘open’ social environments, rich in possibilities and opportunities for interaction, where a talented person can easily become part of the social fabric in a relatively short time (the outsider can quickly become insider; “getting into the loop”, to use the words of Storper and Venables 2004). Bohemian quarters, for example, are generally considered open and attractive to talented and creative individuals (Hannigan 2007). Highly educated human capital is drawn to places with a vibrant music scene, street-level culture, active nightlife and other signifiers of being “cool” (Florida 2002).

The creative city narrative is therefore the newest place-marketing product, and there is a considerable overlap, verging on uniformity, in the key notions used by cities in imagining themselves as something special and unique within this framework (Short and Kim 1999; Hansen *et al.* 2001). And this certainly may raise questions concerning the effectiveness of such urban images (Scott 2008).

#### **4. Symbols and stereotypes of creativity: some European images**

In the next pages, I will look briefly at promotional materials (brochures, web sites), urban marketing plans and “image building” policies in four European cities whose image is somehow linked (also) to culture and creativity: Helsinki, Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Bilbao. The attempt is to discuss some evidence concerning the (common) ways the previously discussed arguments are presented and displayed in terms of external images.

In Helsinki, particularly after being named *European Cultural Capital* for the year 2000, creativity has moved at the centre of the urban marketing strategy (Vanolo 2008a). According to Florida and Tinagli (2004), the Helsinki region is “the most creative region in Europe”, and the Nordic capital has embraced cultural industries and arts flagship strategies, including the development of a cultural consumption quarter around Glass Media Palace: art house cinema, book shops, cafes, media production facilities and, above all, the Kiasma modern art museum, designed by American architect

Steven Holl, with curved, asymmetric (post-modern) lines. The European Cultural Capital event proved a great opportunity to highlight the centrality of cultural industries (Cantell 1999). The conversion of the old Cable factory into a big post-modern container for small ateliers and art studios thus assumed considerable visual and symbolic power. And, finally, the substantial and rapid growth of the ICT sector (and particularly of the flagship enterprise Nokia) gave credibility to the idea of transition towards knowledge-intensive sectors, an idea given considerable prominence in marketing materials ("Star performer in competitiveness and creativity"<sup>4</sup>).

The case of Copenhagen is another example of the centrality of creative city policies, policies carried on both by the Municipality and by HUR, the Greater Copenhagen Authority. Infrastructural projects were intended as global landmarks, positioning the city on the map of Europe: this is the case of the Øresund Bridge and the new urban centre of Ørestad. The general attempt is to develop and portray the region as a post-industrial, knowledge-based economy (Baylis 2007), particularly connected to the biotech cluster Medicon Valley and the ICT sector in the Southern Harbour, but also with cultural landmarks such as the Opera House, the Arken museum and the Statens Museum for Kunst, the Amager Strandpark, or buildings by famous architects, such as the Elephant center by Norman Foster. And, finally, the cultural reference has been amplified by international events like the International Film Festival and the Jazz Festival.

Amsterdam has invested heavily in the creative city approach, and the economic specialisation of the city is moving more and more towards cultural industries (publishing, advertising, radio and television productions, news agencies, arts: Kloosterman 2004). Here, a tradition of innovative economic talent, combined with a high degree of openness and an image as a 'tolerant city', has resulted in a particular atmosphere, a major pull for knowledge workers and creative persons (Musterd and Deurloo 2006). "Freedom is one of *the* keywords in Amsterdam"<sup>5</sup>.

Amsterdam has launched the branding projects *I Amsterdam* and *Amsterdam Creative City*. In the field of image makeup, this operation included sponsored welcome centres and branding campaigns (fig. 1), coaching for creative entrepreneurs, hospitality training, promotional publications, and the annual Picnic Cross Media week, a conference for creative entrepreneurs. In terms of physical planning, many old harbours have been redeveloped into living and working environments for artists and cultural industries (the housing shortage is a relevant problem in the city). Amsterdam is today generally perceived as a central node for the creative scenario in Europe, a tolerant, stimulating and lively place for artists, bohemians, actors in the cultural scene (Hodes *et al.* 2007).

<sup>4</sup> <<http://www.helsinkiiregion.com>>.

<sup>5</sup> <<http://www.iamsterdam.com>>.

Fig. 1 – *Branding I Amsterdam*

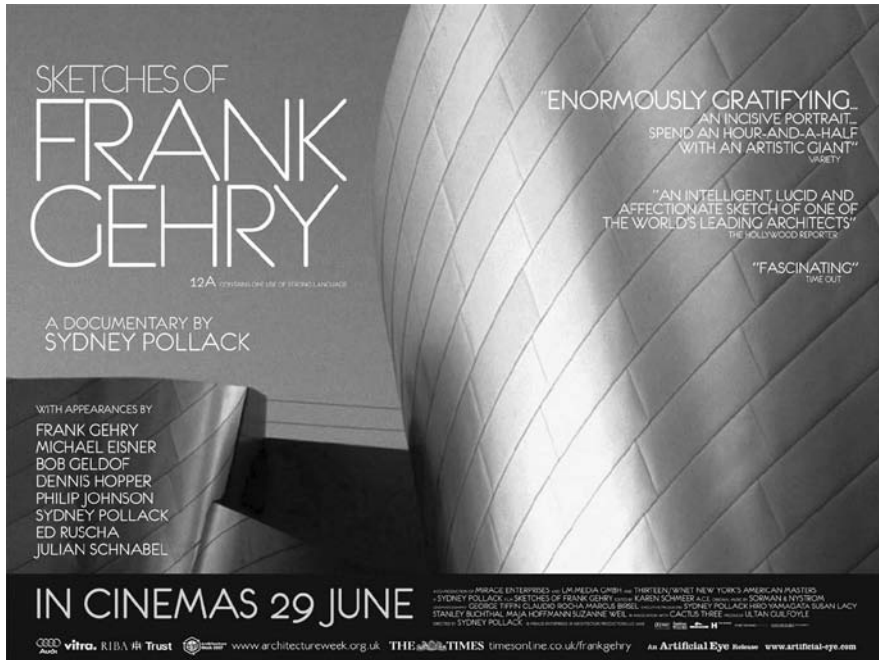
Source: <[www.iamsterdam.com](http://www.iamsterdam.com)>

The well known case of the cultural re-imagining of Bilbao dates back to 1991, when Metropoli-30 was setup as a driving mechanism and vision holder as well as a means of institutionalising the strategic conversation about the city, mainly with the Strategic Plan for the Revitalisation of Metropolitan Bilbao (*Bilbao 2010: The Strategy*), together with Bilbao Ria 2000, the key agency for physical renewal (Landry 2006; Gonzales 2006).

Physical infrastructures and iconic architectures have been central here in molding the image of a cultural city: these include the metro system designed by Norman Foster (opened in 1995), a new airport and the Zubi Zuri pedestrian bridge by Santiago Calatrava, the Euskalduna Music and Congress Centre by Federico Soriano and Dolores Pacios and, above all, the Guggenheim by Frank Gehry (fig. 2), a landmark so powerful and successful that has been imitated worldwide, starting the (ironically called) “Bilbao effect” or “McGuggenheimisation”. Guggenheim is an important example of how an art house has re-imagined an entire city, including above all the port and industrial areas (Evans 2003), and it should be noted that, at the beginning, the Guggenheim was first ignored and then opposed by inhabitants and artists (a museum guard was injured by a bomb on its opening). And, as in many other cases, its importance is not so much linked to the art exhibited in the museum as to the building itself, acting as a post-modern cathedral: 82% of visitors in Bilbao state that they specifical-



Fig. 2 – Iconic landmark: Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao



Source: promotional poster for Sydney Pollack's movie *Sketches of Frank Gehry*

ly visited Bilbao only because of the Guggenheim (Landry 2006), testifying to a relevant embedding of the city image in a cultural field.

The four cases briefly introduced here share some features and arguments in terms of external images. I will briefly try to summarise the main elements, images and stereotypes used to support ideas of culture and creativity in marketing and policy materials. The result of this exercise is presented in the following (certainly non-exhaustive) list.

First are 'landmark buildings', by famous architects, placing emphasis on ideas of culture and also assuming the function of 'art containers'. These are particularly present in three of the four cases: the Guggenheim in Bilbao, the Kiasma in Helsinki and the Opera in Copenhagen. Such an ingredient is less present in the case of Amsterdam, where the main images used to support and locate promotional cultural discourses seems to privilege pictures of canals or the Zuid railway station, which is not a 'cultural container' but a mobility infrastructure with a high value in terms of design. A similar case – mobility infrastructures by famous architects – refers to the Bilbao metro system by Norman Foster, and also to the huge Øresund bridge (8 kms), which certainly assumes the role of iconic landmark infrastructure.

Secondly, the 'buzz'. In visual materials, this takes the form of scenes with people, and particularly of people meeting and chatting (fig. 3), together with slogans as "Copenhagen is full of zest and life", or "in the evening, Amsterdam transforms from a working city into a lively entertainment centre". Basically, all four cases stress images portraying situations of social interaction. Such a narrative is (partly) overlapping with ideas of entertainment and particularly of night life, including both fancy restaurants and venues which attract young and trendy people.

The nightlife in Amsterdam is versatile, cosmopolitan and never sleeps. Enjoy an intimate dinner or dance to top DJs until 5:00. From night theatre to lounge bars; coffee shops to clubs; cosy pubs to grand cafes, Amsterdam offers something for every taste!<sup>6</sup>

The tendency of the creative class to move to lively places is symbolised in a "playscape" (Chatterton and Hollans 2002) full of bars, clubs, opportunities to meet people and have fun. "The Helsinki night is filled with music, people and electricity"<sup>7</sup>.

Moreover, the connection between representations of social interaction and urban entertainment is obtained with images of lively *public spaces*, particularly natural environments and parks, together with facilities for outdoor sports. This is a relevant element in all four cases, with many pictures stereotyping the social or the hedonistic (i.e. sports, relaxation) use of public spaces (figs. 3-5).

In line with Florida's arguments, 'tolerance', 'variety' and 'difference' represent relevant keywords. In general, cities seeking to be both inclusive and to project their multicultural *ethnoscape* now re-label their ethnic quarters which had come to be associated with deprivation and decline (Shaw 2007): Jewish quarters are quite lively in Amsterdam and Copenhagen; the formerly working class area of Vesterbro in Copenhagen is now considered trendy; Helsinki celebrates the Chinese community (fig. 6). In Amsterdam, the case of the Breeding Places Amsterdam (BPA) project is also interesting; started in 1999, 41 million Euros were set aside for the production of 1,400-2,000 workspaces and living/working spaces for artists and cultural entrepreneurs. This project has often been often connected to the legalisation of squats containing cultural functions, an experiment carried out in the past in Fabriek in Van Ostadestraat and Tetterode, Binnenpret, Zall 100 and Kistgewonnen (Pruijt 2004).

In these cities the discourse on diversity and tolerance assumes other shapes as well, emphasising the openness to the 'non-usual'. In the case of Helsinki, there is a specific campaign called "Nordic Oddity", publish-

<sup>6</sup> <<http://www.amsterdamtourist.nl>>.

<sup>7</sup> <<http://www.helsinki.fi>>.

Fig. 3 – Helsinki: life on Esplanade



Source: City of Helsinki, Tourist & Convention Bureau, *Pictures of Helsinki. Photo Cd* (photo by J. Seppovaara)

ing marketing materials (such as *Bohemian Helsinki: 24 hours no-nonsense*) stressing ‘strange’ thing to do in the city. Amsterdam is considered a model of liberal society (liberalisation of marijuana consumption, the annual gay parade, the liberal immigration policy; Hodes *et al.* 2007). In the case of Copenhagen we can mention the gay anti-discrimination environment (publishing for example specific tourist brochures; fig. 7). Such an emphasis on tolerance is less visible in Bilbao, at least in terms of marketing materials.

Of course, much reference in cultural marketing is connected to the celebration of the local artistic scene, including both ‘high’ and more ‘popular’ forms of art. The first refers to the celebration of museums (‘culture’ in the strict sense and in the popular meaning of the term), the second is often connected to music, cafes, street art (i.e. ideas of ‘creativity’: see for example fig. 8). There are plenty of art references in all four cases. The promotion of ideas of lively artistic places often occurs through the marketing of events: large demonstrations, concerts, sports events, and cultural exhibitions have the ‘hypnotic’ power to attract and concentrate, in the same time

Fig. 4 – *Ideas of pleasure and nature in public spaces: Vondelpark in Amsterdam*



Source: <<http://www.iamsterdam.com>>

Fig. 5 – *Ideas of quality of life in Copenhagen*



Source: Brochure *Her Copenhagen* 2008

Fig. 6 – Chinese new year in Helsinki



Source: <<http://www.helsinki.fi>>

Fig. 7 – The gay scene in Copenhagen



Source: *Comecloser Free GayGuide, Copenhagen 2008*

Fig. 8 – Helsinki: art in the streets



Source: Brochure *Helsinki and Southern Finland 2008*

and in the same place, the attention of millions of people from all over the world (the urban spectacle). This strong communicative power can be used in urban discourse to spread ideas of transformation, regeneration, and success, and not just for an external audience: cultural events may add life to city streets, giving citizens renewed pride in their home city (Richards and Wilson 2004). In all four cases it is possible to present a long list of events, each focusing on particular market niches, from families to visitors, from artists to enterprises (an example in fig. 9).

Finally, a further lever for the promotion of urban cultural images refers to supporting ideas concerning opportunities for *high-quality education*, for both young people and professionals. This element is particularly visible in the cases of Helsinki and Amsterdam – with slogans as “Helsinki Calling! Get to know Helsinki by studying here”, or:

Amsterdam is also a city of knowledge, present in its broad selection of choice for solid education, renowned universities and science research centres and opportunities for following solid vocational training<sup>8</sup>.

In the cases of Copenhagen and Bilbao, there is no particular focus on these ideas in marketing materials.

<sup>8</sup> <<http://www.hel.fi> and <http://www.iamsterdam.com>>.

Fig. 9 – Youth festival in Bilbao



Source: <<http://www.bilbao.net>>

## 5. Concluding remarks

This paper has discussed the presence of alternative paradigms and dominant discourses in the rhetoric of urban branding, following the crisis of the Fordist discourse. While in the 90s the dominant narrative concerned technology, current discourses focus more and more on the ‘creative city’ (and more in general, the ‘cultural city’) paradigm.

The promotion of the creative city never implies a disruptive discourse with reference to high technology: it opens up the discourse, moving from the mere representation of scientists and labs (as stereotypes and iconic symbols of research and development activities) to the celebration of social elements: interaction, buzz, quality of life, tolerance, diversity, art, urban quality. The representation in marketing materials of such ‘abstract’ ideas (creativity, tolerance) of course implies the use of labelling and stereotyping exercises, reducing complex concepts to a few iconic images. This is the rea-

son why most marketing materials converge to a surprising degree in representing similar images: young people chatting in a café, crowded and sunny parks, art in the streets etc., often posing on the background of such scenes a strong visual referent (mainly the local, well known, landmark building) in order to contextualise the message in that specific urban environment.

Of course, the general reflections presented in this paper cannot determine to what degree such images are similar, converging to a single urban stereotype (the cosmopolitan, creative, global city), or how such images are intrinsically different, proposing diverse ideas in the framework of the same general paradigm of the creative city. Certainly, the success of image building for the creative city depends on a 'positioning' strategy, i.e. the tension between proposing the right mix of the discussed ingredients, eventually adding 'something different', anchoring these discourses with local identity referents in order to enhance the credibility of the discourse. The four cases briefly presented here, for example, are not identical in this perspective, proposing slightly different mixes.

Tab. 1. *Different mixes in the promotion of ideas of creativity*

Representations and images	Helsinki	Copenhagen	Amsterdam	Bilbao
Landmark buildings				
• as cultural containers	+	+		+
• mobility infrastructures		+	+	
Buzz/use of public space	+	+	+	
Tolerance and difference	+	+	+	
Local art scene	+	+	+	+
High education	+		+	

The scheme in table 1 is merely indicative, in order to show different 'positioning mixes' for the four cities, in the tension between the generic and stereotyped image of the creative city (consider, for example, the simple interpretations of Florida's "three Ts") and the valorisation of uniqueness. The table throws little light on this problem – the mere representation of the buzz may assume both a generic connotation or a strong emphasis on singular and irreproducible features of a city –; nevertheless, even in such a rough classification we can identify different patterns: a quite variegated promotional attitude in the case of Helsinki, a sharper one in the case of Bilbao (focusing basically on art and landmark buildings), and slightly different attitudes in Copenhagen and Amsterdam (the latter insisting for example on education, differently from Copenhagen). And the choice of a specific positioning strategy is certainly not an easy task, considering the amount of cities claiming today to be 'really creative' and the necessity to



celebrate realistic (or, at least, credible) images of complex, dynamic and socially constructed places as cities.

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## Chapter 3

# Site-specificity and urban icons in the light of the Creative City marketing

### I. Introduction

As a result of intensified global competition for the next hot creative centre, cities increasingly try to single out individual and specific features that are particularly associated with 'creativity' in the widest sense. In order to attain a unique selling proposition, distinctive characteristics are highlighted and, if non-existent, are constructed. Similar to commodities that are specifically marketed to attract targeted consumers, creative and cultural assets come into play in the creative city context in order to appeal to so-called 'creatives' and tourists.

But where traditional cultural heritage does not seem to be sufficient in the race for a place, new sites must be constructed in order to meet contemporary expectations and demands of the 'creative class'<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes these new places even construct and bolster the image of a whole city, as was vividly demonstrated by Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Although building an architecturally outstanding art museum was already common practice with such famous predecessors as Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York, the success of the Guggenheim Bilbao far exceeded expectations in putting the former industrial city back on the mental map for cultural tourists and creatives alike.

Gehry's buildings are consistently considered site-specific in that they respond to existing conditions and fit into their urban surroundings. To some extent, however, all architecture is site-specific, in that no two sites offer exactly the same broad environmental conditions. Even prefabricated build-

<sup>1</sup> See Richard Florida's (2002) bestseller (among others) for a lengthy discussion on the creative class.

### Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Designed by Canadian-American architect Frank O. Gehry, the Spanish Guggenheim (completed in 1997) far exceeded even the project's biggest admirers' expectations. Immediately after its completion at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao was called the most important building of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (!) (*Time Magazine*).

Formerly characterised by steel mills and shipyards, Bilbao now attracts tourists from around the globe. A visitor survey revealed that 82% came exclusively for the Guggenheim – no wonder that a 500% increase in tourism to Bilbao is attributed directly to the building itself.

In 2001 the *Financial Times* estimated that with the help of this museum € 500 million have been generated for the region during its first three years, plus additional € 100 million in taxes (*CNN Money.com*, 6 August 2004). However enthusiastic and exaggerated these figures might be, a concise study on the return on investment by Beatriz Plaza confirmed that the Guggenheim Bilbao has indeed generated new tourism and new employment and, as a result, additional fiscal income (2006: 460).

This extraordinary effect has been coined as the 'Bilbao Effect' or 'Guggenheim Effect', and has resulted in civic leaders all over the world hoping that this might happen to their city. Numerous architecturally remarkable buildings have been planned and built since then, especially by cities in the so-called 'rust belt' (*CNN Money.com*, 6 August 2004).

However, the regeneration strategies devised for Bilbao, of which the Guggenheim appears to be both symbol and driver, received a great deal of criticism. Indeed, Bilbao's real estate market has clearly seen a 'Guggenheim Effect', with soaring prices occasionally exceeding even those of Madrid and Barcelona. In this way Bilbao has become "another example of how large-scale urban development projects can actually accentuate social exclusion and polarisation in the city" (Vicario and Monje 2003: 2388).

ings have to respond to given environmental characteristics. One glance at Gehry's portfolio, however, reveals a clear and distinctive signature.

This feature set Gehry up to become the darling of 21<sup>st</sup> century city marketing: an architect with a clear signature associated with site-specificity and the ability to draw crowds. Consequently his extravagant gestures "became signs of artistic expression that could be dropped, indifferently, almost anywhere – in LA, Bilbao, Seattle, Berlin, New York" (Foster 2001). Meanwhile some forty characteristic Gehry buildings are scattered around the globe (plus around twenty currently in progress).

Equally widespread are the rusted steel sculptures of the American minimalist artist Richard Serra. His works not only influenced the monolithic buildings of Frank Gehry but are also labelled 'site-specific'.

The clear signature – curved, rusted Corten steel plates of enormous dimensions that appear to 'levitate' without any visible anchorage – is

**Richard Serra's best-known works in public space**

*Fulcrum*, 1986-1987, London, GB

*Tilted Arc*, 1981 (removed 1989), New York City, USA

*Bramme für das Ruhrgebiet*, 1998, Essen, GER

*Ballast*, 2003, San Francisco, USA

*Terminal*, 1977, Bochum, GER (originally installed at the Sixth Documenta, Kassel)

*T.W.U.*, 1980, New York City, USA (moved to Hamburg, GER, 1982)

*Sea Level*, 1988-1996, Zeewolde, NL

*Te Tuhirangi Contour*, 2000-2002, Auckland, NZ

*Berlin Junction*, 1987, Berlin, GER

*Intersection*, 1992, Basel, CH

*Clara Clara*, 1983, Paris, FR

*T.E.U.C.L.A.*, 2002, Los Angeles, USA

Fig. 1 – Richard Serra, *Fulcrum*, 1986-87, London, GB



Source: Wikimedia Commons

comparable to Gehry's easily recognisable building characteristics not only optically but also in terms of dissemination. Apart from Serra's numerous works in art collections, at least forty-five well-known works situated in public spaces are located around the globe.

Their unmistakable signature and resulting recognition value seem to guarantee low risks for city leaders and investors who, in order to reduce the enormous uncertainties entailed by place competition, prefer to stick to the tried and true.

In order to meet the demands for differentiation as well as 'brand' recognition in the competition among cities, these acclaimed site-specific works promise to be the perfect solution to the contradictory need to deal distinctively with a unique site while presenting, at the same time, an easy-to-recognise signature. Unfortunately, numerous commission practices, together with striking aesthetic features, cast doubt on their acclaimed site-specificity – leaving this paradox unsolved in the end.

This chapter will juxtapose the idea of site-specificity with a seemingly globalised signature – of public artworks as well as spectacular architecture – in the light of contemporary city marketing. It discusses the reasons behind the widespread practice of commissioning monolithic and regularly anti-contextual art and architecture which, despite their cachet of site-specificity, run the risk of becoming ordinary and indistinguishable rather than unique.

The purpose, however, is not to question the idea of site-specificity or to elaborate on this term as in opposition to modernist doctrines (Kwon 2004; Kaye 2000; Suderburg 2000; Deutsche 1988). Nor will this chapter be a critique about the questionable usability and convenience of these architecture-as-art-buildings (Foster 2003, 2001), unless they are subsumed under site-specificity in the widest sense.

Instead, this chapter questions the extensive use of the term site-specificity and its implementation in the context of the creative city and the resulting inherent contradictions. It will elaborate on the seemingly conflicting aspects within the triangular of a city's urge for an attractive and distinctive image, the significance of a star architect's or artist's signature (see McNeill 2005: 511), and the importance of site-specific potential in making an 'individual' city a 'unique' city.

The argument is the following: first, the extensive use of works from a couple of world-famous star architects and artists with brand equity to promote an individual city as distinctive and 'creative' runs the risk of producing the opposite of the results desired. With more and more cities having their own Gehry or Serra, for instance, their striving for individuality will rather result in an increased uniformity. This means that the potential of broadly disseminated look-a-like celebrity misfits is ultimately being diminished by their ubiquity.

Second, as these traditional art amenities do not prove to be particularly relevant in Florida's "creativity index", this older cultural regenera-



tion scheme has been adapted to his demand for a diverse, organic, vibrant and open urban atmosphere. Because of their 'site-specificity', these works promise to blend in with existing structures while enhancing their value and drawing considerable attention. However, not only do these spectacular solitaires regularly contradict their own alleged site-specificity, they also ignore the importance of an urban fabric, which has recently been stressed by various creative city researchers (Lloyd 2002; Florida 2002; Curtis 2006).

In order to illustrate the dialectical characteristics of this issue within the coordinates of site-specificity, uniqueness of place and creative city image marketing, the works of Frank Gehry and Richard Serra will be interrogated.

Mutually influenced (e.g. Serra uses the specific computer program designed for Gehry's extreme structures), their works are considered 'site-specific' in that particularly Serra's works are claimed to be closely related to, if not constituted by, their specific urban locations.

Finally it was Richard Serra who made the idea of site-specificity widely public (Serra 1994: 194) and who still elaborates on site-specificity at large (McShine and Cooke 2007).

## 2. The idea of site-specificity

'Site-specificity' originated in the late 1960s as an antithesis to the modernist belief in an autonomous art object. In the modernist framework, works of art were understood as "self-governing objects with stable, independent meanings" and could "therefore be relocated or moved intact from place to place" (Deutsche 2002:163; 1992:24). The idea of site-specific art also emerged as a reaction to the growing commodification of art. As site-specific art overlaps land, conceptual, performance, public and installation art – and is combined with institutional criticism – its creators insisted on the inseparability of the artwork and its context (in the widest sense). The idea "that aesthetic meaning is formed in relation to an artwork's context and therefore changes with the circumstances in which the work is produced and displayed" (Deutsche 2002: 163; see also Adorno 1977: 187) has especially been supported by the minimalist sculpture of the 1960s. The absolutely reduced object-form, as particularly demonstrated by the early works of Donald Judd and Frank Stella, not only draws attention to the artwork's surrounding but also to the viewer him – or herself (Meinhardt 2006: 143). Almost automatically these simple, three-dimensional objects are perceived as including their environment. "The wedding of the artwork to a particular environment" (Crimp 1993: 16-17), the critic Douglas Crimp argues, does not so much define site-specificity as a specific position of the minimalist object but more the re-direction of the beholder's attention towards the room, which he or she occupies together with the artwork. In distracting attention from it the art object forces the viewer to question his or her position on that particular site as

well as on the relation to it, the artwork and finally the greater surroundings (Adorno 1977: 187).

As Miwon Kwon argues, site-specificity implies a lot more than just the artwork's essential relation to its site:

The (neo-avant-garde) aspiration to exceed the limitations of traditional media, like painting and sculpture, as well as their institutional setting; the epistemological challenge to relocate meaning from within the art object to the contingencies of its context; the radical restructuring of the subject from an old Cartesian model to a phenomenological one of lived bodily experience; and the self-conscious desire to resist the forces of the capitalist market economy, which circulates artworks as transportable and exchangeable commodity goods – all these imperatives came together in art's new attachment to the actuality of the site (Kwon 2000: 39).

Kwon furthermore recognises three main different aspects within site-specificity, each overlapping and competing against each other rather than forming different (historical) stages (see also Butin 2006: 154). She describes the earlier forms of site-specificity at the emergence of minimalism, as mentioned above, as a "phenomenological or experimental understanding of the site". This practice has been followed by artists such as Daniel Buren, Marcel Broodthaers and Hans Haacke, who regularly expanded their site-specific works towards an inherent "social/institutional critique" (Kwon 1997: 86). They regularly intervened in a site, transforming it physically with the result of changing its perception. "Conceptual" or "discursive" engagement with issues of site-specificity is what Kwon calls a more recent position on the matter, such as can be seen in works by Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser or Renée Green (Kwon 1997: 88f.). These artists work within the conceptual framework of a given situation, regularly questioning the common habits, rules and practices that it involves.

Site-specificity, therefore, does not refer exclusively to the artwork's reaction and handling of the given circumstances each individual site provides. It can also refer to the way the object puts emphasis on its surroundings, stressing its inherent share in a much broader discursive context. This again can be used to draw the attention to certain societal, institutional or political structures, transforming artwork into a critique.

In recent years, however, new models of site-specificity and changes in institutional and market forces have challenged the presumption of unrepeatability and immobility. For example, site-specific works shown in important exhibitions on the art of the 1960s and 1970s<sup>2</sup> were relo-

<sup>2</sup> E.g. "L'art conceptuel, une perspective" at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1989), "The New Sculpture, 1965-75: Between Geometry and Gesture" (1990) and "Immaterial Objects" (1991-92) (both at the Whitney Museum, New York).

cated or even rebuilt (Hapgood 1990: 119). Sometimes, if they are not destroyed after the exhibition ends, these re-constructed artworks even come to co-exist with the originals and are regularly integrated in the permanent collections.

This practice ironically transforms once site-bound works into transferable and mobile objects. As the case of Richard Serra will show the artist is also complicit in this development and contributes to making the concept of site-specificity a question of interpretation, a matter of degree. He or she objectifies (and commodifies) the artwork, redefining site-specificity “as the personal aesthetic choice of an artist’s stylistic preference rather than a structural reorganisation of aesthetic experience” (Kwon 1997: 90).

That once-popular term, ‘site-specific’, has come to mean “movable under the right circumstances” (Hapgood 1990: 120).

It is precisely this relativisation of site-specificity which makes possible its instrumental use in favour of a city’s promotion in the first place!

In the context of creative city marketing, however, as cities tend to resemble each other more and more in their ‘thin’ urban identities, it has become necessary to use advertising and marketing strategies to manufacture such distinctions. Consequently this is where site-specificity

[f]inds new importance because it supplies distinction of place and uniqueness of locational identity, highly seductive qualities in the promotion of towns and cities with the competitive restructuring of the global economic hierarchy (Kwon 2000: 55).

This is surely one of the reasons why Gehry’s as well as Serra’s works enjoy such great popularity among city officials.

### **3. Richard Serra’s ‘site-specific’ sculptural work**

Serra’s work predominantly refers to the spatial conditions of the physical site and therefore to its formal aesthetic references (Butin 2006: 150; Deutsche 1992: 24). As a consequence, site-specificity in Serra’s context corresponds to what Kwon calls the “phenomenological understanding of a site” (Kwon 1997: 86).

According to Ernst-Gerhard Güse (1987: 66) it is unthinkable for Serra to position a studio-designed work in an arbitrary open-space location, as equally unthinkable as it is for him to move a work designed for a specific place to a new location later<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Whereas in an earlier statement Serra concedes: “If I were totally free in placing my sculpture, if I could erect it where I liked, I would always consider the specificity of the site. But if you have the desire to build, you cannot simply wait for the opportunity. Therefore, I sometimes have to conceptualize a piece before I know exactly where it will be located” (interview first published 1983, Serra 1994a: 161).

“The concept of site-specificity was at the core of Serra’s aesthetic position and was integral to his legal arguments” (Senie 2002: 75) in the controversy over the removal of the public sculpture *Tilted Arc*<sup>4</sup>. During the public hearing as well as in subsequent public interviews he testified that “since he had conceived *Tilted Arc* for Federal Plaza and only for this site, the site was part of its content and therefore *to move the work was to destroy it*”. (Senie 2002: 75-76; boldface by author).

Although Serra continues to define his sculptures as site-specific, the relocation and renaming of some of his works tell a somewhat different story. The vertical sculpture, *Terminal*, installed in 1977 in Bochum, was originally made for and shown at the *Documenta 6* in Kassel (Serra 1994a: 100f.). After the 100 days of *Documenta* Serra was offered three options for a permanent site (Serra 1994a: 127), from which Serra chose the one in Bochum (Crimp 1987: 36)<sup>5</sup>.

In 1980 the piece *T.W.U.* was installed as a temporary piece in Downtown Manhattan, New York City. This sculpture, composed of three vertical Corten steel plates, became an immediate target of repeated vandalism. After the search for a permanent site for the sculpture had failed, *T.W.U.* was

Fig. 2a-2c – Richard Serra, *Berlin Curves/ Berlin Junction* (1986-1987) first in front of the Martin-Gropius-Bau, second in front of the Scharoun’s Philharmonie and third with the memorial plate in the foreground



Source: Author, 1987,2007,2009

<sup>4</sup> Probably the most famous and notorious case of controversial public art, *Tilted Arc* (1981-1987) was commissioned in 1981 and installed on Federal Plaza in New York City. Even before its installation the artwork was being criticized. Immediately after its official opening employees of several companies located at Federal Plaza began complaining and started petitions to have the work removed (Senie, 2002: xi). The famous three-day public hearing on dismantling the work in March 1985 not only attracted a wide international audience but also made this local controversy one of the most notorious art spectacles of the 1980s. Although the majority of those who testified at the hearing supported the sculpture, its opponents persisted. After the approval of a suitable alternative site failed in 1987 and Serra had exhausted all legal remedies, *Tilted Arc* was dismantled in 1989 and stored in a warehouse.

<sup>5</sup> Contrary to this true story of *Terminal*, Serra later incorrectly claimed that it was built for the railroad station in Bochum (Serra, 1994a: 226).

***Berlin Junction* a.k.a. *Berlin Curves* (1986-1987)**

In 1986 Richard Serra created the sculpture *Berlin Curves* as a contribution to the exhibition *Der unverbrauchte Blick* (January 1987-April 1987), curated by Christos Joachimides, in the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin (Höyneck 1988: 59). *Berlin Curves* consisted of two parallel curved steel plates more than thirteen meters long and about four meters high.

The exhibition is given a special focus by the monumental sculpture *Berlin Curves* by Richard Serra which has been created especially for this show. The recognition he has gained in Berlin so far and above all the great challenge of the atrium of the Martin-Gropius-Bau have motivated him to create such an impressive work (Joachimides 1987: 8).

But with these measures the sculpture unexpectedly failed to meet the given space limitations of the atrium in the museum. Originally meant to be framed by an illustrious collection of international artworks, the sculpture ended up being next to the entrance – outside the museum. This resulted in the artwork being framed by a completely different backdrop – in this case a historically very heterogeneous and vulnerable one.

However, at the end of the exhibition the Berlin Senate decided to buy the sculpture – now under the title of *Berlin Junction* – with the help of public art funds. Richard Serra chose the forecourt of Hans Scharoun's Philharmonie to be the new location for his sculpture. His explanation, however, was that *Berlin Junction* demanded the confrontation with architecture in order to challenge and question its surrounding and start a conversation with the built environment. In a letter to the Berlin Senate he stressed that the relation between sculpture and architecture in a respectively urban setting could simply not be arbitrary. Unfortunately Serra overlooked the specific history of his sculpture's new location. In this location, under the name of *Aktion T 4*, National Socialist officials had conducted an euthanasia program that led to the deaths of more than 200,000 psychiatric patients and other stigmatised individuals in the period from 1940 to 1945.

The *Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* pointed this out to the Senate and organised a mobile museum, conferences and publications in order to draw attention to the horrible history of *Berlin Junction*'s new site. As a result a memorial plaque has been installed, precisely on the site of the sculpture.

exhibited and subsequently bought by the city of Hamburg, where it was installed next to the Deichtorhallen museum.

The story of *Berlin Junction* a.k.a. *Berlin Curves*, as explained in the box, presents in a very telling way the complex system of dedicating a sculpture to a special purpose, renaming it, and reframing it by choosing a new referential system and environment. Still under the name of *Berlin Curves*, this sculpture's location was moved from inside the museum, where it would have been surrounded by other artworks, to the outside, a totally different scenario: right next to the Wall, squeezed between the Topography of Terror and a big parking lot – right in the middle of an urban no man's

land, a typically fragmented Berlin site. As a result, this location put the sculpture in a completely different light than was intended.

The next relocation positioned the sculpture, now under the name of *Berlin Junction*, in an artistic dialogue with Scharoun's Philharmonie as intended and chosen by Serra himself, unlike the third 'relocation'. The placement of a memorial plaque for the victims of the *Aktion T4* transformed the sculpture into a memorial<sup>6</sup> – a mental relocation. The belated approval of the artist's rededication (Höyneck 1988: 60), the concealment of Serra's ignorance about the history of the site before his choice<sup>7</sup>, and the reaction of the Berlin Senate to this issue – the gravity of the sculpture (sic!) and Serra's general artistic attitude would not allow for a contradiction – reveals the arbitrariness of the placement and dedication procedure.

Works which are built within the contextual frame of governmental, corporate, and religious institutions run the risk of being read as tokens of those institutions. One way of avoiding ideological cooptation is to choose leftover sites which cannot be the object of ideological misinterpretation. However, there is no neutral site. Every context has its frame and its ideological overtones. It is a matter of degree. But there are sites where it is obvious that art work is being subordinated to/accommodated to/adapted to/subservient to/required to/useful to... In such cases it is necessary to work in opposition to the constraints of the context, so that the work cannot be read as an affirmation of questionable ideologies and political power. I am not interested in art as affirmation or in art as a manifestation of complicity (Serra 1994a: 120f.).

Still, Serra clearly underestimated the complexity of public space. And if that was not enough, he himself contradicts his claim of site-specificity as numerous other examples also show<sup>8</sup>. His practice rather gives the impression that site-specificity is subject to negotiation.

<sup>6</sup> <<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bild:Serra3.jpg>> states, "With this sculpture a memorial has been created for the victims of the euthanasia in the Tiergartenstraße in Berlin. The memorial consists of two bent steel plates of Richard Serra. Its original name given by the artist was *Berlin Curves*. The Berlin Senate has installed an inscription with information right next to it".

<sup>7</sup> According to the Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt who actually put the site's history back on the mental map, Serra did not know about its history before he chose the new location (likewise: Höyneck 1988: 60). Senie incorrectly asserts that Serra was aware of this issue before (Statement of Bernhard Müller, Geschichtswerkstatt; Senie 2002: 67).

<sup>8</sup> I.e. *Clara Clara* (1983) has been re-sited twice (for a critique see Zweite 1987: 23; Bois 1987: 61); *Sight Point* (1971-75) has been planned for the campus of Wesleyan University but interfered with the architect's plans. Thus the sculpture was installed at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, completely losing all its original reference points (Crimp 1987: 35; Serra 1994a: 133). *The Drowned and the Saved* (1997) was created for a synagogue and is now permanently installed in the ruin of a church (!) (Galerie m, Bochum, <<http://www.m-bochum.de>>); the Lenbachhaus in Munich, however, "which will install seven permanent site-specific sculptures, originally conceived for an exhibition in seven rooms of the museum"(!) (Serra 1994a: 226), did not realize Serra's plans. After having been shown at the exhibition in 1987, these sculptures were put into storage, thus failing to realize Serra's own idea of site-specificity and sharply contradicting his plans.

Serra's notion of site-specificity – allowing the instrumental use of his works for city marketing – brings his works, its usage and dissemination, close to the use of Frank Gehry's architecture.

#### 4. Frank O. Gehry's architectural work

Gehry's buildings and Serra's steel-plate sculptures have more in common than one would initially assume. The two men are not only friends but are also said to have influenced each other<sup>9</sup>. Both have a strong, easy-to-recognise signature style, and are criticised for being anti-contextual (Foster 2001).

Gehry's characteristic metallic blobs can be seen in an ever-increasing number of cities around the globe. Nonetheless, his great strength is said to be his "response to existing conditions" (Cohen cited in Foster 2001) or as Reena Jana puts it in *Artforum*: "Gehry is known for his insistence that his buildings refer to the culture and context of their environs" (Jana 2001: 25). Concerning his Cinematic History Museum (formerly the American Centre 1991-1994) we are told that this building is a testament to

Gehry's attention to site specificity and his prodigious ability to weave adventurous new construction into the fabric of a densely urban nineteenth-century setting. Exquisite in their subtlety, Gehry's historical quotations subtly reflect his awareness of site, purpose, and/or symbolic function (Nero 2002: 98).

Nonetheless this building clearly communicates its creator's signature – intentionally of course – as its design strongly resembles the Weisman Art Museum as well as other predecessors. "Admittedly", Nero gives in, "his buildings possess strong design features which have become his signature", only to conclude that "yet, each of Gehry's buildings is only site specific" (Nero 2002: 98).

Elsewhere we are informed that his creation for the Guggenheim Bilbao "adapts to its setting with billowing forms that face the river and evoke marine imagery" (Cohen cited in Foster 2001). Gehry, indeed, wanted the museum to be legible as an allusion to a ship run aground and also to commemorate the Basque city's history of steel mills and shipyards. Likewise, the shiny curves and swirls of the proposed – but eventually dropped – Guggenheim near Wall Street were supposed to mediate between the East River in front and the downtown skyscrapers behind, "comparable to so

<sup>9</sup> Gehry sent over his expert for digital visualization, conceptualization and modeling, Rick Smith, to Serra when the latter experienced difficulties in building the structures he imagined for the big installation *The Matter of Time* (2005) (Pedersen 2005). After the sculpture was installed in the huge Fish Gallery of Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao it was reported that considerable animosity had arisen between the (now) competitors (Hughes 2005).

many waves and clouds" (Foster 2001; Jana 2001: 25)<sup>10</sup>. This poetic description of the new Guggenheim for New York obscures one fact: "the Wall Street Guggenheim is even more anti-contextual than the Bilbao – swollen to twice the size and propped up on super-pylons like a giant metal dodo" (Foster 2001).

Fig. 3 – Frank Gehry, IAC building New York City, 2007-2008



Source: Author, 2008

Gehry's stainless-steel facades almost automatically resemble the style of his masterpiece in Bilbao, although the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles had been designed, though not built, before the completion of the Guggenheim.

Likewise, his not yet completed projects, among them the Museum of Tolerance, Jerusalem (expected completion in 2009) and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (estimated completion in 2011), instantly reveal their author.

Within the broader discourse of architecture becoming the new (public) art and Gehry "Our Greatest Living Artist" (Foster 2001), it can surely be argued that an easy-to-recognise signature is an artist's characteristic attri-

<sup>10</sup> By the end of 2002 the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation withdrew its plan for the new Wall Street Guggenheim because of the weak economy and the Guggenheim's financial difficulties (*The New York Times*, December 31, 2002: E 1).



**Gehry's best known buildings**

Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, GER (1989)  
 Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA (1990)  
 The Dancing House ('Fred and Ginger'), Prague, CZ (1995)  
 Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, ES (1997)  
 Der Neue Zollhof ('Medienhafen'), Düsseldorf, GER (1999)  
 Experience Music Project, Seattle, USA (2000)  
 Richard B. Fisher Centre for the Performing Arts, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, USA (2003)  
 Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, USA (2003)  
 Lewis Science Library of Princeton University, USA (2008)  
 Pritzker Pavillon, Millennium Park, Chicago, USA (2004)  
 MARTa, Herford, GER (2005)  
 IAC/ InterActiveCorp Headquarters in New York City, USA (2005-2007)

bute. But in this context, as the example of Richard Serra shows, it is not a question of Gehry repeating himself; it is more a question of whether the disjointed metal panoply that has become his trademark might be 'over-used'. It is exactly the same question that was posed in relation to Serra's works – the criticism targets not his style so much as the use of his works.

Last but not least, Gehry himself is considered a modern architectural icon (see Sklair 2006) and celebrity. He has not only taken part in Apple's black and white "Think Different" pictorial ad campaign, been portrayed by director Sidney Pollack in *Sketches of Frank Gehry* (a 2006 documentary) but has also appeared in an episode of *The Simpsons* (*The Seven-Beer Snitch*). This episode illustrates the importance and potential impact of Gehry's buildings, not only for a globalised economy but also for the ever-increasing concurrence between cities in striving to become 'the creative city' of tomorrow.

## 5. Icons as tools of city marketing

Institutions like the Guggenheim Foundation or companies like Disney are eager for name recognition in the global marketplace. The multiplication of museums and exposition halls with its name has already made the Guggenheim, with its appointed architect Gehry, a brand equity, which it sells on to city governments and corporations (Foster 2001). Similarly, the leadership of the former American Centre (now home to *La Cinémathèque Française*) in Paris, envisaging a renewed interest, gambled that a new, Gehry-designed facility would considerably increase donations. Unfortunately the building's \$ 41 million price tag turned out to be too much of a financial burden on the Centre. Overloaded with operating costs and growing debt, the Centre's board of directors had to close the building only 19 months after its reopening. The fact that the new logo of

### **Creative city marketing, Frank Gehry and *The Simpsons***

This episode (season 16, episode 14, originally shown on 3 April 2005) tells the story of the Simpsons visiting the city of Shelbyville. While attending a play at Shelbyville's famous theatre district, where they stage plays titled *3 Dollar Bills in Gay, Gay, Gay*, the Simpsons find out that the Shelbyvillians call Springfield's residents 'hicks'. Marge is dismayed to hear this and devises ways of solving this issue.

Brainstorming Marge comes to the conclusion: "Think, Marge, think. Culture... vulture... birds of pray... pray in a church... the father, son, and holy ghost... ghosts are scary... scary rhymes with Gary... that's it, architect Frank Gehry!" (source: <<http://www.tv.com>>). Therefore she suggests to the Springfield Cultural Activities Board that Frank Gehry designs and builds a new cultural centre for Springfield. Impressed with Marge's suggestion, Gehry (doing his own voice-over) submits his own design (which is actually based on the crumpled and chucked out letter from Marge), which the town then approves. After the \$ 30 million project – a concert hall for classical music – is eventually finished, it opens and closes swiftly, because the Springfielders do not like classical music at all. As a result Mr. Burns turns the space into a state prison (<<http://www.thesimpsons.com>>).

All critical points attacked in this episode of *The Simpsons*, are discussed in this essay: first, Frank Gehry as the saviour for a damaged city image; second, the use of a star architect's signature building in order to put a city on the creative map; third, the building's lack of any relation to its site or to the citizens; and fourth, the (in)appropriateness of the interior, as it can be used equally as a concert hall or a prison.

Finally, Marge's brainstorming, the way how she randomly gets the idea of engaging Gehry, seems to be very similar to the way in which his name has occurred to numerous city officials throughout the world.

the *Cinémathèque* in its new location clearly corresponds to the shape of its Gehry-designed building, undoubtedly demonstrates the importance of promoting the name of Gehry.

In order to gain name recognition and enhance their position in the global marketplace these institutions and corporations consequentially favour architects and artists who can deliver artworks and buildings that promise logo quality and brand equity.

Cities have long adopted the profit-orientated marketing strategies of corporations in order to prevail in the ever-increasing global competition of cities (Griffiths 1998: 45; McNeill 2005: 502).

To ensure any level of sustained investment, and hence economic growth, it has become essential that individual cities seek to differentiate and assert themselves through the creation of unique urban identities (Hall 1995: 122).

"On seeing the titanium artichoke [Guggenheim Bilbao; author's note], other cities have been saying, 'We want one of those'" (Rybczynski 2002: 138).

As Alberto Vanolo demonstrates in his chapter, city marketing has already shifted from hi-tech-focused to culture-focused promotional and redevelopment strategies (for similar changes in the Bilbao development plans, see Vicario and Monje 2003: 2387).

Since the 1970s with their art-led conversions of former industrial sites the role of culture in urban (re)development has increased steadily. Further stimulated by the creative city and creative class hysteria, triggered by Richard Florida, cities now try to create their own 'Bilbao Effect'.

Civic leaders from Sarasota to Sacramento reason that if top-flight architecture can draw free-spending throngs to the industrialised reaches of northern Spain, maybe it can do the same for other benighted burghs (Anderson 2004).

Consequently "urban boosterism is the most common rationale for deliberately created iconic architecture" (Sklair 2006: 38) – and, as various research in this field has shown, the 'Guggenheim Effect' and related incentives can *indeed* be of considerable impact (see, e.g., Vicario and Monje 2003; Elser 2003; Hall and Robertson 2001; Giovannini 2004).

In this context public art is widely thought to have contributed to urban redevelopment economically, socially, environmentally as well as psychologically (although this is in fact still largely untested and unproven: see Hall and Robertson 2001: 5, 22; see also Evans 2005). Consequently numerous of Serra's works have been commissioned in order to boost the prestige of the space, brand it and attract international companies, who like to have their offices housed in prestigious buildings and surroundings<sup>11</sup>. Artworks are also used to create a landmark within broad cultural regeneration projects in former industrial areas (*Bramme für das Ruhrgebiet*, Essen) or to draw international attention to a new education and research site (*Ballast* for the new UCSF campus at Mission Bay, San Francisco).

With the help of these spectacular works, civic leaders hope to spur tourism *and* attract the so-called creative class that according to Florida regularly demands "abundant high-quality amenities and experiences [...] and above all else the opportunity to validate their identities as creative people" (Florida 2002: 218; concerning the Bilbao redevelopment plans see Baniotopoulou 2000: 4). He suggests attracting the new "creative class" with an arts scene, hip neighbourhoods and a gay-friendly atmosphere – the new urban imperative (Peck 2005: 740). "[...] architecture provides symbolic destinations for this group", states Herbert Muschamp on *creativeclass.org*, "Home of the Richard Florida Creativity Group" (Muschamp

<sup>11</sup> See for example *Fulcrum*, a piece from 1987 that was commissioned for the newly built Broadgate complex – 'a highly innovative City business district' (<<http://www.broadgateinfo.net>>) – at Liverpool station in London (see Selwood 1995: 121). Interestingly the website (<<http://www.broadgateinfo.net>>) features a big picture right next to the logo of *Fulcrum* as seen from inside it and looking up to the sky.

2003). Although first-class cultural amenities are definitely helpful in nurturing, attracting, and keeping skilled professionals, however, a vital “creative class” that, according to Florida, will drive future economic development (Florida 2005: 71, 84) demands more than that. Florida stresses the considerable importance of more casual, open, inclusive, and participative activities than the “amenity package of the industrial economy”, which tended to focus on bigness and prestigious cultural amenities (the symphony, opera, theatre, ballet etc.) (Florida 2005: 84).

In the heightened competition between them, however, cities try to gain a unique selling proposition by highlighting distinctive features and/or adding significant attributes – exactly like companies in the sea of marketable goods (Griffiths 1998: 44; Scott 2006: 10). This is precisely where the site-specific *solitaire* comes into play: the attribute ‘site-specific’ suggests that this work responds to its site in that it either draws attention to its surrounding, interacts with its location or deals with given specific situations – in short: engages with its site and its singularities. In fact, as Evans and Shaw point out, ‘most artists and architects’ would “[a]rgue that site specificity is the key to successful projects” (2004: 15). Furthermore, this local engagement of the ‘site-specific’ work promises to densify existing urban structures and add to cultural heritage, thus adapting to Florida’s demands (2005: 99).

In taking the proclaimed site-specificity of these works for granted, many cities seem to find the perfect way to promote themselves as ‘creative’: a unique site-specific work of art or (and!) architecture that highlights the distinctive characteristics of its location and perfectly enhances given environmental specifics, all the same adding a creative atmosphere, combined with an easily recognisable, brand-equivalent signature!<sup>12</sup> But they too easily ignore the inherent contradiction. Not only is the actual site-specificity of these iconic works demonstrably negligible, but their identical and repetitive features tend to produce look-alike cityscapes, all designed to be ‘extraordinary’.

As stated above, these spectacular buildings and artworks rather tend to ignore their site rather than to engage with it (see Rossmann 2006).

[...] its principal quality is its singularity. It’s a choice that may play well in marketing terms, but represents an abandonment of any commitment to [...] commonality. Needless to say, a second Vortex [Shuttleworth’s iconic building project in London (2004); comment by author’s note] would fatally diminish the building’s branding potential (Woodman 2004: 11).

<sup>12</sup> Griffiths refers to this as an “internal contradiction” as there is an “imperative of differentiation” (the need to enhance a city’s “recognition factors” in the rootless world of globalised capitalism) that competes with an “imperative of uniformity” (to steer clear of unnecessary risks and adhere to the tried and tested facing enormous uncertainties involved in place competition) (1998: 56).

These site-indifferent works in fact embody and re-affirm the modernist belief in an aesthetically autonomous object that can be placed anywhere.

The paradox as presented in this chapter, however, is that the more widespread dissemination of works by outstanding architects or artists that represent easy-to-recognise urban icons, while ignoring their proclaimed site-specificity, runs the risk of creating a certain uniformity – although intending exactly the opposite. As Griffiths remarks, “far from projecting distinctive identities”, these “reimagining strategies have tended overwhelmingly to homogenise places, with an endless repetition of standard devices, from advertising slogans to building types.” (Griffiths 1998: 44).

In the competition, not for tax breaks and redevelopment schemes, but for attracting the so-called creative class, the production of cultural centres and the creation of artistic and creative atmospheres, as pointed out earlier, are certainly an asset. But as more and more cities jump on the bandwagon with almost identical designs, the latter cannot really be said to contribute to a city’s unique identity anymore.

It was with this concern in mind that the Basque signatories in the “Guggenheim for Bilbao”-contract inserted a clause restricting a Guggenheim expansion in Europe without the prior consent of the Basques (McNeill 2000: 481).

Furthermore these short-sighted acts of commissioning iconic buildings and public artworks tend to overlook the fine print. Despite their alleged site-specificity and Florida’s claim that they are sought after by the creative class (2002: 223f.), the actual share of these buildings and artworks in vibrant, authentic and diverse communities is often negligible as they regularly form an alien presence in a cityscape thanks to their implant character. Attracting talents is only one side of the coin, keeping them is an altogether different story. Not only Florida but also several other scholars have underlined the crucial importance of a unique, diverse, creative and organic live-and-work environment (e.g., Ley 1996, 2003; Scott 2006: 15). Already in 1961, in her greatly influential manifesto, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs stressed the importance of the intricately layered ecology of neighbourhood life as a mixture of all sorts of activities, ethnicities and social classes. And in the end, the defining unit of a city is not its buildings but its neighbourhoods (Curtis 2006: 116).

City officials preoccupied with re-branding, however, tend to overlook the importance of individual communities and organic neighbourhoods, which simply do not “fit neatly on postcards”; nor do they “attract the attention of benefactors with robust check books”. (Curtis 2006: 116; see also Griffiths 1998: 49). However impressive the artwork or architecture may be, they are all too often “an alien presence” (Giovannini 2002: 141), for such trophy objects are unlikely to pay much attention to their surroundings. In seeking to lure visitors and the so-called ‘creatives’, local politicians tend to

ignore existing communities and their needs and interests – not to mention their general lack of participation in commissioning processes –.

This is even enforced by international competitions, when architects and artists “are expected to add major civic monuments to cities they may have visited only once or twice” (Giovannini 2002: 141), which increasingly devalues the context.

Although, as Charles Landry points out, the way in which Bilbao has been “brought to world attention illustrates the value of creativity” in the cities’ intense competition for distinctiveness, “grandiose statements alone cannot suffice. Creativity is found from business life to social affairs dealing with the intractables of urban living, often unseen and unacknowledged” (Landry 2000: 145).

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter has drawn attention to the conflict between the inflationary use of globalised signature style in public art and architecture in city marketing and the paradoxically growing uniformity this practice enforces. In the “age of creativity” this “show-dog architecture” (Giovannini 2004: 141) and monumental public art with its strong “recall value” are being used simplistically to spur redevelopment (Sklair 2006: 38) and brand public space – very similar to the implementation of Richard Florida’s thesis promoted in his bestseller on the rise of the creative class.

It is in fact remarkable how much the impact of the ‘Bilbao Effect’<sup>13</sup> on city officials resembles the influence Florida had on exactly the same people. Just as *The Rise of the Creative Class* has become a bible for civic leaders, who happily adopted it as a seemingly easy-to-use step-by-step ‘How to become a Creative City’-manual, in a very similarly simplistic manner Bilbao’s redevelopment elements, headed up by the Guggenheim, have been taken over and implemented (Florida complains, too; see Peck 2005: 754).

In general, a strong preference for easily implementable strategies promising instant effects can be observed (see also Evans 2005: 978).

However, it is important to note that such short-sighted actions come only at a considerable price. Buying (and sustaining!) the image of creativity on the basis of brand-name recognition has a steep price tag and remains a risky investment (Griffiths 1998: 54; Plaza 2006: 464). As Beatriz Plaza points out:

Signature architecture or a dramatic cultural investment does not guarantee urban redevelopment in itself [...]. On the contrary, although the final outcome

<sup>13</sup> On 1 November 2008 the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung already titled “Der Bilbao-Defekt” referring to the miscalculations by Thomas Krens, chief of the Guggenheim Foundation (2008: 35).

in the case of Bilbao is positive, the GMB [Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; author's note] should not be employed as the means to legitimise the instrumentalisation of signature architecture or extreme investments (Plaza 2006: 464).

But with the officially reported, almost instant revenues of Bilbao, prices have become relative. Furthermore, as Gómez and González stress, the risk of failure is even higher once places are forced to copy each other, as the barrel of new ideas becomes depleted (2001: 899).

It is the proclaimed prosperous future of the cities that score high on the creativity index and attract tourist throngs, which makes them rush to entice the promising creatives with eye-catching prestige incentives, generously overlooking their high prices.

It has been argued that the constantly growing dissemination of look-alike buildings and monuments with a clear signature not only sweepingly neglects their acclaimed site-specific character but also leads to increasingly uniform cityscapes.

The central crux is the relativisation of site-specificity for the sake of recognisability.

As a result, rather than standing out by virtue of the individual uniqueness of their street- and cityscapes, cities tend to resemble each other more and more.

But even if 'under the pretext of their articulation or resuscitation, site-specific art' and architecture can still "be mobilised to expedite the *erasure* of differences via the commodification and serialisation of places" (Kwon 2000: 55), other examples do exist. There are in fact buildings and artworks, even by world-famous architects or artists, that are site-specific in the truest sense, all the same adding considerable value (and not only the real estate value) to their neighbourhood without ignoring their context. Take Tadao Ando's Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, St. Louis 2001, which responds to its urban context in a most subtle way, being "calm and considered" (Rybcynski 2002: 142) in opposition to the 'eye-deafening' spectacle of a Gehry. Or the national art museum KUMU (Eesti Kunstimuuseum) in Tallinn (opened 2006): designed by the Finnish architect Pekka Vapaavuori the museum perfectly blends into its surroundings (Meyer 2006: 35). Furthermore, KUMU's main focus is on Estonian Art whereas at the Guggenheim Bilbao despite its "claims to be placing emphasis on the Basque and Spanish Artists [...], of the 53 works acquired between 1996 and 1998, only 12 are Spanish and of these only 7 Basque" (Baniotopoulou 2001: 10)<sup>14</sup>.

In the end, show-off architecture and site-*un*specific public art whose cachet lies in their recall value will not be able to compete against a richly textured and complex urban fabric. This demonstrates the importance of

<sup>14</sup> Nota bene: Most of the seven Basque artworks are by Eduardo Chillida, an internationally renowned artist.

questioning the idea and understanding the significance of place and identity in the context of the creative city in order to engage in truly site-specific or rather site-oriented practices. But as they will probably not prove to be instant successes these practices demand perseverance from local politicians as well as foresight and commitment.

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J. Kulonpalo

## Chapter 4

# Creating a Creative City: Discussing the Discourse That Is Transforming the City

During late 1990s and early 2000s, creativity became the new catchword in urban development. A growing number of cities all over the world started calling themselves 'Creative Cities' and begun promoting and marketing themselves with a wide array of phenomena and concepts ranging from culture, cultural tourism, heritage and art to technological innovation and urban regeneration, urban design and planning. Cultural values and economic activity based on culture was brought into the forefront of urban policy in many European cities and culture, no matter how it was or was not defined in each particular case, became an increasingly important element in many cities' development strategies and plans. While it is questionable whether, despite the increase of different types of city promotion campaigns and marketing strategies, much has actually changed in these cities, this chapter argues that in parallel to the paradigmatic transformation of urban development policies linked to this phenomena a new discourse about the creative city emerged. Some of the building blocks of this new discourse were a number of rather vague notions of creativity and innovation based on urban culture, and often especially on local culture in its different forms and manifestations. Furthermore, at least on a rhetorical level, the particularity of place, in many cases the local urban character and the cities themselves started to matter more in a new and positive way.

This chapter discusses those transformations and the political economy behind them by referring to the international urban studies debate concentrating on the theme. As it is often argued that particularly the often contested work of Richard Florida (2002) has been a highly influential component in the emerging trend emphasising the role of creativity and innovation based on culture in urban policy, his work is discussed here in some detail. This chapter also presents a brief discussion and case study of the

City of Helsinki's urban policy and its transforming focus during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

### **I. Urban Development in the Era of Globalisation**

During the last two decades many urban theorists such as Aglietta (1979), Sassen (1998) and Castells (2000) have been quite unanimous about the growing importance of place in a globalising world. Even when the interpretations of how and why these developments have occurred have differed, in this discourse three general main issues have been raised: urban regions and cities in particular are gaining power and importance, national governments are increasingly losing their capacity to respond to economic changes and challenges from global level through traditional policy measures and instruments, and finally the growing importance of sub-national level decision-making, where urban development measures become more and more important for local decision-makers in both public and private sectors. The de-centralisation of political power from central government to regional and local levels and governing bodies, the fragmentation of power at the local level, and a shift of local planning policy priorities from more welfare-oriented policies towards fostering economic growth have been recognised as some of the tendencies visible in Europe (Harding 1997). Le Galès and Harding (1998) argue that in many western European cities there has been a multiplication of different types of contracts between the state and cities in various policy sectors, and also a reinforcement of the regional state in an attempt to maintain national territorial coherence and further develop common strengths.

In connection with these broad transformations in the global environment, the history of European urban policy has been divided roughly into three phases and associated with three different policy-fields. During the 1980s urban-related activities targeted primarily environmental policy; in the 1990s urban issues became part of the cohesion policy, formally remaining there until today; with regard to its content the city itself has become more and more part of the economic development policies in the 2000s. On the level of urban policy, politics and governance, the shift in focus from technology to culture in the economy of the cities also reflects the transformation of cities' economic base from industrial production to services. These developments match what has been suggested in the discussion of the post-Fordist mode of production and post-Fordist society.

In the debate about the current post-industrial phase of capitalism, many authors such as Scott (1997), Bianchini and Parkinson (1993), Florida (2002a), Hannigan (2003), Fainstein et al. (2004) have argued that culture would bring competitiveness to urban regions by attracting companies, educated people and capital. In the new climate of increasing global and more importantly inter-urban competition and the trend of city market-

ing, cultural regeneration and massive flagship projects became everyday things for entrepreneurial city regimes. Amin and Thrift (2002) argue that in our times the urban economy increasingly operates as a discursive construction of blending economy and culture. In the view of some authors, the contemporary city has become a stage and a prime site for consumption-related activities related to tourism, sports, culture and entertainment (Hannigan 2003). In this context the projected image of a city often plays a greater role than the reality in shaping the views of visitors, investors and even residents. High-pressure marketing and sales techniques are frequently used to help troubled cities in their transition to post-industrial centres of tourism, culture and reinvestment. Tourism, which can also be seen as the cultural component of globalisation, and especially cultural tourism in its various forms such as heritage, arts, conventions are increasingly an urban phenomenon (MacCannell 1999).

## **2. Cultural Economy: The Main Ingredient of a Creative City**

It has been argued by many authors that some of the most significant effects of the post-industrial shift are reflected in those sectors of the economy linked with culture and cultural production, often roughly put together without much consideration of their actual contents and labelled as the new cultural economy. Scott (1997; 2000) sees the location of cultural industries within cities as vitally important to the competitiveness of urban economies on a global scale. Whereas globalising processes allow cultural products to gain access to wider ranges of markets, the cultural economy has been re-localised at nodes of global transaction flows, as recognised by Zukin (1989), Castells (2000) and Sassen (2001).

However, in the context of cultural production and new cultural economies in cities, many academic critics seem to believe that small-scale cultural producers tend to be excluded from the new entertainment economy and they may even be actively forced to move because they can no longer afford the rents (Zukin 1989). The counter-criticism to that argument suggests that conversely, tourism, for example, offers increased opportunities for local people who are involved in the production of culture and in providing culture-related consumption goods (Hannigan 2003). Harvey (1989) has noted that rapidly growing inter-city competition exerts an external coercive power over individual cities to conform to the rules and logic of capitalist economy and accumulation. And although the consequence of this can be a forced uniformity of cities, all in the provision of a good business climate, the orchestrated production of urban image for a city can also help to create a sense of social solidarity, civic pride and loyalty to place (Harvey 1989). Harvey has also argued that the concentration on spectacle and image rather than on the substance of economic and social problems can also prove to be harmful in the long run. Zukin (1989) has voiced her

concern by noting that greater attention should be paid to the material inequalities that are at stake in cultural strategies of economic growth and community revitalisation. The question of 'who the city is for' and 'who is it (effectively) marketed to' by using culture and cultural aspects has its implications for cities (Kulonpalo 2005). This brings about the central question of the consequences of these developments for the societies and particularly for the social sphere of societies. These developments contain linkages to many much debated urban issues and problems, some of these more obvious than others.

### 3. Cultural Paradigm in Urban Development

The discussion as to what makes cities creative has been carried out mainly among policy makers, politicians and the media but only rarely involved artists and other people operating in the field of cultural production. At the same time the international urban studies, urban planning, economics and policy studies academic community at large has kept its distance from the subject. Discussion and research has been concentrated primarily on the concept of creativity and the cultural values linked with economic production and the cultural economy, with regard to which the academic community has been rather critical, as evidenced for example by the attitude towards Richard Florida's *The Rise Of The Creative Class* (Florida 2002b). Other, slightly older examples of academic work on the theme may be found in Bianchini and Parkinson (1993) who argued more than a decade ago that in the previous twenty years, the relationship between cultural expression and the city had been turned on its head, as cultural expression is thought of less as a socio-economic practice that follows in the wake of urban life than as the motor of the urban economy. In similar vein, Scott (1997) saw the location of cultural industries within cities as vitally important to the competitiveness of urban economies on a global scale, and to Evans (2003) the idea of the cultural city and the use of arts and entertainment as tools in urban regeneration and economic development can be considered an almost universal phenomenon.

Charles Landry (2000) has sometimes been quoted as the father of the concept with his book *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. In this study Landry aims at nothing less than to change the mindset of decision makers and offer a mental toolkit to influence policies, strategies and actions undertaken in cities. Landry defines creativity as something that is value free, in a sense that while scarcity defined value in industrial society; post-industrial value lies rather in an abundance of choices for consumers in every sense. For politicians, policy-makers and urban developers, only new perspectives of understanding culture can harness the new situation for cities, which then leads to a new paradigm focused on 'urban software': identity, social development and network dynamics. In addition, creativity,

imagination and innovation are the tools from which coping capacity in the transforming international environment and competition, i.e. globalisation can emerge. However, Landry also considers the traditional political leadership, rather than pure creative talent, to be essential in keeping alive a sense of place and local identity in cities. However, Landry also pinpoints the main resource of creativity in cities very clearly when he argues that cities have one crucial main resource, the people living in them.

Human cleverness, desires, motivations, imagination and creativity are replacing location, natural resources and market access as urban resources. The creativity of those who live in and run cities will determine future success. (Landry 2000)

Scott (2006) has sought to situate the concept of creative cities within the context of the so-called new economy and to trace the connections of these phenomena to recent wider shifts in technologies, structures of production, labour markets, and the dynamics of locational agglomeration. He has attempted to show how the structures of the new economy unleash specific forms of economic and cultural innovation in large metropolitan areas like the city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. His argument has been concerned with the policy issues, and above all with the general possibilities and limitations faced by policy makers in any attempt to build creative cities.

#### **4. Questioning the Creative Class Doctrine**

One of the main, if not 'the' main motivator of the creative city boom, Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Florida 2002b) has been criticised heavily by the academic community for many reasons and from many different points of view, while the general book-buying public and especially decision- and policy-makers in urban governments all over the world have apparently embraced it with open arms.

Some of the main issues pointed out in the critique have to do with the general methodology (or what appears to be the lack of it) and the broad causalities and conclusions drawn. One of the main problems cited with Florida's reasoning is the causality assumed between a number of descriptive and often rather general indexes, such the sizes of local gay – and artist – populations in a given city and the local economic growth. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that in the new economy, the growth engine is not so much the companies as the creative individuals who came to live in the cities they think are 'cool'. Then these creative people start their own firms and on the other hand they also attract businesses, which are seeking educated workers. Florida's main conclusion was that what attracted these creative people was the fact that these creative cities were "tolerant, diverse and open to creativity" and that as a consequence this general creativity becomes the fuel of new creative economy. Multicultural local communities and municipal cultural amenities all become one big 'Culture', which

feeds the creativity of creative cities. To add to this, most of his empirical work was based on the specific situation in the United States during the late 1990s and the era of the so-called dotcom-boom, the unprecedented growth period of the Internet and ICT-based economy, just at the moment before the bubble burst.

In a way Florida's book offers urban policymakers a new and simple economic-development agenda for capitalising on the new economy. However, not much thought has been put into contemplating how flawed and unsound, or indeed context-specific, Florida's findings and conclusions might actually be. The policy-makers must simply concentrate on attracting the creative class, whose interests are very different from the small and medium sized enterprises and the traditional concept of middle class families interested in reasonably priced single-family houses in suburbia with lots of parking space, high quality schools and other municipal services. The new creative classes crave a vibrant nightlife; outdoor sports facilities, and multicultural and mixed neighbourhoods with colourful street life, specialised shops, and trendy cafés and bars. The number of local bands and music venues becomes more important to the development of the local economy than the income tax rate. In the same vein, young and highly educated creative professional workers want to live and work in authentic, often central city neighbourhoods of historic buildings, which undeniably presents a major changing trend in the American context. Consequently they also become the perfect gentrifiers from the point of view of both city governments and property developers.

The attractiveness of the picture Florida paints to urban policy-makers is not surprising. However, drawing far-reaching and generalisable conclusions from his work and the results his studies present becomes problematic, and even more so in a non-American context. In a way he presents something that seems like an easy answer to all the problems resulting from the economic globalisation and increasing competition between regions that de-industrialising and declining cities have faced since the 1970s. Of course it would be naïve to assume that policy-makers all over the world are taking Florida's ideas and their applicability for granted; nevertheless the discourse of creative classes and creative cities they happen to live in seems to be having tangible effects on urban development.

Another implicit problem with this Floridian approach to urban development is that fact that it does not really include the traditional working classes or any other form of industrial production. Non-creative workers (i.e. people without a high level of education and/or capitalisable artistic qualities) are reduced, to a large extent, to service industries and to offering services to creative workers. Of course the existence of urban multicultural local communities consisting of 'authentic' working class neighbourhoods and people as well as immigrants and their communities are an essential part of what makes creative cities vibrant, attractive and bustling with



street life in the first place, but they hardly seem to have any real weight, apart from in the service industry, in the economy of cities, which is all based on ICT and technology in general, commodified cultural products, information flows and immaterial innovation.

## 5. What About Creative Helsinki?

Following the general changing trend and paradigm in urban policy aimed at urban development and urban economy, it is interesting to look at what has been going on in Helsinki, capital of Finland, during the period described. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Helsinki region was the second fastest-growing EU metropolitan area after Dublin, Ireland. Besides the population growth, principle factors of structural change in the region have been the ICT-sector, increased focus on 'planning for the know-how' materialising in new university campuses, infrastructure investments both in roads and air travel, and new retail patterns (Lehtovuori 2002). At the same time, or in fact already some years earlier, since the mid 1980s, Helsinki has witnessed a remarkable urban cultural change (Lehtovuori 2005). During this time new forms of and sites for consumption and leisure, new cultural institutions and also new local media have sprung up at a rapid rate, as documented in research by Cantell (1999), Eskola and Ruoppila (1999) and more recently by Mäenpää (2005). At the very same time in Helsinki, as in cities of most other western post-industrial societies, developers, other entrepreneurial private sector actors and political regimes and elites began to view the city increasingly as a commodity. All of a sudden, the creative and cultural economy was considered to be one of the most central future growth sectors for the cities and metropolitan regions, and there was strong renewed interest in developing culture in its many forms (Kulonpalo 2005).

In some sense the year 2000, when Helsinki served as one of the European Culture Capitals, and which was, incidentally, also the year when the dot.com boom was at its overheated peak in Finland and everywhere else, was the zenith of the long transformation and development that had begun in the 1980s. As documented and discussed by Cantell and Schulman (2001), in Helsinki the Culture Capital of Europe Year generated an enormous positive buzz: there were a large number of different kinds of cultural activities, and significant investments in cultural activities and facilities were made. Almost an endless number of festivals, exhibitions, concerts, festivals and happenings took place. When the year ended there seemed to be almost a communal after-the-party depression, which was pushed even further by the many financial troubles and issues that emerged later. Many of the new small companies working on producing events for the year ran into problems when there were no more public sector, or European Union, investments and subsidies and private sector sponsorship money

was no longer available: many of these companies had based their activities largely around these sources of financing, which were relatively easily available while the city was preparing for the year 2000. The Culture Capital year was organised largely by establishing different types of partnership arrangements and by encouraging individual artists and cultural producers to engage actively in the year by setting up their own private companies, which were then sub-contracted by the public sector to organise events. The strong economic growth and the ICT-boom at the time also generated a special atmosphere, with the many success stories of young entrepreneurs, rumours of the abundance of easily available venture capital and so on, which appeared in the media continuously. The factual main element of the economic boom in Helsinki region was Nokia's phenomenal rise from a mid-sized boot- and cable-making, traditional heavy-industrial company, into the leading mobile phone and network technology company in the world. While Nokia grew very quickly into a real global company, it also helped along a great many smaller local technology companies as sub-contractors and spin-offs linked to it. Incidentally this was the same period during which Florida's (2002) study of the creative class was written and to which it implicitly relates, albeit in the context of the United States.

In the Helsinki case it was argued afterwards that the undeniable synergy and cooperation between all the different actors, private actors, local business and the public sector, disappeared somewhere during the process of trying to sort out the problems (and in some cases trying to find scapegoats for some of the incidents). To put it bluntly, it seemed like many politicians wanted nothing to do with what turned out to be a series of minor financial catastrophes or related matters subsequently determined to have been failures. Especially during the mid and late 1990s when Helsinki was in competition for the title of Culture Capital and while preparing for the year itself, the role of culture in urban policy was stressed very strongly. Hence, one of the outcomes of the Culture Capital Year comedown was the fact that urban culture, which had been seen as a very positive and important element in Helsinki's urban policy prior to and during the year, was suddenly pushed aside in municipal politics. Since then the City of Helsinki has steered its urban development policy very markedly back towards high technology and ICT-sector, even while continuing to use 'creativity' as the main catch-word, and this has been reflected clearly in Helsinki's development strategy as well as its city-marketing (as discussed in the chapter by Alberto Vanolo in this book).

Even if ICT-based economic development has not been the only theme in Helsinki's development strategy, the shift in focus has been clearly observable. An illustrative example of this can be found on the website of Helsinki Region Marketing Ltd (or Helsinki Metropolitan Development Corporation HMDC), which is a marketing company promoting the region for foreign investment and companies, and is owned by the City of

Helsinki (54%), the Helsinki Chamber of Commerce and the Regional Council of the Helsinki metropolitan region (see Box 1.). Helsinki Region Marketing (2006) presents the Helsinki region as “The Most Creative Region in Europe”, “Star Performer in Competitiveness and Creativity”, “Fascinatingly Creative” and “European Super Region”; these claims are based on Helsinki’s high position in the “European Competitiveness Index 2004”, a study undertaken by an international consultancy company, Robert Huggins Associates. The website of the company is also cited in a study by Richard Florida and Irene Tinagli (Florida and Tinagli 2004), *Europe in the Creative Age* as proof of these claims. Furthermore, the claim to Helsinki region’s creativity is based especially on the technological capa-

Box 1 – Helsinki Region Marketing Ltd. ‘The most creative region in Europe’

Helsinki Region 

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Star Performer in Competitiveness and Creativity

## Finland Is a Leader in National Creativity

### Creativity index ranks Finland third in the world

A “creative crescent” of northern European countries is challenging the economic power of the United States and “old Europe”, according to the *Europe in the Creative Age* index by Richard Florida and Irene Tinagli, published in February 2004 by Demos, a London-based think tank.

The top five countries in the index are Sweden, the United States, Finland, the Netherlands and Denmark.

The researchers show how countries such as Finland, Denmark and Sweden are leading the traditionally powerful European economies of France and Germany. The United Kingdom, although with a strong creative class, is also failing to grow its innovation and technology capacity as quickly as its Nordic neighbours.

The research ranks European countries according to three inter-linked

factors that, according to Florida and Tinagli, are indicators of a country’s creative potential: talent, technology and tolerance.

Tolerant societies are able to attract talented people who contribute to technological innovation. In his best-selling book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Florida argued that creativity is one of the main engines of economic growth and competitiveness; that cities and states

are successful if their cultures are tolerant in that they accept ethnic and social diversity and promote equality. He showed that creative people seek tolerant environments and that jobs are now following people rather than vice versa.

As indicators of tolerance for their index, Florida and Tinagli looked at values and attitudes to research. The

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Excerpt from *City of Helsinki: Helsinki News, April 2004*

From: [http://www.helsinki-region.com/most\\_innovative\\_region/](http://www.helsinki-region.com/most_innovative_region/)

bilities and innovation, its high level of education and the resulting general competitiveness. Culture is not mentioned even once in connection with the region's alleged high degree of creativity.

## **6. Can Any Conclusions Be Drawn?**

A large part of the working population in western cities and urban regions is primarily engaged in creative professions. Artists, designers, university professors, writers, performers, but also researchers, consultants and engineers are all in 'creative' jobs. Accordingly, many studies on the subject emphasise a need for openness, tolerance, diversity and a positive attitude towards change and deviation from prevailing standards. These elements are also increasingly projected upon the character of urban environments as well. In theory only open, tolerant, diverse cities that welcome change and ideas, attitudes and action that contest and even encourage the status quo of societal values can be creative and attract more creative people, which will in turn create more creativity and striving and vital urban culture. However, this equation is often much more difficult to achieve in reality than it appears to be when presented in seminar speeches given by politicians and city-administrators. The rather vague idea and discourse of a future of western cities as Creative Cities is based, more than anything else, on a vision of an ideal type of economically successful post-industrial city, where the economy and social well-being is heavily based on new kinds of service industries, innovation, information and production based on culture and new ICT-technologies rather than old-fashioned large-scale industrial production.

The most central issue is not whether an interesting and lively local arts and music scene, active local gay or other sub-cultural groups, a high profile flagship cultural space such as an art museum or other marginal attractions have beneficial effect on the development of a certain place, because it is very hard to anyone with any social awareness to deny that the existence of these phenomena are beneficial and 'good' for any locality or region. They are all integral elements of urban culture and life and they form, undeniably, the fabric of modern western cities. The real accountable effect of those things on the developing of the local economy of a certain city is, however, an altogether different question, which should be addressed in studies based on hard empirical evidence.

Whether city government officials, policymakers and public sector organisations manage to come up with policies and plans and implement concrete programs that help to produce creativity in all its forms and especially in a manner that leads to economic development is yet another question. As noted earlier, Charles Landry pinpoints the main resource of creativity in cities very clearly when he argues that cities have one crucial main resource, the people living in them. Cultural attributes of cities and

creativity in general tend to be something much more intangible and spontaneous than development policies. Most often they are not the product of government planning, even if there are examples of that, too.

Without wanting to play down the important role of public sector subsidies, services and amenities such as education and cultural services, whether we are talking about ICT-companies and other kinds of technological advancements, individual artists' or musicians' and bands' successes, vibrant nightlife economies or immigrants' businesses, creativity and innovation leading to economic success more often results from the efforts of innovative, hardworking individuals with – often very limited – private or public sector investment and backing. Flagship buildings and major investment in urban regeneration, public infrastructure and public transport, sports stadiums and convention centres, city marketing campaigns targeting tourism and international investment are all equally important in their own right and can most likely sometimes make a real difference in competition between cities; whether they can make a city creative is, once again, an altogether different question.

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## Chapter 5

# The City That Was Creative and Did Not Know: Manchester and Popular Music 1976-1997<sup>1</sup>

### I. Popular Music and Cities

Citizens, tourists or city officials nowadays increasingly understand popular music as a booster of local pride and a motor of the local economy. Its presence is traceable in tourist material, through city reports in the media, in biddings (e.g. European Capital of Culture) and, with very different reasons and aims, in regeneration, preservation or renewal projects. For instance, the preservation of the Battersea Power Station received wide support also because the building appeared on the cover of *Pink Floyd's Animal LP*; the *U2 Tower*, a new skyscraper (*cum U2 recording studio on top*) in Dublin's South Docklands, has been planned in close proximity to the spot featured on the cover of the band's 'October' LP. In addition, big and small municipalities have adopted dedicated initiatives to boost local music scenes and to increase their visibility. *Projekt Zukunft*, conceived by Berlin's local state senate, attempts to generate synergies among creative industries, local politics, media and services. *Rockpolis* is an initiative funded by the City of Oulu and the Council of Oulu Region (Finland) and links local bands, promoters and businesses into joint projects.

It is a common fact nowadays that the influence of popular music in the definition of 'urban' lifestyles and tastes has been enormous, at least since the 1960s (see: Chambers 1986). Popular music constitutes 'the sound of a city' in various kinds of representation (e.g. films, documentaries) and city practises (e.g. nightlife, tourism). In addition, a buzzing popular music scene is able to provide employment in a huge variety of jobs (musicians, studio technicians, photographers, press agents, DJs, visual artists, graphic designers...) and is

<sup>1</sup> This article was first published on *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 349-365 (2009).

believed to attract newcomers, tourists and businesses to a particular city. In recent years, innovations in IT, mobile communication and fashion have also been increasingly connected to popular music (Power and Jansson 2004).

All the above-mentioned elements show a clear positioning of popular music within the so-called “creative” or “symbolic economy” (Scott 2001), implying a shift from a sub-cultural (and therefore oppositional) dimension to a more consensual one.

This paper deals with a period (1976-1997) where the concept of ‘creative city’ and ‘symbolic economy’ were far from being at the centre of political agenda and popular music was simply ignored at a municipal level. The attempt on the part of the municipality to exploit creative forces was connected to the preservation of established institutions of civic (high) culture while relegating everything else to the duties of low-level officials in connection with “leisure” (O’Connor 1999: 84-85).

Between 1976 and 1997, popular music worked in Manchester independently as a creative urban milieu (Heßler and Zimmermann 2008) and attracted international attention through continuous interaction with the local social and spatial environment. Bands such as *Buzzcocks*, *The Fall*, *Joy Division* and *The Smiths* revealed an uncanny sensibility in the way the ‘ugly northern industrial environment’ could be perceived and represented. A similar cultural sensibility brought the independent music entrepreneur Anthony (Tony) Wilson to develop Factory Records and the Hacienda FAC 51, which set the trend for the city’s re-imagining and partly for the regeneration of some of its areas. The relation between the city’s reputation and these bands and people is still strong and celebrated every year by new products and events (one of the most recent is the film ‘Control’, directed by Anton Corbijn, about the life of *Joy Division*’s singer, Ian Curtis, released in the second half of 2007).

Only lately have cities begun to revise their definition of cultural/creative resources, mainly to boost their own promotion and regeneration. Accordingly, this paper ends in 1997, when, at the local level, the experience of The Hacienda FAC 51 and of Factory Records ended and when, at a national level, Tony Blair became the first Labour Prime Minister since 1979. In July 1997, the newly elected Prime Minister invited a number of cultural and media producers to 10 Downing Street for an election party, among them Noel Gallagher, guitar player of the Manchester band Oasis, and the band’s manager Alan McGee, then a member of the Creative Industry Taskforce. At the time, popular music in Great Britain was turning into Britpop, a pacified and all-encompassing national booster of economic export. At the same time, popular music scenes were slowly abandoning local textures and narratives, both on the material and on the imaginative level.

Academically, the concept of urban creativity has followed two main narratives. The first consists in searching long threads, where Athens, Rome, Florence, Paris and New York become ‘best case studies’, according to different historical époques (Hall P. 1997). The second narrative



describes ‘winning places’, which supposedly undertook some sexy ‘cultural’ upgrading in their built environment, social life or event organisation and are therefore ready to face all anxieties of late (or post-) modernity (Landry 2000 and Florida 2002). A study by Charles Landry (2000) offers examples of creativity that range from ice castles in Lapland to police training in Addis Ababa. The author’s main effort lies in the relevance given to culture in the implementation of creativity on a municipal level and in the construction of tool kits to be used by the city to maintain and breed creative forces. On the other hand, Florida (2002) stresses the role of the people (gathered into the so-called “creative class”) and describes creative cities as those able to accommodate tolerance, talent and technology. These definitions focus entirely on their subordination to economic development and often ignore the democratic legitimacy of certain urban initiatives. In addition, they tend to fit the interests of global and neo-liberal concerns in constructing virtual and often unfulfilled urban promises.

The major claim of this paper is that creativity, as an urban force capable of influencing a city’s image and materiality, is connected to the presence of certain cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh 2002) fuelled by local scenes. Creativity in popular music is often completely independent of immediate economic growth and oppositional to any attempt to ‘boost’, exploit or utilise it.

## **2. The Manchester Popular Music Scene as a Creative Milieu and the Representation of Urbanità**

### **2.1 History and Identity of the North**

Following Shields (1991), we could claim that the image of Manchester has been constructed as a ‘place-myth’. It is located in the extreme north of England, therefore in a ‘marginal place’, which arouses a particular fascination. The ‘North’ has always had working class and industrial connotations in England, developed in the last centuries by a set of cultural elements, often filtered by fiction (films and novels set in the North).

The writer Charles Dickens used the geographical divide, where the North always represented the most desolate, poor and evil landscape (*Coketown* covered in smoke in the novel ‘*Hard Times*’ 2009, first published 1854), a counterpart to London, the site of wealth and civilisation (Shields 1991; Preston 1994; Moretti 1998).

Manchester is often central to these representations of the ‘North’ because of its historical significance in the development of the whole region. Manchester was the world’s first industrial city and as such carried the burden of negative connotations that would later come to designate many other cities around the world. The concentration of workers in hygienically and socially hazardous situations, the rapid development of an industrial landscape

composed of canals, chimneys, red brick factories and dormitory quarters corroborated the 'shock' documented by visitors such as Friedrich Engels, whose stay in the city inspired *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England* (1987, first published in German 1845). The book describes Manchester as the archetypal manufacturing town and is considered today one of the first sociological accounts of an industrial city (Vicari Haddock 2004: 59).

The situation of the city worsened with the First World War, which marked the slow downgrading of its wealth. The loss of the Indian market, together with the poor economic situation following the Wall Street crash in 1929, slowed mass migration of workers in search for a job, and unemployment began to affect many districts. After World War II the decline continued: from the 1950s on, Manchester's small city centre emptied and many inhabitants moved to high-rise projects in the suburbs and satellite towns.

In this period cinema set its eye on the North and the *kitchen sink* films, black and white dramas set in a vague industrial environment, began to romanticise the working class condition, ascribing to it a particular bohemian aura. In these films, as in the soap opera *Coronation Street*, first broadcast on Granada TV in 1960, the industrial landscape is used as scenery for the 'authentic' stories of unsatisfied and unhappy working class youth dominated by alienation, unsatisfied ambition and a bitter 'northern' sense of humour.

The end of the 1970s saw the low point of the slow dismantling of industry as the conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher came to power. Less than 1,000 people inhabited the city centre (Misselwitz in: VVAA 2004) and unemployment grew. Between 1972 and 1984 at least 207,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in the Greater Manchester area. Unemployment reached 16% in 1986. (Taylor 1996).

British city centres were reorganised following a model of regeneration based on a free enterprise approach, the restriction of local government and the creation of new semi-autonomous bodies outside the control of local government (O'Connor 1999: 83). The media coverage of the North emphasised the wreck of city centres and localised in them the "British crisis" (Shields 1991: 231 - 244).

## 2.1 Manchester, So Much to Answer For

Novels in the 19<sup>th</sup> and films and media in the 20<sup>th</sup> century made possible the circulation of certain images of Manchester around Great Britain and the consolidation of its place myth. In both these cultural operations we refer to external images, often based on singular points of view of outsiders, where places are merely settings and do not contribute directly to cultural creation (as in the case of *kitchen sink* films, see: Higson 1996).

The Manchester popular music scene overcame the internal/external division in cultural production. For the first time, images produced locally found their niche in the global market. The birth of British punk in 1976 led

to attempts to democratise the music industry (Hesmondhalgh 1998) and was essential to the success of Manchester bands (Milestone 1996). Punk first developed DIY strategies connected to production, distribution and marketing in fashion (T-shirts, pins), music events (gigs), press (fanzines) and musical supports (EPs, cassettes). These elements became easily produced and accessible and relied entirely on the opportunities that arose through underground circulation (Reynolds 2005).

A clear example of this new cultural attitude and the starting point of the Manchester music scene was the concert given by the infamous London punk band *The Sex Pistols* at the Lesser Free Trade Hall on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1976. The gig was organised by two local students, Peter McNeish and Howard Trafford (who would later change their names to Pete Shelley and Howard Devoto). After reading about the band in a music magazine, the *NME*, the two went to London, watched the band play live and contacted the band's manager, eager to promote the band beyond the London area.

About forty people attended the gig, which took place at the Free Trade Hall in a smaller room upstairs from the main concert hall. About six weeks later on July 20<sup>th</sup>, *The Sex Pistols* played in the same place again, supported by two newly-formed local bands, *Buzzcocks* and *Slaughter and the Dogs*; the crowd had meanwhile multiplied to several hundred.

There is still an on-going dispute about who attended the first, the second or any of the two gigs, because of the mythical status that they acquired in local history. The book *I Swear I Was There. The Gig that Changed the World* (Nolan 2006) tries to 'set things straight', although it appears to have enhanced the mystery. It appears certain that some members of *Joy Division/New Order*, *Buzzcocks*, *The Smiths*, *The Fall*, the music journalist Paul Morley, the local cultural entrepreneur and TV journalist Tony Wilson and the producer Martin Hannett attended one or both of the gigs. Some were already involved in music or had plans to do so, but the synergic significance of the gig should not be underestimated. The main narrative about the event could be summed up in the words of Peter Hook, bassist of *Joy Division* and *New Order*:

Literally the next day [the day after the gig], I went to Mazel's in Manchester and bought a bass guitar for thirty-five quid. [...] So I went to a music shop on Deansgate and bought a book on how to play rock and roll bass guitar: *Play in a Day* (Nolan 2006: 73).

The two Free Trade Hall gigs could be used to show that in 1976 popular music in Manchester began to function as a creative milieu. The concept of creative milieu will be considered here in the definition by Camagni and the GREMI group (*Groupe de Recherche Européen sur les Milieux Innovateurs*) as a set of complex networks

[...] of mainly informal social relationships within a limited geographical area, often determining a specific external image and a specific internal rep-

resentation and sense of belonging, which enhance the local innovative capability through synergic and collective learning processes (Camagni 1991: 3).

In his work Camagni identifies basic features of this particular kind of milieu, including pre-existing local traditions, spatial proximity, time and the production of ideas and innovations (Metzger 2007).

If we consider the place where the gigs took place, it is easy to understand how tradition and common social practices are involved. In fact, the Free Trade Hall, which today, sadly, has been turned into a hotel, is a place of enormous local significance. It was built on St. Peter's field, the site of the 'Peterloo massacre' where workers gathered to listen to the speeches of radical reformers and were brutally attacked by the police on 16 August 1819. The subsequent formation of the Anti-Corn Law League also took place symbolically on the field and the construction of the Free Trade Hall was begun in order to host talks concerning the liberalisation of trades in agriculture. The hall changed its function over the years, becoming the rehearsal space for the Hallé Orchestra and the major live music venue in the city. The *Lesser* hall was a smaller room, upstairs from the main venue, used for events of minor importance, and was easily rented by the two students for *The Sex Pistols* gig.

The independent organisation of a gig and the choice of the venue testify to the importance of local labour traditions. This is in fact not only connected to rallies, strikes, assemblies, but also to the autonomous shaping of free time and cultural life and to the establishment of dedicated institutions. The spatial proximity of the people involved in the milieu is also of great importance. The people who gathered at the two gigs formed bands with neighbours and school friends, people that they were continuously interacting with, even before playing music. In addition bands gathered in pubs, competed with each other in a strong local rivalry, started attending each other's gigs or rehearsals and planned to perform together. The time dimension is also significant, over the years the cohesion of the scene diminished, as new bands developed and old ones split up.

The most relevant element of a creative milieu is the ability to implement innovation and develop new ideas. Another major happening soon followed the organisation of the two gigs. In 1976 *Buzzcocks* (the band formed by the two students Shelley and Devoto) published their own EP *Spiral Scratch*, founding their own record label (*New Hormones*) and directly controlling every aspect of its production (art work, sound, image, distribution) (see: Savage 1991: 296). Bands began producing, promoting and circulating music outside the traditional record company logics, cutting costs and increasing the artists' freedom.

Creativity became a basic aspect in the Manchester punk and post-punk music scene and the sense of belonging, proximity and innovation made it possible for musicians to build a milieu in Manchester without feeling the

need to move to London, which used to be and still is the common procedure for a British band looking for success.

### 3. Music and Representation: *The Smiths*, *The Fall* and *Joy Division*

Martin Stokes (1997) suggests that music is able to define and transform places and identities, thus acquiring part of its “social meaning”. According to him, performing, listening or talking about music “evokes [...] collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity” (Stokes 1997: 3). Sara Cohen (2007) has successfully analysed what she refers to as “the rhetoric of the local” in the rock music scene in Liverpool. In her study, she examines the interaction of textual and contextual factors in the way the authentic “Liverpool sound” is identified and represented locally. She recognises media stereotypes, rock culture, familiar local narratives, and economic change as the major contextual elements in the definition of this sound.

Popular music is scrutinised here because of its ability to implement places in a credible authentic way, forming new modalities to conceive and perceive them. Territorialisation through popular music occurs (or better: it takes ‘place’) on three dimensions: ‘textsapes’, ‘soundsapes’ and ‘landsapes’. Lyrics and titles of songs referring to places make up a band’s textscape. The use of local music tradition, local vernacular or typical city noises constitute a band’s soundscape. Finally, the landscape consists of all the visual elements (e.g. photo shootings, videos, covers, posters, clothes, stage) referring to the same particular locality or to its previous representations. The mediation of places through three ‘scapes’ turns popular music into a powerful tool for re-imagining places and builds alternative images of cities, circulating around the world in millions of copies. The Manchester scene’s use of these ‘scapes’ is strikingly similar to the paradigm introduced by the post-war Parisian humanist photography. Stuart Hall (1997) refers to six elements of this paradigm: “universality” (human emotions), “historicity” (place-time specificity), “quotidienality” (everyday life), “empathy” (complicity with the subject of the representation), “commonality” (photographer mirrors the viewpoint of the working class) and “monochromaticity” (extensive use of black and white) (see Hall S. 1997: 101).

The Manchester scene made significant use of landscapes: nearly all of the bands considered here, from *Buzzcocks* to *Joy Division* and *The Smiths*, were pictured, especially at the beginning of their careers, outside in open space, posing in front of factories or blocks of flats. Chimneys, cobblestone streets and red brick buildings have been part of the Manchester imagery since the descriptions of Friedrich Engels and the novels of Charles Dickens (Shields 1991 and Moretti 1998) and are therefore connected to historicity. These bands adopted the referenced architectural elements as symbolic ‘authenticity seals’ for their local belonging, confirming the narrative that

makes everything 'popular', something 'for real' (commonality). In addition, two other considerations could be made. First, showing the empty and decaying temples of capitalism can be linked to the gloom expressed by these bands. They exemplify the emptiness of capitalist society and of industrialism, which can best be expressed as: when the money stops coming in, unemployment rises and entire districts are left in physical and social decay. Second, it could be read as an ironic commentary: in 1985 *The Smiths* posed in front of the Salford Lads Club (youth leisure club) for a shot by Stephen Wright, which appeared in the gatefold of the band's *The Queen is Dead* LP (1986). The club was opened in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to keep the local Salford youth 'off the streets' and educate them to become 'good citizens', as usual for many other philanthropic initiatives of the time (Lindner 2004). *The Smiths* posing in front of the club, located at the end of the real 'Coronation Street' opened up a series of questions concerning identity, as the band was increasingly attracting media attention for its overt subversion of working class values, while celebrating, at first sight, idleness, criminality and social indifference. In addition, most of these bands pictures were black and white (monochromaticity) and portrayed the band members wearing everyday working class clothes (jeans, Doc Martens boots) or those of lower middle class clerks (black suits, white shirts, ties, cardigans) (commonality). Usually the bands were not posing in any explicit way; mostly they looked naively at the camera or shyly avoided it (empathy and universality).

By 'textscape' we refer to the use of localities, toponymies, street names, monuments, and districts, more or less recognisable as such. The references to the quite unmistakable built environment are variously present in songs by these bands (historicity). *The Smiths* refer to iron bridges, disused railway lines and cemetery gates. Additionally, the city's districts are more or less openly referred to, in particular those most run down and disfavoured at the time, such as Whalley Range, Cheetham Hill and Ancoats. The band *Joy Division* relies less on the direct nomination or representation of the built environment and concentrates much more on its subjective psychological effects. In their lyrics the built environment is evoked because of its monotony and desolation, structuring a sinister textscape (monochromaticity), which only through circulation goes back to being identified by the listeners with Manchester.

The soundscape of Manchester is built upon the use of local music tradition, local sound and noises and the vernacular. With 'local music tradition' I refer to the influence of early North American Rock'n'Roll and Soul music (which in the UK is epitomised as Northern Soul), widely played in local fairs, workers' clubs and local pubs, the places of the working class (commonality). The use of certain sound effects (harmonica, synthetic drums) has often been associated with industrial noises (trains, alarms, heavy industry machineries). In addition, the Mancunian accent is easily recognised and sometimes accentuated by the bands' singers, both in performances and interviews.

Manchester as a place is present on all three levels of representation, which could be adopted in popular music. The city's local music scene was able to deconstruct previous media representation and was able to develop a different image of the city, through individual sensibilities and their adherence to a common aesthetic paradigm and world view. Through circulation this image reached millions of people, who were able to make it their own, reshape it again and keep it viable.

The following musical wave, *madchester*, started some years later, at the end of the 1980s and varied the themes and imageries first conceived by the previously quoted bands. *Happy Mondays*, *The Stone Roses*, *Inspiral Carpets*, among others, introduced new features in all three levels of city representation through ecstasy-connected psychedelic imagery. The old built environment was still fundamental in the musical landscape, although it mutated into stylised icons, brands and superficial symbols, no longer connected to real or recognisable places. Factories were no longer empty ruined places to be contemplated alone; they became the sites where the new events, the illegal rave parties, took place.

#### **4. Regenerating through Popular Music: The Hacienda FAC51 and the Northern Quarter**

In the late 1970s, when bands such as the *Buzzcocks*, *Joy Division* and *The Fall* were starting the local music scene, there was no real urban clustering in connection to popular music. Most of the people involved in music lived in the suburbs or in the new satellite towns, being of lower middle class or working class origins. Like in many other cases around the globe (especially in the US, see Savage 1991: 137 about Pere Ubu and Cleveland), punk and post-punk local scenes were attracted to the centre by a peculiar fascination for decay, mixed with the availability of spaces to be used as rehearsal rooms or improvised gig venues. The most known places for live music at the time were pubs, which usually reserved a weekday for live music made by 'young' bands. Outside the pub circuit there was Electric Circus (Collyhurst Street), a dilapidated former Bingo Hall. The place became the first punk epicentre, but closed in 1977. The same happened to The Squat (Devas Street), a venue that once hosted the Manchester College of Music in the University Area.

There are no hints of a real clustering of the scene and of a real regeneration of places in connection to music. The financial situation of the music scene was very poor, city officials tended to ignore popular music, because of its irrelevance to the political struggle of the time. The entrepreneurial skills of managers, promoters, record label owners and musicians themselves were often amateurish. In addition, the manners and aesthetics of bands like *Joy Division* were taken, erroneously, for right wing related (the singer wearing often onstage a brown shirt), or in the case of *The Smiths*, too overtly homosexual to cope with the northern working class tradition.

The situation changed thanks to the consolidation of Factory Records and the opening of The Hacienda FAC 51. In addition, starting from the beginning of the 1980s, the Manchester music scene acquired first national and by the end of the decade international popularity.

In 1978 Tony Wilson, a TV journalist born in Manchester and a graduate of Cambridge, began organising a night called *The Factory* at the Russel Club in the district of Hulme, and founded 'Factory Records' that same year. The name 'Factory' was inspired by the Andy Warhol atelier active in New York in the 1960s, but its evocation of Manchester is no less obvious. The independent record label published most of the records of the local music scene. Over the years, Wilson signed bands like *Joy Division*, *A Certain Ratio*, *Durutti Column*, *New Order* and *Happy Mondays*. The bands were free in their artistic choices and the profit was fairly distributed between artist and label, without label interference in the copyright of the produced material.

The Hacienda FAC 51 (each product of the Factory catalogue was given a progressive number, the club being number 51) opened in May 1982 on the corner between Albion Street and Whitworth Street West in a run-down area, close to the almost abandoned city centre. The architect Ben Kelly re-designed the former yacht showroom, maintaining many of the real features of the building, such as the big iron doors, the inner columns and the outside appearance with red bricks. Its financial existence was based on the co-ownership of Factory Records, Rob Gretton and *New Order*, at the time the most successful of the label's bands (their single *Blue Monday* became one of the best-selling 12" records of all times).

The success of *New Order* guaranteed the economic survival of the club and influenced its stylistic choices in the music program. Because of the band's fascination for New York and the American dance and electronic music scene, the Hacienda became the first club in Europe to play house music. The DJs Graeme Park and Mike Pickering started playing house at the Friday *Nude* night in 1987. New local bands, such as *Happy Mondays*, began mixing local pop music tradition with this new exciting dance music. The Hacienda gave birth to the first European house music scene, which later developed the practice of rave-parties. This scene became infamous as *acid* house, because of the involvement of a new synthetic drug: ecstasy. The music press created the term *madchester* (Manchester and madness) to designate the local scene.

1989 saw the first ecstasy-related death in the UK, when a girl collapsed on the club's dance floor. Drug dealers began haunting the area, slowly bringing the club to a financial crisis. At the same time violent incidents (rival gang fights involving shootings) undermined the reputation of the whole area.

The Hacienda closed once in 1991, under pressure from the Greater Manchester Police. It reopened after 3 months, but Factory Records went bankrupt in 1992 and The Hacienda shut its doors in 1997. A private company, Crosby Homes, bought and demolished it. Between 2002 and 2004



on the site, an apartments and offices complex was completed. The project, of course, maintained the name of the club, in accordance with corporate strategies that employ cultural elements as marketing ploy (See Haslam 2000, 2002 and 2003. In addition, the film *24 Hour Party People*, directed by Michael Winterbottom in 2002, gives a semi-realistic portrayal of the Hacienda's history).

Parallel to the Hacienda, and on a different scale, the 'Northern Quarter' also represents an important aspect of the relationship between popular music and the built environment in Manchester. The name was conceived to designate what used to be a 'left over' of the unitary city centre plan. Located between Piccadilly Gateway, Ancoats and Shudehill, the Northern Quarter had been a major shopping area since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially along Oldham Street and in the Smithfield Market. It was later devastated by developments in the 1960s, which culminated in the construction of the Arndale centre, which when built in the 1970s was the largest indoor shopping mall in Europe. The area was rapidly abandoned in the 1970s and left to its fate by speculators.

The availability of cheap flats with affordable rents, together with the *Enterprise Allowance Scheme* (a start-up project for self employed entrepreneurs) encouraged many musicians and music entrepreneurs to move to the area. Record shops, recording studios, rehearsal rooms and small alternative shops (such as bookshops, tattoo studios, clothes shops) began to appear in the district, together with flats (Brown *et al.* 2000). Factory Records itself also opened a bar (The Dry Bar) and a shop (The Area) in the Northern Quarter. The Afflecks Palace opened its premises in a five-storey building, selling street fashion and design in connection with various styles of popular music scenes (punk, dance etc.) in about 50 independent stalls.

The entrepreneurs, workers and inhabitants of the area joined together in the Northern Quarter Association (NQA) which tried to put forward the needs and agenda of a 'creative district' in the municipality. From the 1990s on, the Northern Quarter, just like the Hacienda, faced problems linked to the rise of violence among gangs and the consumption of illicit substances, which, due to its 'hands off' policy with regard to the district, the municipality was not prepared to control.

Parallel to the Northern Quarter, also the Gay Village (along Canal Street) and China Town developed, extending further the notion of 'cultural districts' through tolerance, diversity and ethnicity. Today the municipality formally recognises all of these areas as neighbourhoods.

## **5. The Municipality Facing its Creative Capital: Nightlife Economy, Popular Music and the City**

The era under consideration in this paper is more or less the same dominated, on a political national level, by the conservative party and in par-

ticular by the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher was elected in 1979 and maintained her position until 1990, when John Major replaced her, before losing his seat in 1997. The Conservative Party policy was concerned with centralisation and neo-liberalism and with the recovery of the British economy through privatisation.

In reference to city policy, Thatcher encouraged collaboration with the private sector, convinced that the physical reshaping of city centres would have an effect on their social dimension as well. Urban culture was connected mainly to the institutionalised forms of high culture: theatres, ballet, operas and concert halls, relegating everything else to the duties of low-level officials in connection with leisure.

Manchester in the 1970s and early 1980s was one of the most prominent local governments promoting 'municipal socialism', inspired by the labour tradition and by class solidarity. The city was a site of struggle against the Tory government and its policy was connected to basic elements: housing, transportation and welfare.

From 1984 onwards and most evidently after 1987, the so-called 'New Urban Left'<sup>2</sup> substituted the traditional socialism inside the local Labour party. This has been explained by the third defeat in the general elections (1987) and by the 'growing awareness of the limitations of what a local authority was able to do in an era of globalisation' (Quilley 1999: 187). There is also a sociological explanation connected to the decline of traditional working class masculinity due to unemployment and to the increase of ethnic and gender diversification in the labour force. At the same time, there is also a clear connection to the decision by many of the 'prodigal sons' who had abandoned the party in 1968 to rejoin it (see Tickell and Peck 1996; Quilley 1999; 2000).

The New Left local government in Manchester brought to the city an innovative entrepreneurialism, which recalled the deeds of the 'Manchester men' in liberalising English economy at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Tickell and Peck 1996). This was connected mainly to the re-imagining of the city as a whole, after the disastrous de-industrialisation. This re-imagining was believed to be central to attract new private investments in the built environment and was seen favourably by Mrs. Thatcher's central government. The focus of the municipality shifted therefore from social housing and training schemes for the unemployed to big bids in sport (1996 and 2000 unsuccessful Olympics bids 2002 Commonwealth Games), managerial-led initiatives and to the creation of new tourist attractions.

The municipality began looking at successful regeneration stories in the United States (Baltimore, Boston and New York) and in continental Europe

<sup>2</sup> There are two political movements, which are referred to as 'New Left'. The first arises in the 1950s; the second 'New Left' is connected to 1968 and to radicalisation of some Left-wing movements following the student revolt. In this paper I refer to the second 'New Left' and to its reintegration within the Labour Party in the 1980s (see: Quilley in Peck and Ward 2002 p. 77).

(Barcelona and Amsterdam). A new narrative began influencing the public opinion and the city council policy: the 'European city'. Bars and clubs were able to adopt 'more European' opening hours and licensing laws, following the new philosophy of the 24/7 city (Lovatt 1996). Ironically enough, in the same period, the band Happy Mondays was singing a tune called '24-hour party people' about ecstasy, the so called 'love drug', able to make people smile and dance, annihilating time and space, until the early afternoon (typical of the rave scene are the 'after hours', clubs open usually from 2 am to 10 am). 'European' started referring to everything from 'Spanish licensing hours' to 'cappuccino bars' and had a huge impact on the marketing of the city and on the way the municipality, but also the citizens saw and imagined Manchester's post-industrial success.

Quilley (1999) identifies three different assumptions in relation to the 'New Left Manchester' and questions each of them, as part of a single script, played out by the municipality.

The first is the unproblematic description of the shift from industrial to post-industrial city, with the latter as a simple next stage in capitalist development. Quilley stresses the fact that also in the downfall of the early 1980s, one fourth of the conurbation's workforce were still employed in manufacturing (Quilley 1999: 191-193). We could argue that popular music seems to be aware of this, referring continuously to the industrial imagery and heritage of the city and addressing the working class. In addition, the democratic organisation of many independent labels (Factory) and the attitude of most bands questioned capitalism as a whole.

The second assumption is bound to the belief that in an era of globalisation, cities are competing with each other and a vibrant branding of a city could make the difference. Under the circumstances, the conversion of old factories into offices and apartments and the marketing of Manchester as a place with a high quality of life become priorities (Quilley 1999: 194-197). Popular music can be seen from two different perspectives in relation to this assumption: firstly in a positive and secondly in a negative way. Popular music represents in fact the 'folklore' of the creative class; its presence can confirm the liveability and vibrancy of a place and its image can be used for local branding. The Haçienda and Manchester bands like *The Stone Roses* stood on the pages of major lifestyle and music magazines all over the world in the 1990s and were present also in tourist brochures and biddings. On the other hand, the material manifestation of popular music can also be seen as an impediment or a danger. The Northern Quarter's creative potential cannot be recognised immediately as economically profitable, in comparison to the renting or selling of the same premises for the new economy executives and office workers. Popular music (the *madchester* scene in particular) was seen as a threat, because of its connection to gang violence and drug use. The commission of the *Northern Quarter Regeneration Strategy* in 1995 for example, first overcame the 'hands off' at-

titude towards the Northern Quarter. Still, the report refers to the mixed use of the area and to the necessity to link its creative potential to the area's 'main commercial core'.

The third assumption is connected to the development of partnerships (with the national government and with the private sector) in the name of growth. This implied the exclusion of conflicts through a cross-class and place-bound attitude. Every step that the local government took was felt and explained as being for the benefit of Manchester as a whole (Quilley 1999: 197-199). In this latter assumption as well, popular music plays an antagonistic role. Bands and music entrepreneurs (Tony Wilson *in primis*) were aware of the 'pacification', which took place between local and national government in the late 1980s. They understood this as a 'selling out' and were therefore sceptical regarding municipal interventions. The attitude of the local music scene in favour of Manchester and local pride was fuelled by global recognition and success, which lacked only flexible local planning and licensing. The city was not ready or willing to grant these (Brown *et al.* 2000).

## 6. Conclusions

Most of the Mancunians referenced here as involved in popular music are still active – touring, making records, planning re-unions or comebacks, writing memoirs, organising gigs and conventions –. The years under review (1976-1997) are still vividly part of their creative activities. Today, the Free Trade Hall is called the Radisson Edwardian Hotel and The Hacienda has been converted into 130 city apartments for managers, although the plate with the name of the club is still visible on the building's external wall. Six Mancunians involved in music offer their view on the city's musical heritage on a 'Manchester Music speaks' podcast hosted on the local tourist board site (<<http://www.visitmanchester.com/podcast/>>).

The University of Manchester's 2015 *Agenda* suggests that after addressing sport in the 1990s, the new means to success is education. UMIST and The Victoria University of Manchester merged in 2004 and a new agenda was set to put the city university in the world top 25 by 2015. Manchester is still fighting its way onto the global map.

The deep relation between Manchester and popular music is unquestionable. The city's musical scene from the 1970s on created a new and powerful way to produce, circulate and consume music. At the same time it succeeded in giving a global appeal to a locality. This was achieved through the continuous reference to its own built environment, which became central in the image, sound and lyrics of the scene. The circulation of these aroused a fascination for the city, and its industrial landscape; Manchester became, in a way, more attractive.

The scene was able to develop as a creative milieu, creating jobs, opening venues and inventing professions from scrap, forging what we to-

day understand as cultural industries (design, photography, music, night life...). The rivalry with London and its more institutionalised music scene was also fundamental in creating an opposition pole based on local pride. The vitality of Manchester's popular music scene was not able to stabilise, when major problems related to drug dealing and violence took over, the need for a more pro-active municipal intervention was felt.

The municipality took notice only of the most superficial and iconic manifestations of musical creativity and was for a long time unsure of their 'cultural value'.

Only international recognition caught the city's attention, although the attitude towards the Northern Quarter was devoted almost exclusively to the regeneration of the built environment, without any strategic fuelling of cultural industries. On the other hand, the local music industry maintained its deep scepticism towards the city government for a long time.

Creativity, as defined in this chapter, characterised Manchester and its music scene from 1976 on, years before the city began to be labelled 'post-industrial'. Manchester was in fact a creative city, a city where a single cultural industry was able to redefine the city's image while maintaining its unique character. But no one knew that at the time.

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## Chapter 6

# Fashion and the city. Social interaction and creativity in London and Milan<sup>1</sup>

Creative industries (design, fashion, art, entertainment) are key to the economic growth and renaissance of contemporary cities. Characterised by a constantly changing environment, high levels of uncertainty, and tacit knowledge, these industries show patterns of concentration in urban quarters; the relevant literature suggests that such concentrations reflect the critical role played by frequent face-to-face interaction and exchange among individuals, organisations and institutions in fostering innovation and creativity.

On the basis of previous work (d'Ovidio 2008) and current research, in this paper we focus on the interactions among fashion designers based in Milan and London, two international fashion capitals. To begin with, we show that the industry is highly concentrated in specific quarters by mapping the location of the main fashion houses in the two cities. Secondly, we present evidence that designers engage frequently in face-to-face interaction and we discuss the different functions of interaction in relation to the construction of trust, the building of in-group reputation and the nourishment of creativity. Thirdly, we identify the diverging patterns of interaction in the two cities; despite the strong economic performance of this industry in both cities, the 'creative field' is perceived to be much more vibrant in London than in Milan. We discuss these different patterns with respect to complaints regarding a perceived decrease in the creativity of the Milanese designer community. Finally, we advance a tentative explanation for the relative weakness of the Milanese creative community based on the absence of links with other fields of creative production in the city.

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the European Urban Research Association (EURA) 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference *The Vital City*, 12-14 September 2007 (University of Glasgow).

## 1. The role of proximity and face-to-face interaction

Since the seminal work of Goffman (Goffman 1959) and Garfinkel (Garfinkel 1967) face-to-face relations have been considered the richest communication medium, because in a face-to-face context communication occurs on many levels at the same time – verbal, physical, contextual, intentional, and non-intentional –. Such multidimensional communication is held by many to be essential to the transmission of complex, uncodifiable, tacit knowledge. The rise of the cultural industries, which rely to an enormous extent on this kind of knowledge, has renewed the focus on face-to-face interaction and its functions in the coordination of the economy. For many of these industries there is empirical evidence that face-to-face interaction remains a crucial means of communication for their highly skilled workers, despite the development of new communication technologies and the low cost of their use. The reliance on direct interaction, and the requirement of physical proximity that this entails, are part of the explanation of the clustering of these industries in cities and in specific quarters of cities.

Fashion is a typical segment of the cultural industry, as it is

[e]ngaged in the creation of marketable outputs whose competitive qualities depend on the fact that they function at least in part as personal ornaments, modes of social display, forms of entertainment and distraction, or sources of information and self-awareness, i.e. as artefacts whose symbolic value to the consumer is high relative to their practical purposes (Scott 2000).

The fashion industry shares with all culture-based products continuously changing and uncertain environments and a constant high demand for innovation. Due to these characteristics it is said to rely heavily on face-to-face relations and to be concentrated in specific quarters.

Studies on different cultural industries have shown that face-to-face communication performs several functions. First, cultural workers spend time, money and energy in face-to-face interaction because they need to build relationships conducive to trust and to mutually renew and confirm that trust over time. Trustworthy relations are necessary because of the nature of knowledge involved in their work, which entails individual ability, sensibility, taste and lifestyle that can be communicated and transferred only through a personal relationship based on mutual trust. Trust thus makes easier the sharing of different cultural assets and skills necessary for collective projects. Because more and more cultural products are the result of the coming together of different special skills and distinct forms of human capital, trust is a prerequisite for successful collaboration. Banks *et al.* (Banks *et al.* 2000) in the analysis of Mancunian cultural industries have shown how networks and informal spaces of social interaction were conducive to non-planned cooperation and the development of new products. In his work on

new media workers, Pratt (Pratt 2000) stresses the need for frequent face-to-face interaction and relationships of familiarity among them.

Secondly, trust is also important in the creation of dense networks which tie together cultural workers in community-like formations based on common sensibilities, aesthetic orientation and cultural values. Within the community, knowledge is shared "horizontally" among the actual participants but also "vertically", that is, transmitted over time from one generation to the next (Scott 2000). The network/community thus performs a socialisation function, since through the interaction with its members, individuals learn the 'codes', acquire specific criteria of judgment which, in turn, signal to others that they belong to the same social world. Through this process of "getting into the loop" (Storper and Venables 2004) the network selects its prospective members and defines and reproduces its identity: as a result, individuals' qualities and skills are recognised as adequate to belonging to the group and the group defines its cultural capital. Once in the network, due to the fact that group members have an interest in maintaining a high standard of quality, there is constant monitoring and assessing of one another: thanks to frequent and extended interactions the network guarantees the competence of its members and produces reputation capital for them, which results in a reduction of risk and information costs, enables more efficient partnering in joint projects and increases motivation in collaborative efforts. As in the cultural industries there are no formal credentials that can guarantee the creative qualities of a person, an individual's reputation, which derives from being recognised as belonging to the creative community, is of paramount importance. Moreover, due to the flexible, unstable nature of cultural work, which is performed mostly on the basis of short-term contract projects and forces cultural workers to be committed to different temporary jobs at any given time (Menger 1999; Storper and Christopherson 1987), they are constantly on the lookout for new jobs or better contracts. The network provides them with the reputation and the contacts needed to further their careers (Pratt 2000; Wittel 2001).

Last, but by no means least, creativity. Its importance for the cultural industries cannot be overstated, as they combine artistic expression and creativity with material production, tradable goods and, to a greater or lesser extent, market-based consumption. The conception, production and manipulation of symbols, signs and ideas employed in making a movie, a video game, a music CD or a fashion collection are much less the result of the creativity of single individuals and much more the outcome of intense interaction among a critical mass of highly skilled, creative individuals in an environment which promotes and rewards creativity. Becker's pioneer study of the art world (Becker 1974) has shown the socially constructed nature of the production of works of art. Far from being the result of a spark of inspiration of an individual artist, a work of art is the outcome of a process involving different actors, of whom the artist herself is the last in a long chain. The

process is mostly carried out through face-to-face interaction of the actors involved, who agree on value judgements, share conventions and mutually adjust to each other's orientation and style; by doing so, they are able to effectively collaborate in the final definition of the work of art. More recently, the work of Molotch on the design industry (Molotch 2002, 2003) has shown that, in the creative process leading to the production of "new things", geographical proximity is considered vital, as it increases the opportunities for interaction among designers and for unplanned, inter-network contacts with other creative communities; in turn, these frequent face-to-face contacts and encounters are crucial to the enhancement of creativity.

## **2. Comparing the fashion systems of Milan and London – similarities and differences**

The designer fashion industry (designing and creating clothes, shoes and accessories) is internationally linked to specific cities in the world. Paris, London, New York, Milan and increasingly Tokyo (Gilbert 2000) are broadly recognised as the fashion world capitals, where the main fashion events, (the fashion weeks) occur; where the most important fashion *maisons* are concentrated; where the consumption and commerce of fashion converge.

In this paper we focus on Milan and London, and in particular on the two fashion systems, understood as the set of actors and relations that form and sustain this industry. The empirical observation and the consequent analysis have necessarily a strong comparative character, in order to capture most effectively the delicate balance between the parts of the systems: how networks are shaped, which functions they serve, what kinds of ties are established with institutions and so on. Only through effective comparative analysis emphasising common features and differences in terms of both institutional structure and the fashion industry itself is it possible to understand these local systems.

Nevertheless, although the two cities are said to be two world fashion capitals, it is clear that they constitute very different environments. If we observe them in their absolute dimensions, the comparison seems quite difficult: London is a global metropolis, a crucial node for the world economy, while Milan could represent, in the most optimistic view, a second-order global city<sup>2</sup>. A few examples should suffice to indicate the differences between Milan and London<sup>3</sup>. London is a metropolis with more than 7 million inhabitants, with more than 4 million workers producing a GDP of almost 280 billion Euros. Milan, on the other hand, has 3 million inhabitants, less than half the number of workers and produces a GDP of 95 bil-

<sup>2</sup> On this concern, see researches and works by (Taylor 2004) or by Magatti et alii specifically on Milan (Magatti 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Data are used from the Statistical National Bureaus of Italy and the United Kingdom.

lion Euros. London's population density is three times that of Milan, which includes a large number of semi-rural and rural areas.

Bearing this in mind, is it possible to confront the two cities? Is comparison valuable despite the differences? If we change perspective and observe the cities within their respective national contexts, we note with interest that the ratio between workers and inhabitants is similar: both in Milan and in London there is one worker for every two inhabitants; the GDP per capita is also similar: 30 million Euros in Milan (10% of the National product) and 37 million in London (17% of the national GDP). Thus, at least in terms of relative values and positioning, the two cities are more comparable than they appear at first sight.

As far as the fashion industry is concerned, Milan and London are part of an international network connecting them at the highest level with Paris and New York, followed by Tokyo, Barcelona, Singapore and other emerging cities. The first four cities, which are acknowledged as the main fashion capital cities, differ from each other with respect to the kind of products, the market niches serviced and consumer behaviour. In this respect Milan is recognised for high-quality prêt-à-porter, London for innovation and creativity in dress, New York for sportswear and Paris for haute-couture (Gilbert 2000; Breward 2003).

We must therefore enquire if the two cities also have comparable fashion systems (in terms of economic weight, employment and fashion-related industries). We believe that the comparison of two different systems allows us to shed some light on hidden elements, keeping in mind, however, that the heuristic value of comparative analysis and interpretation can be invalidated by the use of excessively heterogeneous case studies. In order to discuss the different dimensions that characterise the fashion systems, we must agree upon a methodological basis that allows us to measure and compare them. Most of the research addressing the measurement of a particular sector, especially in a comparative perspective, uses data on employment, because it is available and comparable for most of the countries and easy to interpret<sup>4</sup>.

In the UK, both the Great London Authority (GLA) and the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) offer data on the London fashion industry that is comparable with data concerning Milan. Data is collected from the Annual Business Inquiry in the UK and from the Census of Industry by the national statistic bureau (ISTAT) in Italy and represents the number of employees in a set of sectors measuring the clothing and the fashion industry. In both contexts we used data referring to 2001, although for the British case data was also available for more recent years.

Table 1 shows the sectors selected for the definition of the fashion industry (fashion and clothing) and the portion that DCMC and GLA consider relevant with respect to designer fashion.

<sup>4</sup> The value of the use of such data in the cultural industries has been discussed by Pratt (2004).

Tab. 1 – *Industries and proportions used by GLA and DCMS*

Sector	% used by DCMS designer fashion	% used by GLA clothing and fashion industry
1771: Manufacture of knitted/crocheted hosiery	0.5	100
1772: Manufacture: knitted/crocheted pullovers	0.5	100
1810: Manufacture of leather clothes	0.5	100
1821: Manufacture of work wear	0.5	100
1822: Manufacture of other outerwear	0.5	100
1823: Manufacture of underwear	0.5	100
1824: Manufacture of other wearing apparel n.e.c.	0.5	100
1830: Dressing and dyeing of fur	0.5	100
1930: Manufacture of footwear	0.5	100
7484: Other business activities n.e.c.	25	50

Source: Greater London Authority (2007)

As shown, the sectors are mainly concerned with the manufacturing of clothing and accessories, the only exception being industries classified under the label “Other business activities n.e.c.”. All the activities connected with business services that are not classified in other classes converge in this category, along with the activities associated with the design of clothing, shoes, jewellery, accessories and so on. As it is a cumulative class, only a portion of it must be taken into account: the GLA considers 50% of this class and takes the whole of the manufacturing of clothing and accessories into account. As the DCMS builds a proxy of the *designer* fashion industry it takes into consideration only a small percentage of the manufacturing activity and 25% of the residual group. In fact the classification does not distinguish between creative and non-creative professions within the sectors, and a proxy must be constructed that considers only a portion of the larger sector, specifically the creative professions.

Measured in this way, the weight of the fashion and clothing industry in Milan and London, in terms of employment, is shown in table 2.

The data shows that in both economies the fashion and clothing industry represents approximately 1.5% of the local workforce, notwithstanding large differences in absolute terms. Interesting data emerges if we look at the proportion of workers with creative occupations (again on the basis of the proxy): the absolute number of workers in the designer fashion sectors is very similar, which means that the proportion of creative workers is much higher in Milan than in London. This is surprising, because it clashes

Tab. 2 – *Employees in the fashion and clothing industries*

Employees (2001)	London	Milano
Total industries	4.016.542	1.790.042
GLA Definition fashion + clothing	57.500	26.088
% on tot. industries	1,4%	1,5%
DCMS Definition designer fashion	4.800	5.605
% on tot. industries	0,1%	0,3%

Source: Greater London Authority (UK) and ISTAT (Italy)

with London's reputation as a creative and innovative city, as opposed to Milan, which is most often portrayed as a more traditional fashion hub.

It is possible to read this data in two ways, depending on the interpretation given to the proxy of the measure of the designer fashion industry. First, since the proxy is largely comprised of a sector that includes many other business activities in addition to design, the category is a residual one in which activities not classified elsewhere converge: it may well be that differences in the classification of activities lead to differences in the proxy of the designer fashion industry.

The second interpretation rests on an in-depth study of the main features of the two systems: in Milan the fashion system is much more consolidated from an economic point of view; it is characterised by the presence of a small number of *maisons* of significant economic dimensions that address an international market and make use of a large number of creative workers, many of them free-lance (Bucci 2002). Most of the clothing manufacturing is outsourced and is produced in large factories located outside the Metropolitan Area, in the south of Italy or abroad, where labour is less expensive. This is due to the fact that the Milanese fashion houses' market is highly globalised and production is at a large scale: the outsourcing of the manufacturing side is therefore worthwhile (Pasqui and Bolocan Goldstein 2002).

The London fashion system, on the contrary, comprises many fashion houses, many of them relatively small (Beward 2004). In keeping with the smaller scale of consumption, most of the apparel production takes place in small workshops within the city.

We note, then, that the fashion systems in Milan and London are of similar dimensions but have different qualitative features, and one must keep this mind when undertaking a comparative exploration.

The analysis carried out in this paper is based on a range of field work and empirical materials. Data on the fashion industry was collected in two three-month periods of field work in spring 2004 in Milan and in summer 2004 in London. The data was first used to construct a profile of the two

fashion systems, as part of a Ph.D. dissertation (d'Ovidio 2005). Second, locational data regarding the fashion houses was collected in order to produce maps showing the geography of the fashion designers' activities in both cities, which will be presented in the next section. Thirdly, during the same two periods a total of 31 designers (17 in Milan, 14 in London) were interviewed at length. The designers are a sample of those working at the time in fashion houses that had participated in the Fashion week in fall 2003 in Milan or in London. These interviews were complemented by those carried out and published in Bucci's book on *Fashion in Milan* (Bucci 2002). In-depth interviews with key experts of the industry and specialised journalists were carried out in both cities; in London men and women are equally represented in the interviews, while in Milan almost all interviewees are men. We reached designers working in internationally-known fashion houses (such as, for example, Extè and Moschino in Milan and Arkadius and Eley Kishimoto in London) as well as designers working in small or mid-sized fashion houses. Most often the interviewee is the head designer, in some cases a member of the design staff. An analysis of the fashion trade press also served to provide background information. Sections 4 and 5 contain the analysis and discussion of the interviews.

### **3. Fashion quarters in Milan and London: where is fashion made?**

This part of the paper explores the location of fashion houses in London and Milan in order to provide an assessment of the pattern and level of geographic concentration of fashion activities. As our starting point we use the lists of fashion houses which participated in fashion shows in Milan or in London in Fall 2003; their addresses were georeferenced; if a fashion house had more than one address, we considered the address of the designers' workrooms, not that of the fashion house headquarters or showrooms. These georeferenced points were then projected onto maps of the two cities: each point represents the location of designers' activities. Some words of caution are in order for a correct interpretation of the maps. The first problem relates to the different size of our sample of fashion houses in London and in Milan, which, in turn, derives from the fact that the fashion show of one city involved two and a half times as many brands as in the other city: the London fashion show hosted more than 400 brands (of which 260 were located in London), while in Milan more than 170 fashion houses presented their collections, 46 of which were from Milan or the surrounding area.

The second problem concerns the different scale of what is considered the central area in the two cities and their different morphology. For comparative purposes we take as a unit of analysis the area of Greater London and of the Province of Milan (a good proxy for the Metropolitan Area of Milan). Maps 1 and 2 present the results at this scale: in Milan all fashion houses are within the boundaries of the municipality of Milan, the very



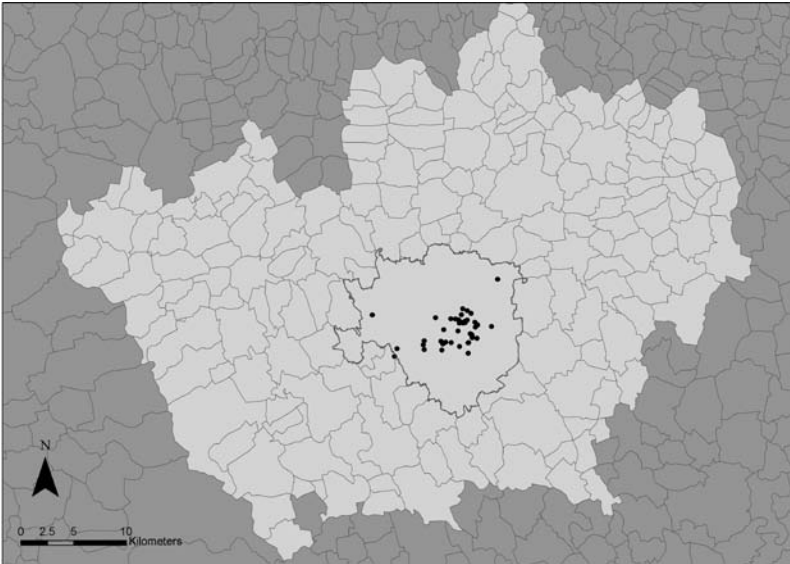
core of the metropolitan area. Within the municipality all 44 fashion houses are concentrated in the centre of the city. In London, the large majority of fashion houses (240 out of 260) are in Inner London but distributed over a comparatively much larger territory.

From these maps it is evident that the nature of designers' activities requires a central location and that the fashion industry has maintained its traditional location despite the industry's transformation over the last three decades and the development of new information and communication technologies; along with the benefits in terms of accessibility and services provision, this central location confers prestige and signs of distinction; it can be argued that through their location fashion houses establish a link between the aesthetic quality of the built environment and the sophistication and originality of their production.

Map 3 gives us a more detailed picture of the distribution of Milan's fashion houses. The strongest concentration is in the so-called *Quadrilatero della moda* (Fashion quadrilateral): a very central, square-shaped quarter within the historical centre, where all brand-names shops and showrooms of world fashion brands are also concentrated. This highly prestigious and most expensive quarter in the very heart of the city has long been the traditional location of the *haute-couture* houses and remains so today. Of the 46 fashion houses, 16 are located in the area and a number of others at the boundaries of this area. The remaining fashion houses are located in two other parts of the city which have come to be characterised by the presence of the fashion industry in more recent times. One coincides more or less with a traditional neighbourhood called *Navigli*, where the canals are located (*naviglio* means canal); this area, which used to be characterised by artisans and small industrial activities, has been subject to an intense process of gentrification in the '80s and '90s, which transformed it into a fashionable, bohemian quarter with an intense night life. Today it also houses a vast number of support activities for the fashion industry: model agencies, photo studios, PR and advertising agencies. By contrast, the other area is not identifiable with a traditional neighbourhood, is very unassuming, and has not previously been linked to any activities related to fashion or to other creative productions. The current concentration reflects the relatively low cost of real estate in this area and the investment made by two important fashion houses (Etro and Prada), which moved to the area in early nineties and were followed by a number of smaller and/or less well known firms. It is interesting to observe that these three agglomerations are the same as those identified in a previous study of the Milanese fashion system (Morace 2002).

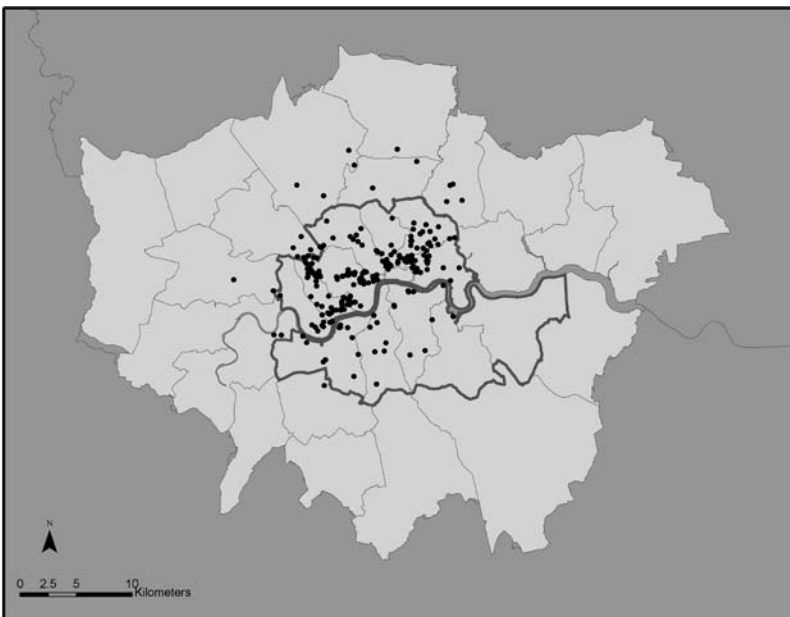
At first sight the map of London (map 4) shows a different picture: fashion houses are distributed over a larger area, although it can be argued that the large majority of them are centrally located here too, as the central-city effect refers in London to a much larger area than in Milan. The northern part of central London maintains its pre-eminence as the preferred location

Map 1 – *Province of Milan. Fashion Designers*



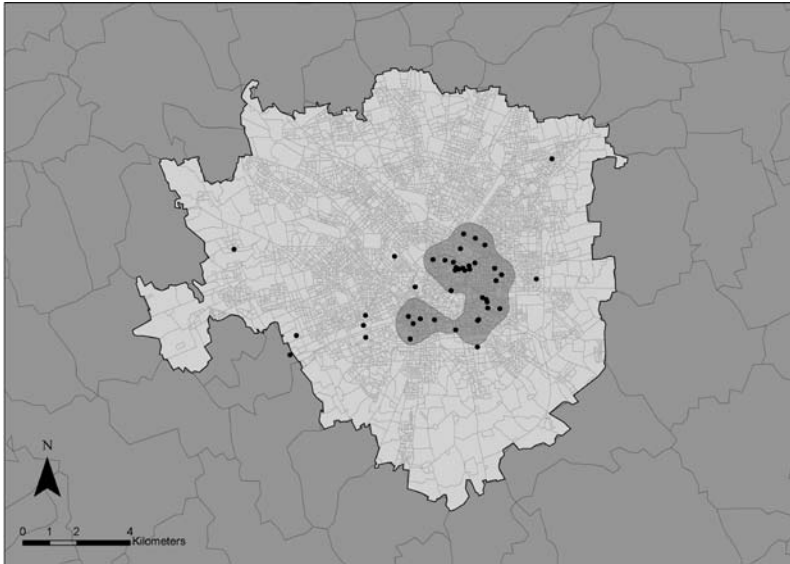
Source: Author's data collection and elaboration

Map 2 – *Greater London. Fashion Designers*



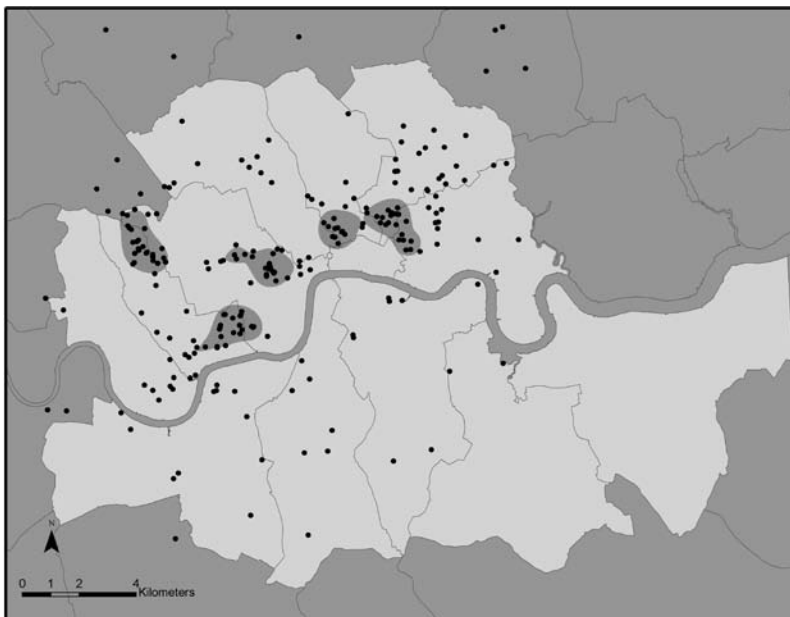
Source: Author's data collection and elaboration

Map 3 – *City of Milan. Fashion House Clusters*



Source: Author's data collection and elaboration

Map 4 – *Inner London. Fashion House Clusters*



Source: Author's data collection and elaboration

also of the fashion industry, reflecting the traditional wealth and concentration of commercial and industrial activities over time. Here the tendency of the fashion houses to concentrate in certain areas is more evident as five agglomerations are clearly identifiable: Notting Hill, the area between Brick Lane and Hoxton Square, Clerkenwell, the area around Oxford Circus, and the area from Knightsbridge to Sloane Square.

These last two areas have a long tradition of being associated with the fashion industry. The area around Oxford Circus used to be the centre of high fashion in London: from the mid eighteenth century, Savile Row carved out for itself the role of centre of excellence of bespoke tailoring, initially for the exclusive delight of the aristocracy. On that basis a high-end fashion district has developed. Traditionally, the other high fashion district is Knightsbridge, centred on the presence of Harrods's and other high-end department stores and luxury shops; today it is also the location of the London Fashion Week, which takes place here twice a year and brings countless people to the area.

The remaining three areas are 'new' developments, the result of the transformation of old neighbourhoods into new quarters for the cultural industries. The Notting Hill area features a dense agglomeration of fashion designers, among which there are famous fashion houses such as Ghost or Stella McCartney close to lesser-known ones; the area is said to be bursting with creativity, the mainspring of which derives from the presence of the celebrated Portobello street market and the enormous variety of people it attracts, including tourists. The area around Brick Lane is a mixture of Bangladeshi tradition and fashionable places, from bars and restaurants to shops. Whitechapel, the surrounding area, has been heavily affected by gentrification; 'occupied' by many young artists some time ago, it experienced a period of artistic renaissance with an ethnic connotation: many fashion designers, fascinated by the artistic atmosphere of the area and attracted by relatively cheap housing, located their laboratories there. Today the success of the area and its central location still make it a much sought-after choice for residence and work spaces. Finally, a similar process of urban renewal is at the basis of the location of fashion houses in Clerkenwell; a former industrial area with many large spaces which became available as a result of de-industrialisation, Clerkenwell underwent a rapid transformation due to its central position between the City of London and the West End.

We estimated the density of these agglomerations in Milan and London (Table 3).

The diverse constellations populating the fashion system in Milan and London show clearly the different structures of the two contexts. The London system comprises a large number of small enterprises, localised in neighbourhoods at the core of the metropolitan area, while in Milan the fashion *maisons*, which are large and well established companies, are concentrated mainly in the very centre of the city.

Tab. 3 – *Clusters of Designers*

	Area (Km <sup>2</sup> )	Fashion <i>Maison</i>	Density: <i>Maison</i> per Km <sup>2</sup>
Milano	181,70	43	0,27
M - Cluster	11,40	33	2,90
M1	1,47	5	3,4
M2	0,74	3	4,07
M3	1	4	4,14
M4	2,20	12	5,4
Inner London	301,00	240	0,80
L - Clerkenwell	1,57	16	10,22
L - Oxford Circus	1,96	18	9,19
L - Knightsbrigde	2,20	25	11,37
L - Brick Lane	2,34	24	10,28
L - Notting Hill	2,48	26	10,47

Source: Author's data collection and elaboration

The differences rise from the observation of the localisation and the presence of the fashion houses does not impede the comparability of the cases, but, on the contrary, represents an interesting element that highlights the context and enriches the analysis.

#### 4. Patterns of interaction among designers

From our interviews the work of fashion designers seems to be all about being engaged in making and maintaining relationships, which requires direct and frequent interaction and therefore co-location of actors. The main demand of their job is to be in the city, constantly reachable and permanently available to meeting people who are part of the fashion system or are engaged in the creative field.

It is all networking (Respondent f - London).

It is all a matter of contacts, you cannot do this job on the phone or by fax, you have to meet people, to talk to them, to keep in touch (Respondent i - Milan).

No, you cannot [work elsewhere], I would like to live in the countryside, for example, but I cannot; you have to be here to meet people, your friends [...] you cannot stay away from Milan very long (Respondent q - Milan).

Fashion, in other words, is a contact sport. Three levels of interaction are identifiable. The first relates to the internal workings of the laboratory:

here the designer is at the centre of a network of intense interactions aimed at channelling his/her creativity into a product with a precise positioning in the market; a lot of different abilities, skills and sensibilities are employed, value judgments and taste and style interpretations are monitored and reciprocally adjusted. Such rich work of interpretation requires direct and intense interaction where the persons involved are perceived to be tied together by relationships based on a certain level of trust.

Everyone is essential [...] you need people to convey your message, to turn your ideas into material (Respondent a - Milan).

We classify ourselves as a group. We work as a team (Respondent d - Milan).

The second level refers to the interaction with other fashion designers. According to our interviewees these relationships tend to form a network which is the basis of an exchange system where information and support circulate. A problem with a textile producer, the search for a junior designer or for a better job are all issues which can be dealt with through face-to-face interaction with other designers.

It is only business, and it is done by talking to people. It is all networking: if you have a problem with the production, you can talk about it and maybe make new contacts, understand what is happening and so on (Respondent f - London).

In the network relationships are constantly renewed so that they can be resumed when opportunities for collaboration arise.

I had already worked for him a while ago, then we met again and he needed someone to design a new collection, it was a very important opportunity for me (Respondent b - Milan).

Designers report helping each other in different matters. Some designers have relationships with artists and emphasise the high level of reciprocal support which circulates in the creative quarters of the city where they work and live.

We hang out a lot with the guys from the lab next door because we understand each other: we give each other support both for practical things, for example taking deliveries when they are not in or helping each other with transport, but also for more important things, even financial issues (Respondent m - London).

All designers have a clear perception of the benefits deriving from their being part of networks.

This brings us to the third level of interaction in which fashion designers are involved, which refers to the fashion system as a whole. At this level

parties and fashion shows are the main catalysing events of interaction and sociality. Participation in these events is a must because by being present designers affirm their belonging to the system. It is also during these events that they gain visibility and recognition by the media; in this respect journalists play a crucial role as they legitimise the work of a designer, acknowledge the life style that his clothes are supposed to convey to the final consumer, and, more in general, interpret fashion for the general public. The direct interaction with journalists is here perceived as necessary in order to ensure the desired interpretation. Last, these events are increasingly the occasion for meeting people in show business who may provide further visibility.

You have to be there [...] you may meet some celebrity and ask them to wear your clothes for publicity (Respondent g - Milan).

Milanese designers tend to emphasise their relationships among themselves and within the fashion system, and stress the frequency with which the creative workers from different fashion houses interact with each other. They also have a very clear idea of the geography of this interaction: parties, events, specific restaurants and places where they gather for both social and professional reasons. Parties organised by sponsors, by the fashion press, by designers to celebrate a special occasion and, of course, fashion shows are all mentioned as important occasions to meet people, to consolidate already existing relationships and to forge new ones. Because contacts are so essential, a lot of attention is paid to the planning and attendance of these meetings: nothing is left to chance.

We all know each other, we see each other very often [...] everyone knows what is going on in other companies. We also go to the same places, to the same restaurants, so you end up meeting there too (Respondent q - Milan). You have to be there when things happen, you have to be seen there (Respondent g - Milan).

A number of London-based designers, on the other hand, report being more engaged in relationships with the world of art, specifically in the form of specific localised artistic communities; generally they have chosen a 'creative' area for their laboratories and they often live in the same area, thereby making contact with other artists particularly easy. These fashion designers tend to set themselves apart from the fashion world and to identify more with the art community; that is the locus where they seek belonging and recognition. These designers portray the fashion world as dominated by appearance and superficiality, as opposed to creativity, and refuse to be perceived as belonging to this world or to be identified with its values.

We keep in touch with many persons in this area, they are creative people too, but not fashion designers [...] we don't go to parties or to places where

other fashion designers go (Respondent m - London).

The fashion world is superficial, I don't like it (Respondent j - London).

Many of the people I meet are artists [...] and it may happen that they want to wear our creations, and give us publicity this way. We like the fact that artists wear our hats (Respondent n - London).

Finally, in the interviews the relationship with creativity was explored. Contrary to the prevailing view in the relevant literature, the focus of interaction among designers is more on business than on creativity. On the one hand, most of them, especially in Milan, are keen to underplay the creative content of their work and to emphasise the business-related aspects and even the routine character of their job. In particular a lot of time seems to be occupied by decisions related to the quality of details such as the choice of seams, linings or buttons, the combination of accessories, and so on.

My job is pure business (Respondent a - Milan).

You must not think that we spend the whole day with coloured pencils in our hands: [our job] is less creative than that. We spend hours working on the wearability of a sleeve, or meeting suppliers, and so on (Respondent q - Milan).

On the other hand, the sphere of creativity is described as an individual and private area which should be kept separate from business; the birth of new ideas is a solitary activity, as the fashion designer works alone when drawing and putting new ideas to paper. But this is not to say that the creative process is not a collective and creative undertaking; quite the contrary – there is a high level of interaction with the staff in the fashion labs who must transform the idea contained in a drawing into a material object. As they perceive the collective nature of the creative process, designers show appreciation for the contribution of their staff to the creative and original character of their final product.

No, we never talk about our drawings [with other designers]. Even if you know that one is working on the fifties, he would never show his sketches, we all work alone when drawing (Respondent e - London).

I am on my own when drawing, but then I work with the staff: they are essential once the model is drawn, they put my ideas into practice (Respondent f - Milan).

Outside the laboratories, however, the interaction with other fashion designers does not concern the production of ideas or the creative content of their work. For some designers what is important for the nourishment of creativity is interaction with other creative workers, mainly artists but also architects or designers; particularly in London, these fashion designers claim to have close relationships with artists and/or to consider themselves



artists. These relationships are sustained by frequent face-to-face interactions and are perceived as conducive to enhanced creativity. The resulting need for proximity is seen as the main reason for living and/or working in a specific neighbourhood where different creative workers are present.

I often show him [a neighbour, painter] my drawings of clothes, and he does the same with his sketches for his paintings. We often talk about colour or shape, it helps us find new ideas or further develop the ones we have already. [...] I have many friends here. It is a sort of community. This area is very nice, it's very creative. A famous painter lives just around the corner, and another artist lives above me. There is a mix of many different things; I think the relevant thing is having all sorts of people around you, many of whom are artists. It's a very exciting area (Respondent i - London).

Many of the people I meet are artists (Respondent n - London).

My work is more like that of an artist than a fashion designer. I create unique works of art that, of course, can also be worn [...] I know many people who live in this neighbourhood, many painters live here [an industrial building remodelled into lofts and laboratories], there is a sort of artistic movement here (Respondent j - London).

## 5. Designers and the city

Patterns of interaction, emphasis on creativity and the relationship with the city are different in the two cities. In particular the relationship with the city and its role vis-à-vis creative work seems to point in two divergent directions. In both cities fashion designers are well aware of the importance of the city as a stimulus for their creative work; without prompting all interviewees repeatedly refer to art galleries, to museums and exhibitions, to the mix and diversity of people in the streets, to open-air markets, to the buildings and their aesthetic qualities as potential sources which provide inspiration for their work, new ideas and novel innovative directions to explore. In London designers show appreciation for all forms of inputs which they reportedly receive from the city; in particular, open-air markets, such as Portobello or Spitalfields, are mentioned as important parts/events of the city in this respect.

I often go window shopping during my lunch break, especially for vintage clothing; and every Friday we go to the market [in Portobello Road]. Many fashion designers go there, you can find lots of strange and old things there, and you meet people (Respondent c - London).

In sharp contrast with their London colleagues, Milanese designers never mentioned the city in this respect and complain emphatically about the lack of stimuli in their home town. One of our interviewee went so far as to say:

Milan is uninviting, there is nothing to do, it's not a city, it doesn't offer anything (Respondent b - Milan).

Precisely because they value those urban stimuli on the one hand, and on the other perceive the city as lacking in cultural events, interesting exhibitions and contemporary art in particular, Milanese designers mention their frequent travels abroad, mainly to other fashion capitals, as the means through which they fulfil the need to nourish their creativity. This need to go elsewhere for inputs is recognised by the Milanese fashion houses which are keen to assign travel allowances and to facilitate the acquisition of inputs, for example, by recruiting fashion students to do research on urban-wear in other cities.

Secondly, designers' connections with the art world in the city are different. In both cities, more and more fashion houses are main sponsors of art exhibitions and establish dedicated venues for the presentation of their collections but also as spaces for culture where cross-fertilisation between fashion and art is said to occur. All designers report an increase in the number of events and venues where art and fashion blend, as it is increasingly common to present collections in art galleries or to make short movies or to use experimental art for the promotion of collections. Also, music and multimedia and visual arts are used to communicate the emotions that a particular brand is supposed to produce. Here again, however, our interviewees paint two different pictures. While London designers refer to stable and ongoing exchanges and collaboration with artists, Milanese designers see their connections with the arts as mere experiments and isolated episodes which fail to consolidate into stable relationships between the two worlds. The venues established by the big names of the fashion industry, such as *Fondazione Trussardi* or *Fondazione Prada*, are portrayed as effective in bolstering the image of the respective brand but much less so in providing space for artistic production, innovation and creativity.

Several culprits are identified with regard to this problematic relationship between the city of Milan and its creative communities. Local institutions are said to pay little attention to the promotion of creativity and innovation. Despite the relevance of the fashion industry to the city's economy, the local government is seen as completely indifferent, if not hostile, and its cultural policy is perceived as being peculiarly blind to the needs of this industry. The city's inability to support the fashion industry is considered damaging in particular to young, innovative designers who face almost insurmountable obstacles in their effort to gain visibility. In the words of a Milanese designer:

The costs [of organising a fashion show] are enormous for young designers, so much so that they often cannot afford them. The local government should support them financially or at least guarantee that there will be media coverage. Unfortunately none of this ever happens (Respondent 1 – Milan).

Moreover, local institutions are seen as resistant to change; examples are offered when opportunities were not seized and possible improve-

ments were not made. The difference with London cannot be more striking: in different parts of our interviews London designers mentioned the support of public and private institutions, in terms of competitions or prizes and dedicated funds available for innovative projects; the support of retail brands is specifically sought for these actions. Within the framework of cultural policies connecting the world of fashion to the world of art, young professionals are given opportunities to take part in collective shows with high visibility vis-à-vis the international press.

Secondly, dedicated institutions such as the Italian Chamber of Fashion, which has its headquarters in Milan, have proven to be ineffective in promoting a creative environment. None of our Milanese interviewees feel fully represented by this institution: the Chamber is described as dominated by the big names in the city fashion systems, and as such poorly attentive or unresponsive to the demand for innovation and to the interests of innovative young designers. An interviewee recalls that during one of the last editions of the fashion week, the Chamber could not find a date to schedule an event organised by the magazine *Vogue Italy* to promote young fashion designers. The event was eventually scheduled the same day of the biggest shows and consequently failed to provide international visibility to the participants. But this is reported only as one of many examples demonstrating the reasons for the negative opinion shared by all designers<sup>5</sup>.

The next fashion show will not be in Milan, but in Paris: there is more visibility there (Respondent e - Milan).

Third, the 'big names' are also called to account because their behaviour has, as an unintended consequence, an adverse effect on creativity in the city. The main fashion houses increasingly tend to hire young professionals who are foreign nationals, mainly from London and Paris. To this end they have come to entertain on-going relationships with the best fashion schools in these cities; they are often invited to attend the end-of-year shows presenting the work of graduating students, the best of whom are offered work. No relationships of this kind are maintained with Milanese fashion schools, which are never mentioned in the interviews as institutions to be in touch with as potential source of new talent.

Not only do they prefer to look for young professionals in French or English schools, but they are also particularly keen to collaborate with foreign fashion universities (for example, in writing or organising conferences and workshops) because these connections give them more visibility than that provided by Italian or Milanese institutions.

<sup>5</sup> This negative evaluation is shared also by Anne Wintour, editor of *Vogue America*, who accused the Italian Fashion Chamber of being in a state of paralysis (Maltese 2007).

Finally, one asset is recognised to Milan: the high level of craft skills present in the city, as a result of the specific trajectory that the development of the fashion industry has taken. It is because of these skills that Milanese fashion is of excellent quality and fashion cannot be elsewhere in Italy but in Milan. The designers are perfectly aware that the reason to be in Milan is not the participation in a environment of creativity but the acquisition of those skills.

I came to Milan with the intention of working here for a short while but then I understood I had to stay longer to learn to do my job well. It is not enough to be creative, you must also have the skills to do things well. Schools do not always teach you this but in Milan everyone is very highly skilled and professional (Respondent q - Milan).

What is presented during the fashion shows in Milan does not represent creativity, but the industry. The clothes are perfectly made and this is why fashion is in Milan (Respondent e - Milan).

## 6. Discussion

Our interviews prove the importance of developing and maintaining social relations for fashion designers. It is by being connected with other people in the field that they do business, solve problems and acquire information, visibility and recognition as they build their careers. Through social relations, trust is built and collaboration is fostered. As they need to be connected in order to function successfully in their profession, time and energy are constantly invested in networking, in seeing each other and being seen in the 'right' places and events.

Is face-to-face interaction important for creativity and innovation as well? Here the picture is less clear-cut. In London, sociality and creativity are more intertwined: some of the designers there are part of artistic communities which not only transcend the fashion industry but also provide a different venue for creative exchange, mutual recognition and support. Because being part of an artistic community is important, proximity assumes a greater role for designers working in this city. In point of fact, designers who emphasise the creative side of their work tend to portray creativity as the result of interaction with other creative workers, whether designers at large or artists. Conversely, designers who underplay the creative content of their work tend to portray creativity as the outcome of individual activity produced in isolation. For this last group sociality is more a medium for business than for creativity: all Milanese designers stressed the instrumental role of social relations for doing business and being successful in their profession; they do not see creativity and innovation as their paramount concern.

The maps we presented provide the basis for the following conclusions. First, they confirm – if proof were still needed – that the fashion industry,

like all cultural industries, needs a central location in cities, for all the reasons already discussed in the relevant literature. Second, the fashion industry needs special places in the central city; when complemented with qualitative materials, the maps allow us to state that fashion houses are located in specific quarters within the city core. Particularly for the quarters established in the last two or three decades, high accessibility, high quality of the built environment, a certain social mix and alternative, bohemian atmosphere are the main characteristics of these places. Third, when complemented with our interviews the maps indicate, at least in London, that creativity has a clear spatial dimension. In this city we found a very high concentration of fashion houses in specific clusters; this high density implies close proximity and consequently a high potential for face-to-face interaction and building relationships of exchange, support and trust. From the interviews we know that these conditions are necessary but not sufficient for creativity to be developed, as evidenced in Milan where these conditions are met but creativity is lacking. It is also necessary that other creative workers be there, in addition to the fashion designers. It is the diversity of creative workers, when these are highly packed into limited space, that facilitates creativity. Milan, by contrast, seems to be with proximity but without creativity; our data, however, is very limited and we need to see, for example, if a larger sample might define the clusters better or point to a more widely dispersed pattern. We are left with the evidence of the interviews and the complaints about the lack of creativity in Milan.

The problem about creativity that our interviews pointed out is not new, nor is it unknown. Complaints regarding a perceived decrease in the creativity of the Milanese designer community, along with criticism about the lack of novelty and renewal, “always the same names and faces”, have been a constant refrain in the specialised press in recent years. It has been also suggested that creativity was never the main asset of Milanese fashion and that it ought not to be the ground on which the city competes. As argued by Morace:

[i]n the international fashion system, Milan will never be able to produce the freshness of bottom-up trends, nor the multiple inputs that emerge from cities which are laboratories of youth cultures. Milan will continue to follow its calling in producing, through on-going experimentation, a very measured and balanced style and elegance which is the defining character of Milan fashion (Morace 2002: 185).

According to our interviews with fashion experts, the fashion system in London has developed an increasing focus on innovation and creativity, while the fashion system in Milan has taken another route and focussed on product quality, choice and refinement of materials, and close examination of all stages of the assembly process to ensure excellence. It can be argued

that the two systems have carved out two different market niches in which they thrive. Data showing growth in turnover and profits of the main fashion houses in Milan may be taken as evidence that the system continues to perform successfully regardless of the alleged lack of creativity.

Questions about its capacity to reproduce itself over time remain relevant with regard to the reliance on foreign designers and the lack of integration between the fashion houses and the training schools, which are perceived as damaging to local assets. Italian designers transfer their know-how to young foreign designers who rarely stay in the city longer than the time necessary to complete their training; as temporary guests they tend to invest little in the local scene, which is also further impoverished by their leaving. Students of Milanese, or Italian, fashion schools have to struggle to find access to the local fashion system; as a result their potential for the development of the city's "creative field", in the Bourdieu's sense, remains largely unexploited. Moreover, the inclination of the main fashion houses to rely on foreign designers makes them less interested in the city as a creative field; it can be argued that as they become increasingly global actors, they tend to disengage from the local scene, have no interest in partnerships with local institutions and see little reason to invest locally to promote culture and creativity. If this is true, the alleged disengagement of such important actors will not be without impact on the vitality of the city.

From the point of view of the city, it is also true that Milan fashion shows, which twice a year used to be great events where the city spaces experienced the creative outcome of the social, cultural, and economic mix, are no longer so exciting and appealing. As a matter of fact, the shows are increasingly considered uninteresting by the international press: commenting on the 2007 spring edition, the *New York Times* complained that 228 fashion shows had been squeezed into seven days, adding that only about five were well worth seeing. Monopolized by the 'big names' and lacking new names and faces, the shows are of little interest from the point of view of creativity and originality. The result is that, in the words of Mariuccia Mandelli (alias Krizia), "For the first time in forty years the Milan fashion shows were deserted" (Maltese 2007). Facing increasing competition from the new entries – Tokyo, San Paolo, Los Angeles, Shanghai, Moscow, in Europe Barcelona and Berlin – and from the aggressive strategies of traditional fashion cities such as Paris and New York, Milan seems unable to renew its image (Corbellini 2006).

Creativity is, obviously, only one of the many variables that contribute to the success and competitiveness of the fashion industry, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess the relevance of the city's creativity for the future performance of the Milan fashion system. What is of interest is that the problems identified by the designers as having a negative effect on Milan's creativity have an impact and significance that go beyond the fashion system and are damaging the vitality of the city as a whole; it can be argued that what is missing or working poorly for the designers are the compo-

nents of a creative field which, if they were to function effectively, would be beneficial to the cultural economy of the city and the region as a whole. Milan is particularly lacking a cultural policy attentive to the nourishment of cultural clusters, as well as public and private institutions able to offer forthright encouragement and support for innovative artistic production.

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## Chapter 7

# Creative Entrepreneurialism: The role of urban public space in urban change in Dublin<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

Recent years have witnessed an overwhelming interest in the relationship between notions of 'creativity' and urban life amongst urban theorists, policy makers and practitioners alike (Storper and Scott 2006). For Richard Florida (2002, 2005), who has played a leading role in the promotion of the so-called creative city, the economic potential of cities is directly connected to their ability to attract and retain members of the 'creative class'. Central to this is a particular 'geographical imaginary' (Harvey 1973, 1996; McCann 2008), where urban space is seen as the backdrop for a form of socialisation, which is 'diverse', 'vibrant' and full of life, yet bereft of any forms of conflict. For Florida (2005: 167):

It makes sense to invest in the quality of place that attracts creative workers, and also enable the private sector to meet the amenity needs of this group by providing cafes and similar establishments. Members of the Creative Class prefer active, participatory forms of recreation and have come to expect them in urban centres.

In summary, only those places that structure and shape their city in a certain manner that is in keeping with what are seen to be the desires and preferences of the creative class will prosper. Following from the work of Peck (2005), this chapter examines the manner in which the ideals of the 'creative city', and, more particularly, the 'creative class' fit directly with

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper appeared under the title: "Evaluating the role of urban public space in Dublin's evolution as an entrepreneurial city", *Progress in Irish Urban Studies*, 4, 2008. The Author is very grateful to the Forum for Irish Urban Studies for their ongoing support in this research.

the shift from the 'Fordist' industrial city to that which is orientated towards a more services-based economy (Harvey, 1989a; Scott, 2008). As such, it is argued, that much of the creative city rhetoric is primarily driven by, and fully supportive of, a structural economic shift which involves 'selling the city' (Logan and Molotch 1987; Hall and Hubbard 1998; Griffiths 1998; Ward 2003). As summarised by Griffiths (1998: 41):

[a]ppplied to places, the language of marketing implies that places can take the form of (or be regarded as the equivalent of) commodities; that they are traded in a market-place and bought by consumers; and that they are designed with those consumers in mind.

Put simply, it is argued that the more recently emerging ideas relating to the 'creative city' support and add impetus to a strong entrepreneurial drive in the recent transformation of Dublin. Moreover, it is argued that Florida's (2002: 183) imaginary of "sidewalks, with dining tables, musicians, vendors, panhandlers, performers and plenty of passersby at all hours of the day and night..." is at best a superficial and simplistic representation of urban life, and in reality is more akin to an attempt to carefully order and choreograph the urban 'scene' towards the demands of high end consumption and an intolerance of un-programmed activities outside such demands (Zimmerman 2008; Vanolo this volume).

This shift from 'managerial' to 'entrepreneurial' modes of urban governance has been well documented elsewhere in relation to Dublin, and will therefore form the context but not the main focus of this chapter (see MacLaran and Williams 2003; Bartley 2007). However, while the more general transformation of Dublin – large-scale docklands renewal and the emergence of Temple Bar as a 'Cultural Quarter' – has involved an implicit re-making of urban public space, few commentators have highlighted the degree to which public space, or the wider public realm, has been central to its transformation. This paper sets out to place public space – its planning, design and management – at the centre of Dublin's drive to become a globalised city. Furthermore, it aims to show how particular notions of 'urban liveability' associated with the 'creative city' have emerged as a means of further supporting this change. Rather than seeing alterations to public space as being an outcome of broader physical, economic and social changes in the city, it is instead argued that these alterations to public space are central to, and drivers of, contemporary urban transformation. The paper will focus on three areas within the city. Two of these, O'Connell Street and Smithfield, have recently been subject to large-scale urban renewal projects under the Integrated Area Plan (IAP) mechanism. The third example will examine the manner in which a particular globalised urban ideal was used as a means of promoting a market-led urban change in the Liberties area. The paper will conclude with a brief discus-

sion of the continuing tensions within planning between the desire for 'iconographic differentiation' and 'environmental standardisation', along with the desire of 'social diversity' and 'social control'. By this, I am referring to the manner in which city authorities use particular buildings, sculptures and monuments as a means of marking their city out as being in some way 'different' to other cities, while at the same time attempting to promote public spaces which can be experienced in a similar way to other western cities; clean, safe and commercially orientated with an imbedded familiarity and legibility, yet promoting a 'social mix'.

As will be discussed throughout the paper, the relationship between the built environment, public space, and the wider 'image of the city' is carefully considered with regard to boosting and promoting Dublin's economy. Recent decades have witnessed a surge of interest in public space in the western city. Many commentators (Mitchell 2003; Low and Smith 2006) have noted the increased securitisation of urban space, which has loosely come to be known as the 'privatisation of public space'. This discourse has covered a broad range of topics, with some authors focusing on the manner in which 'culture' has been used as a means of transforming city centres into a pleasure ground or 'theme park' (Sorkin 1992; Zukin 1991; 1995), and others charting the associated clamp-down on particular activities – public drinking, begging, or 'loitering' in public space through numerous policing and security measures, including Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) and private security guards (Atkinson 2003; Mitchell 2003; Raco 2003). The scene is becoming a familiar one in western cities. The alterations range from large-scale dockland and waterfront renewal, such as the development of London's Canary Wharf and Barcelona's waterfront area (Meyer 1999; McNeill 1999) to the attraction of celebrity architects such as Frank Gehry or Daniel Libeskind to construct another 'icon' museum or gallery, in the hope of renewing the fortunes of a city or city area (see Sklair 2005). In this regard, Dublin has been little different to other cities. From a planning and design perspective much of this change has come under the umbrella of what might be loosely termed a 'European City' rhetoric. Although admirable in its shift from a strictly zoned city to a more loosely mixed-use form of urban space, this shift has also involved an overwhelming embracing of entrepreneurial measures as a means of achieving urban renewal (MacLaran and Williams 2003; Bartley and Treadwell Shine 2003). As will be discussed throughout this chapter, with particular reference to public space, one consequence of this is the promotion of surface image and commercial gain over and above use value.

It is possible to identify three distinct approaches to the delivery of urban regeneration in Dublin's city centre over the last two decades. The first of these, which can be summarised as the 'cultural approach', resulted in the regeneration of the Temple Bar area as Dublin's 'Cultural Quarter' (see Montgomery, 2003). The second approach involved the regeneration of the docklands area,

including the development of the Irish Financial Services Centre (IFSC) and the wider Docklands renewal (see Malone 1996; Bartley and Treadwell Shine 2003; MacLaran and Williams 2003; Moore 2008). Both of these approaches have involved the development of new forms of urban governance with the establishment of separate bodies to oversee development. Finally, there is the Integrated Area Plan (IAP) model which led to five new regeneration projects including the implementation of the already existing Historic Area Rejuvenation Project (HARP) (1996) in the Markets' area of north inner-Dublin and the recent alterations to central Dublin's O'Connell Street.

## 2. Smithfield Square and O'Connell Street

Launched in 1996 and 1998 respectively, the HARP and O'Connell Street IAP proposed vast alterations to the physical fabric of much of Dublin's north inner city<sup>2</sup>. Public space became a focal point for each of these plans. O'Connell Street, widely considered to be Dublin's, if not Ireland's, 'main street' was deemed to be in a poor state both from a physical and social perspective. As indicated by the original IAP document (Dublin Corporation 1998: 45),

[n]othing short of a redefinition of the existing use culture in O'Connell Street and its environs is considered necessary if the street is to respond to its role as Main Street of the capital and of the country.

The alterations, in a physical sense, involved the widening of the footpaths, replacement and standardisation of street furniture, replacement of trees and, most prominently, the selection of a replacement monument for the site formerly occupied by Nelson's Pillar. This was opened to an international competition, which was eventually won by Ian Ritchie's *Spire of Dublin*. The Spire, which is a 120 metre pole standing on the O'Connell Street – Henry Street/Earl Street axis was to become a symbol of Dublin for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (fig. 1) –.

The focus of the HARP (to the west of the O'Connell Street IAP area) was on both the social and economic rejuvenation of the area. As with O'Connell Street, the transformation of the public domain became a central feature of HARP:

The presentation of the public domain is critical: it is that part of the city which everyone can and does experience. The quality and presentation of

<sup>2</sup> Although not originally an Integrated Area Plan (IAP), the HARP became designated as such under the Urban Renewal Act 1998 (Part 7) (Government of Ireland 1998). As outlined in the 1998 Act, Integrated Area Plans outline: "(a) the social and economic renewal, on a sustainable basis, of the area to which the plan relates, and (b) improvements in the physical environment of that area". For further reading on the planning context of Integrated Area Plans, see Bartley 2007.

the public domain will play a decisive part in deciding the area's ability to attract and hold onto passersby as customers, residents and investors (McDonnell 1996: 28).

The long-established Smithfield Square became a central focus in the HARP IAP. As envisioned by Dick Gleeson, Dublin City Planner;

The urban space at Smithfield is the flagship space for the city after 2000. Apart from developing the character of the space itself through an international design competition, the objective is to attract a strong mix of cultural, commercial and specialist uses which will animate the space and ensure that the architecture in which they are housed responds to the civic dignity of the public square (Gleeson 1999: 52).

The alterations to Smithfield Square were therefore seen as shifting the focal point of the centre of Dublin westward and attempting to create a new focal point for the city in an already established inner area. The main work carried out by the City Council was in the re-paving of the square, which had been in use as a surface carpark throughout the previous decades. The finished square retained some of the older cobble, along with introducing new elements, such as a line of large gas-burning lamps lining the west side of the Square. As set out in the brief, the remainder of the Square was left as an open plaza so as to be suitable for official events.

Fig. 1 – *Spire of Dublin*



Photo by Author, 2007

Fig. 2 – *Smithfield Square*



Photo by Author, 2007

As much as surrounding land use may come to define the social environment of urban space, physical alterations by a particular public or quasi-public body within the public domain are often directly aimed at altering that particular land use with the overall target of changing the social and cultural reality of that space. For example, as pointed out by a representative of Dublin City Council with reference to the changes made to the public realm of O'Connell Street:

I think if we get a big destination on the Carlton site and it becomes a destination for people from all over the city and maybe from outside the city..., on the other side of the street for example, or up or down from the site will also begin to go up, as it becomes more attractive, you will want, if you've got a business, to be located close to this main destination. And therefore rents will begin to go up, and maybe the quality of the uses will go up in tandem with that, so the market will drive the quality of the uses up. So we'd hope in the long term to get better quality uses in, and some of them will be cafes and restaurants that will be allowed to spill out (I-1, Dublin City Council)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing, Dublin City Council were assessing a planning application for Euro 1.25 Billion project for the 'Carlton Site', which includes a public square and a 'park in the sky' by developers Chartered Land (McDonald 2008).

In this example it can be seen that the upgrading of the physical space of the public realm is being used as a means of encouraging inward investment in the area. This will serve to alter the surrounding land-use and drive up ground rents which in turn, it is believed, alters the dominant social reality of the public realm to one orientated towards commercial use. Such logic can be further highlighted in the case of Smithfield. As indicated by another Dublin City Council representative:

If you view the kind of plan in some ways as being a very broad based public private partnership, we had public moneys, assisted by EU, intervening in the public realm, and we were kind of basically investing in the area to give confidence to private investors that the area was changing. So we were going to do our thing in Smithfield, we were going to do our thing in, say, Wolfe Tone [Square], well not so much Wolfetone..., well I suppose you could relate it to say what we were doing in O'Connell Street. We were investing as a public authority in these areas that were run down, upgrading the public realm, so as the private investor that was coming in..., or, to entice the private investor, would give them confidence that they should invest their money (I-2, Dublin City Council).

The alterations made to spaces such as Smithfield can be directly linked to a desire to attract future investment into the area within the property sector. In the Smithfield example, this has become evidenced by the redevelopment of its entire west side in recent years as Smithfield Market, which is a mixed-use scheme of offices and apartments. In this regard, the alterations to the physical fabric of public space is carried out as a means of boosting investment, which in turn, it is hoped, alters the social reality of public space.

This point can be examined further by looking at the connection between particular definitions of 'heritage' and what is deemed to be acceptable in terms of land use and culture; what is deemed to 'fit in' with the area's aesthetic value. Following the IAP of 1998, there have been three further developments each aimed at influencing the day-to-day life of O'Connell Street. The first of these is the designation of O'Connell Street as an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) (Dublin City Council 2001). Closely connected to this is the introduction of the Area of Special Planning Control<sup>4</sup>. An area can only be designated as an Area of Special Planning Control (SPC) once it is already designated as an ACA. As such, the ACA designation can be used as a vehicle for the implementation of the SPC Scheme. As a consequence, the 'heritage' value of the area becomes directly

<sup>4</sup> Areas of Special Planning Control were introduced under the Planning and Development Act 2000 as a means of promoting a specific use-policy that is 'in keeping' with the perceived architectural importance of a particular area (Government of Ireland 2000). Of the five Architectural Conservation Areas under the remit of Dublin City Council, three are also Areas of Special Planning Control. The other two are outside what might be considered the City Centre.

intertwined with the desired land use in the area and, by an inferred logic, the social structure of the public domain. For example, as stated in the O'Connell Street SPC Scheme:

[...] certain land uses were identified that physically detract from the architectural, historic and civic character of the area. These uses were classified as fast food outlets, amusement arcades, convenience stores and ground floor office uses including some financial services (referred hereinafter as non-desirable uses). Market forces will largely determine the survival of these uses on the street. In this regard, it is anticipated that the more economically marginal of these non desirable uses will voluntarily move away from the principal thoroughfare to the secondary streets as key major projects are completed and private investment comes on stream. It is also predicted that the attraction of new higher-order uses to the street will increase the range and mix of uses and 'dilute' the impact of the remaining non-desirable uses (Dublin City Council 2003: 13).

Further to these schemes, and in response to increased pressure from various suburban centres, the businesses within the city centre have formulated numerous methods of promoting the city centre as a shopping destination. These have included particular marketing schemes, such as the *Dublin: Make the City Yours* campaign which was launched by the Dublin City Business Association in 2006. Of particular note, however, is the introduction of legislation allowing for the introduction of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)<sup>5</sup> in Dublin's City Centre. BIDs, which have their origin in North America, allow for the implementation of various activities, such as street-cleaning, graffiti removal and the promotion of tourism activities through the provision of wardens and various marketing strategies, additional to the services already provided for by the local authority (see Low and Smith 2006). These services are funded by local businesses as a means of promoting the area. The first of these was introduced in the wider city centre area around O'Connell Street and Grafton Street. Although not directly promoted through the legislation, the BIDs allow for a privatised control of socialisation in public space, in that they aim to remove aspects of urban life that are seen as 'unsafe' or outside the expected reality of a business district. The homepage of a website dedicated to the promotion of BIDs in Dublin (Dublinbids 2008) sets out the underlying philosophy of this initiative:

Dublin is a cosmopolitan and sophisticated city. It is a city we can be proud of with its new Luas, Liffey Boardwalk and rejuvenated O'Connell Street it looks better than ever. Now imagine a Dublin city with landscaped streets,

<sup>5</sup> The *Local Government Business Improvement Districts Act* was introduced in 2006 (Government of Ireland 2006).



without chewing gum, without graffiti, with no overflowing rubbish bins, with no broken paths, with no drunken revellers on our streets, no dilapidated buildings, a city with a welcoming and embracing environment, with hospitality wardens helping people, family friendly facilities, special community care and amenity projects... Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) will transform our Capital City to reach its full potential.

The business interests in terms of O'Connell Street are further highlighted by the expectations of the Dublin City Business Association, who have been directly involved in promoting the implementation of the BID model:

[...] all business people want is they want clean streets, they want the refuse collected, and they want the customers to walk down the street safely, that's all they want. It's no big deal. If you're paying the kind of money that my guys are paying, they're entitled to it (I-10, representative, Dublin City Business Association 2006).

The physical and social reality of the area can, therefore, be seen to be directly related to the interests of the surrounding businesses.

### 3. Projecting the future

In the examples above, different bodies used alterations in urban space as a means of attracting future investment into the area and of controlling public space according to a particular vision of the desirable use and users of that public space. The following example illustrates the manner in which a planning body can use the media to help 're-brand' a specific area within central Dublin as a means of attracting future investment. In April 2006, a number of articles appeared in *The Irish Times* newspaper highlighting a new "€2.6bn plan for a cultural 'SoHo' quarter in Liberties" (O'Brien 2006). According to the articles, the plan was inspired by the SoHo area in New York due to the location of the Liberties and Coombe area to the south of Heuston train station<sup>6</sup>. As highlighted by the article, the area currently contains a wide variety of employers including the long established Guinness Brewery, the Coombe hospital and newer creative-knowledge industries such as architects firms and digital media firms. One of the articles, an editorial, focused on the ambitious plan for the area:

Branding is everywhere these days, even for areas, and while 'SoHo' seems a peculiar choice for Dublin's south-west inner city – derived from its indus-

<sup>6</sup> The name was taken from the SoHo area of New York. I would like to thank Dr. Michael Punch for pointing out the fact that South of Heuston station would actually be SoHe! (For further discussion on the manner in which other cities have imitated the SoHo ideal, see Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008: 39-41).

trial heritage and the fact that it lies south of Heuston Station – there can be no dispute about the ambitious nature of Dublin City Council’s plans for the area (*The Irish Times* 2006)

The article went on to stress how this new area would try to learn from the mistakes of Temple Bar, “where pubs were permitted to predominate...” and also highlighted the importance of families in the area (*The Irish Times* 2006)<sup>7</sup>. The newspaper articles were based on information gathered at a media day, which was held in Dublin City Council offices in April 2006. For the purposes of the day, a briefing sheet was prepared outlining what was to be discussed. As with much of the media coverage of the plan, very little was said of the existing social structure of this area. Instead, the discussion focused on the aesthetic qualities of the area and how they resembled parts of both New York and Chicago:

Like New York’s SoHo [*sic*], the Thomas Street area has a strong industrial heritage, eclectic character, cobbled streets, robust brick industrial buildings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wandering around this area today you could be in New York or Chicago, [...] the scale and dramatic nature of the industrial buildings is untypically Dublin (Dublin City Council 2006).

In this manner, the aesthetic qualities of the area were seen as central to altering the everyday life of the place (fig. 3). As highlighted by the media notes with reference to New York’s Soho:

This began the renewal of the area building on the character of the past that it is now one of the most fashionable and exciting parts of New York (overtaking Greenwich Village as this area could complement Temple Bar). Now it has museums, art galleries, great shopping and places to eat and a wonderful place to walk around and take in the drama of the city (Dublin City Council 2006).

For Dublin City Council, this industrial aesthetic is seen as key in the

[n]eed to get the leaders of fashion into the city core to make it fashionable/desirable for the middle classes; if they come, the others will follow and suburban mind-sets will be transformed... Only then will we get the full and final revaluing of core city and all the practical results of that (better policing for example) (Dublin City Council 2006).

In the end, despite the media attention and hype around the ‘SoHo’ idea, it turned out to be a marketing strategy with no specific plan behind it<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> While the role of the media in promoting the city-centre for upmarket consumption and gentrification is recognised, it is beyond the scope of this article to expand on it further here.

<sup>8</sup> Although not directly referred to above, the SoHo plan can be directly connected to the ‘creative class’ hypothesis associated with Richard Florida (2002), amongst others. The ambition

Fig. 3 – Guinness Factory, Dublin



Photo By Author, 2006

#### **4. Conclusion: The illusion of social life?**

The rest of this chapter will question some of the core elements of the transformation of urban public space in Dublin. Broadly speaking, the representation of public spaces can be seen as a reflection of the changing aspirations of the different bodies with official responsibility for urban change in Dublin. The ideal of such alterations is relatively straight forward yet remains largely hidden under the rhetoric of regeneration and rejuvenation. As such, the physical alterations to public space are undertaken in a manner that is attempting to boost investment, alter the market perception and, in turn, change the nature of use within public space. Moreover, such

of Dublin City Council to transform the Liberties into a Creative hub along the lines of that discussed in the SoHo promotion are also apparent in the current Draft Local Area Plan for the Liberties area (see Dublin City Council 2008).

changes have become widely accepted and naturalised as being representative of the form of ideal city and city-life amongst policy makers, planners and vested interest groups in terms of future planning strategies.

Although a shift to a more 'European City' could be commended in that it leads to a more environmentally sustainable pedestrian friendly city, it has gradually led to one that is largely dominated by a specific urban image associated with up-market consumption patterns and the tourist industry. In the various examples examined above, the image of the city is associated with a particular imagined social outcome. For example, in O'Connell Street, a particular ideal of 'heritage' is linked to a desired land use, which in turn it is hoped will change the 'culture' of the street. In the Smithfield example, it can be seen how a particular vision of city living has been imposed on an established area where it was assumed that Smithfield Square could become a focal point of the city for the 21<sup>st</sup> century while also attracting further investment<sup>9</sup>. In the example of the Liberties area, the post-industrial aesthetic is compared to gentrified areas of New York in a manner that foresees the up-scaling of the area for the middle-classes as though such spaces are destined for such particular futures due to their aesthetic attributes. From a purely economic perspective, the cumulative effects of this are based on a desire to use public space as a means of achieving higher land values, which in turn creates a desired use.

From a broader perspective, such changes highlight what Griffiths (1998: 56) refers to as a continued tension between an "imperative of differentiation" and an "imperative of uniformity" within urban planning and development. This can be expanded on in a manner that allows us to examine a four-way tension between the desire for both 'iconographic distinction' (differentiation) and 'environmental standardisation' (uniformity) along with the 'desire for social diversity' and 'social control'. On the one hand, this entails a constant urge to create distinctive icons that can be instantly recognisable, such as the Spire of Dublin (fig. 1). On the other hand, it involves creating spaces, which can be recognised as being in keeping with the image of the global city (converted historic warehouses, contemporary modernist dockland developments etc.) (fig. 4). For example, as pointed out by Tonkiss (2005: 89), in relation to the now transnational trend for the transformation of former lofts and warehousing:

[g]iven the common language of design and distinction, these are buildings that do not necessarily remind you which city you are living in. On one level this points to a new international style in urban domestic architecture – the SoHo effect, as it were, in its various translations.

<sup>9</sup> Although I do not have the space to expand upon this in this paper, the degree to which such an imposition is possible could be widely debated, and has been the subject of another strand of this wider research project.

Fig. 4 – *Converted mills, Grand Canal Dock, Dublin*



Photo by Author, 2008

Added to this is the tension caused by the desire to promote a form of 'social mix', one that is suitable for the consumer and tourist market and the promotion of particular patterns of development, while also maintaining social control. When brought together, the tendency towards 'iconographic distinction' and 'environmental standardisation' are easily reconcilable. A wider problem is caused by how planning promotes a particular social order (social control) while promoting a distinct social scene (diversity), which is believed to result from particular types of land-use, such as 'higher order retail'. The recently employed 'Street Ambassadors' with the Dublin Business Improvement District are directly illustrative of the measures being taken to control public space in the interests of con-

sumption. From the perspective of the day-to-day activities, the street ambassadors are in direct contact with both retailers and the Gardai about graffiti, and other forms of behaviour deemed inappropriate to the image of a city centre area.

From a promotional perspective, the aspiration to create instantly recognisable 'icons' which are of Dublin but are in keeping with the expectations of the global city, has been reflected in other proposals for Dublin's city centre in recent years. These include as yet unrealised plans by the Dublin Docklands Development Authority to construct a giant sculpture of a man in the river Liffey by *Angel of the North* artist Anthony Gormley, an eighty-meter-high cable-car running from the west of the city centre to the docklands, and the current construction of the docklands theatre on Grand Canal Dock by internationally renowned architect Daniel Libeskind, which will face the new Martha Schwartz designed Grand Canal Square<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, the recently published Local Area Plan (LAP) for the Liberties area, which has followed the media orientated SoHo idea is also directly infused with 'creative city' rhetoric as a means of promoting urban change. Moreover, it employs an instantly recognisable and predetermined 'geographical imaginary' when discussing the desired outcome of how many of its existing public spaces may change in the coming years:

This historic square at Newmarket has been reborn as a new city destination accommodating markets, events, performances and outdoor seating for its many cafés and restaurants. The organic food market occupies new premises facing the square, along with shops, artisans' workshops, galleries, a bar and micro brewery, it also has community arts and leisure facilities (Dublin City Council 2008: 21).

Such aspirations are directly reflective of the geographical imaginary presented by Florida (2002; 2005) in terms of promoting and attracting members of the creative class. What is more difficult is questioning why this form of prescribed form of social life has become so popular within planning policy and practice. One answer lies in the degree to which it can be easily adopted, repackaged according to context and, more importantly, presented as an ideal social space. As pointed out by McNeill (1999: 9), in reference to the transformation of Barcelona in recent years:

<sup>10</sup> Another example of Dublin's continued turn towards the promotion of spectacle as a key urban strategy was the announcement in early 2006 of a cable car to run along the quays, which was to be Dublin's answer to the London Eye, or the Eiffel Tower. In July 2007, Liffey Cable Cars Limited applied to be considered for 'fast-track planning' through the Irish Government's newly introduced Strategic Infrastructure Act. This was later turned down by An Bord Pleanála, who stated that it was not of strategic interest and should go through the normal planning procedure. According to various media reports, the planning department in Dublin City Council were receiving the plan with enthusiasm (Kelly 2008).

Instead of idealistic commitment to political and humanistic principle, they [Europe's reasonably affluent] are able to use their knowledge and education to consume the political heritage of place. And this political agenda has two dimensions: an openness to the idea of a New Europe, and a fondness for the – often related – notions of civilised life: cafe culture, modern art, long lunches, strolling. The European city.

When looked at in this manner, the promotion of such lifestyles fits in with an emerging international class (Sklair 2005) and their expectations about how place should be experienced. The recent inclusion of direct references to creative city rhetoric in planning documents in Dublin has given a further impetus to the wider entrepreneurial approach to which it has been orientated in recent years. On one level, the production and promotion of public space within Dublin's city centre, and the more recent shift towards the promotion of the 'creative city' can be seen primarily to suit "today's neoliberalized political-economic terrain" (Peck forthcoming: 2).

The pervasiveness of this vision of urban space has become a powerful aspect of urban change in recent years. In a recent article, Zukin (2009: 545) discusses the tensions between "building the corporate city and preserving the urban village." In the article she stresses how the urban village as an idealised form of social interaction at street level (see Jacobs 1961) has gradually morphed into an image of conspicuous consumption associated with boutique style shopping and pavement cafes. While not directly stated by Zukin (2009), these forms of social life are connected to the search for a so-called creative class, and the constant desire for upscaling, which itself is an important aspect of the promotion of a 'corporate city'. When viewed in this manner, and with particular reference to the Liberties example above, the differentiation of space as both an 'urban village' and that of the 'corporate city' are part of the same constant desire for the up-scaling of urban space. In all of this, however, what is not exactly clear is how those involved in planning and managing urban space perceive such control of public space to be a realistic possibility. Indeed, a major problem with such logic is the degree to which social space escapes the bounds imposed on it by the constant desire to seek a specific imaginary of consumption-led social-life at all costs.

The degree to which planning and investment can truly alter the public domain is often dependent on the intricacies of everyday life. As pointed out by Harvey (1989b: 204), with reference to the power of modern planning practice, "this does not mean that practices are determined by built form (no matter how hard planners may try); for they have the awkward habit of escaping their moorings in any fixed schema or representation". Although the powers of particular vested interests can be seen to exert their influence in a visible manner in urban space, the complexities of the social life of cities simply do not fit in with the imagined outcome of particular plans. It may

often prove impossible to set boundaries around what the social outcome of a particular urban space will be. Moreover, such questions become of greater note when presented with the limitations to achieving these forms of social life. For example, Smithfield Square is illustrative of the degree to which market forces are limited in promoting an ideal of urban space. Although originally perceived as a central space for officially orchestrated events, its existing social context as an 'urban neighbourhood' has limited the degree to which such activities could be promoted. Moreover, the surrounding retail outlets, which were envisaged to activate the street have remained largely empty since their construction in 2005. While the brochures promoting and marketing urban change may show coffee shops and smiling professionals, the reality is full of the intricacies of urban life, and all the forms that real diversity brings, both harsh and joyful. The current predisposition of planning practice to predetermined forms of 'diversity' and 'vibrancy', associated with the so-called creative class, as being both desired and inevitable is therefore questionable both from the perspective of social reality and how city life should be planned for.

This research has been kindly supported by funding through the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences through a Postgraduate Scholarship (2005-2007) along with funding from the Urban Europe Research and Training Network (2005-2006).

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