

# Artists in urban regeneration processes : use and abuse?<sup>1</sup>

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## Résumé

L'intérêt pour le rôle de la culture dans les stratégies de développement économique local s'est amplifié depuis les années 1980, tant parmi les chercheurs qu'au sein des cercles politiques. Plus récemment, on peut même parler d'une sorte de « fièvre culturelle » qui s'est emparée des politiques, et qui se traduit par une « compétition pour la culture » entre les villes à l'échelle mondiale. Cependant, la convergence salutaire entre la culture et l'économie n'est pas prouvée. La priorité des projets porte sur les enjeux économiques, alors que les impacts culturels sont souvent négligés. Le (re)développement urbain par la culture est un concept complexe et composite qui embrasse différentes dimensions, économiques, environnementales, sociales, culturelles et politiques. Les artistes, qui sont à la fois des initiateurs et des catalyseurs de développement local, sont ainsi « utilisés » pour l'amorçage de programmes de régénération, pour être ensuite souvent les oubliés de l'opération. Quel est donc alors le rôle des artistes dans ces processus de (re)développement urbain ? Sont-ils simplement « utilisés » ou « instrumentalisés » pour d'autres objectifs que ceux de la création artistique ? Ce papier vise à faire un panorama de ces questions, en présentant notamment plusieurs projets de régénération dans quatre villes européennes.

*Mots clefs* : artistes, industries culturelles, politiques culturelles, régénération urbaine

## INTRODUCTION

Interest in the role of culture within local economic development strategies has developed significantly both in academic and in policy-making circles since the 1980s. On an academic level, this is evident by increasing amounts of studies on the relationships between culture and economy, culture and urban development, culture and place, and the "creative city". The role of culture in urban development has raised attention from

## Abstract

Interest in the role of culture within local economic development strategies has developed significantly both in academic and in policy-making circles since the 1980s. In recent years, one could testify a sort of 'cultural fever' among policy-makers and 'cultural competition' among cities worldwide. However the benign convergence of culture and economy is no longer an uncontested issue. Economic priorities and impacts prevail, while cultural impacts are often neglected. Urban (re)development based on culture is a composite and complex concept, encompassing economic, environmental, social, cultural and political dimensions. In particular, artists who are initiator and catalyst of the local development process are 'used' to trigger the regeneration process and then often forgotten. What is at the end the role of the artists in urban (re)development processes? Are they only 'used' and 'instrumentalised' for other means rather than the artistic ones? Drawing on several re-development projects in four European cities, this paper offers an overview and reflection on these issues.

*Keywords* : artists, cultural industries, cultural policies, urban regeneration

a wide range of different disciplines, from economic geography to urban studies and regional economics, cultural studies, urban sociology, cultural economics and so on. On a policy-making level, an increasing number of reports and strategic documents on the impacts of cultural industries at local or national levels have been commissioned. Local and national governments have recognized the importance of culture in local development, promoting policies to reinforce the linkages between them in an attempt to

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increase possible benefits. Culture has gained its space in the economic agendas of policy makers. Urban cultural policy has become an increasingly significant component of economic and physical regeneration strategies in many European, North American and Australian cities, and also in New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, China as well as in less-developed countries.

In the European Union, culture has recently been targeted as one of the main pillars for economic development. After the first study on the economy of culture in Europe published by the European Commission in 2006 - KEA, *The Economy of Culture in Europe* - there has been widespread recognition of the role of culture and creativity for the competitiveness of the European Union in the context of the *Lisbon Agenda*. To further stress the strategic role of culture in local development, in May 2007 the European Commission approved an important strategy document on culture, entitled the *European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World*. The Agenda sets three objectives : (i) cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; (ii) culture as a catalyst for creativity - in line with the Lisbon strategy; and (iii) culture as a key component in international relations. In September 2007, the *First Cultural Forum for Europe* was held in Lisbon and two month later, the *Resolution on the European Agenda for Culture* was finally adopted by the Council of the European Union. The year 2008 has been chosen as the *European Year of Innovation and Creativity* and 2009 as the *European Year of Innovation and Creativity*. Furthermore, in April 2010 the European Commission published the *Green Paper - Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries*, the first ever European Commission paper on culture and creative industries which officially acknowledges the economic and social importance of the sector.

On an academic level, there is an agreement that cultural industries are making a significant contribution to the economy of places, increasingly extending their spatial presence and visibility in cities. They boost economic growth and employment and at the same time they also add to the quality of places (e.g. Bianchini *et al.*, 1988; Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993; Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Scott, 2006; Markusen, 2006). The cultural industries are considered as

a distinctive set of industry because of a complex articulation of culture and economy, the "art-commerce relation" (Ryan, 1992; Caves, 2000). The increasing economic importance of cultural industries can be attributed, at least partly, to the growing intertwinement of the domain of culture and the domain of economy in the contemporary society. Cultural products are increasing subjects to process of commodification while at the same time we can witness a process of culturalisation or aestheticisation of the economy (Lash and Urry, 1994; Scott, 1997). At the same time, as A.J. Scott (1997) argued, culture and place are intertwined, with a strict link between the cultural attribute of a place and the logic of a local production system. The cultural industries have strong place-bound characteristics as they rely on local production networks. Furthermore, they operate through a specific spatial logic and pattern : they are highly dependent upon each other's proximity, with a natural tendency towards clustering as this provides them with competitive advantages, flexible specialisation and increasing return effects, through economies of agglomeration and scope, creative exchange and networking (Scott, 2000).

However, the benign convergence of culture and economy is no longer an uncontested issue. M. Banks and J. O'Connor (2009) contend the need to engage critically with the simplistic scenario that supports creative industries as a "contradiction-free marriage of culture and economics". S. Galloway and S. Dunlop (2007) argue that while originally cultural industries were incorporated in cultural policy, today culture has been included within a creative industries agenda of economic policy and in the process the distinctive characteristics of culture (e.g. symbolic ideas and freedom of expression, market failure) have been obscured. Economic priorities have overcome the cultural ones. M. Banks and J. O'Connor (2009 : 366-367) contend the same apprehension when they argue that « *we might be entering a phase where the special and exceptional claims of the creative industries (as particular exponents and arbiters of art, culture and economic practise) may be coming to an end* ». Culture and economy are not in opposition, it's more a problem of complex articulation of cultural values on one side and commodity/market logics on the other. While J.

O'Connor (2009) and K. Oakley (2009) are critical of the emerging creativity and innovation policy discourse and question the extent to which this innovation-led policy offers a solution to the contradictions that underpin the creative industries, S. Cunningham (2009) opts for a model of creative industries policy precisely linked to the innovation discourse. J. Potts *et al.* (2008) develop a new definition of the creative industries in terms of "social network markets", an innovation system definition where the distinctive characteristics of the creative industries are not the non-market value but the fact that the environment of both their production and consumption is constituted by complex social networks. They argue for a shift in the policy from a top-down re-compensatory model of public support to a bottom-up model of experimental facilitation and innovation.

All these considerations raise important questions and have important policy implications. Theoretically, the "art-commerce relation" suggests that every intervention in the field should be both a cultural and an economic policy (O'Connor, 2007). But what happens in reality? Is the policy agenda leaning towards economic priorities forgetting about the cultural ones? And what is the role of the artists? Are they only "used" and "instrumentalised" for other means rather than the artistic ones? This paper is a review of the state of the art on these controversial questions. Drawing on several re-development projects in four European cities - Amsterdam, Birmingham, Milan and Helsinki -, this paper offers a critical overview and reflection on these issues. The empirical cases have been the objects of previous qualitative studies - including literature search, interviews and participant observations - which focused on culture and urban re-development<sup>2</sup>.

## **1. FROM CULTURE TO CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN URBAN (RE)DEVELOPMENT : WHAT PLACE FOR ARTISTS ?**

Since the mid-1980s many European, American and Australian cities facing the de-industrialisation process have increasingly used culture and urban cultural policies within urban regeneration and city marketing strategies. Huge investments were made in cultural infrastructure, in flagship projects and in major cultural events (e.g. festivals, the European Capital of Culture event, Olympics Game, etc.). The main aim was to diversify the local economic structure, to compensate for job losses in the manufacturing industry and to re-new the city image thus attracting tourists and new businesses. In addition to the need of adaptation to the social and economic transformations arisen from de-industrialisation process, the increasing use of culture in urban (re)development was also accelerated and facilitated by several processes and factors : (i) the decentralisation processes at the national level, (ii) the increasing deregulation and privatisation, (iii) the raise in disposable income and leisure time, (iv) the emergence of a growing, more differentiated and sophisticated cultural demand. Since the 1990s, a gradual reduction in the level of public funding to culture has contributed to further strengthen the justifications for state cultural support : arguments on the economic relevance of culture became common in the policy discourse, the desire to harness cultural production to the economic agenda became stronger, and culture and economy were increasingly interlinked. The development of policies to stimulate the links between culture and the economy, to increase the economic impacts of culture and/or to promote the cultural and creative industries started at the city level.

<sup>2</sup> The empirical cases are based on previous studies done by the author between 2002 and 2010. The literature search included policy documents, strategies, publications and reports from city governments, cultural and economic departments, development agencies and other networks. The interviews were carried out with key people from the city governments and cultural sectors. All the cities have been visited. The case of Amsterdam is based on content analysis, participant observation and an interview with the curator of RED A.i.R. – Redlight Art done in 2010. The case of Amsterdam is also partly based on the project *The impacts of culture on the Economic Development of Cities* done by the author together with A.P. Russo and J. van der Borg in 2005. The cases of Birmingham, Milan and Helsinki are partly based on the research *Proeftuinen – Cultuur als hefboom voor de locale economie. De cases Helsinki, Manchester, Lille, Milaan en Birmingham* done in 2008 by the author together with R.C. Kloosterman, E.S. Stegmeijer and J. Haijen (2009). The case of Milan is also based on the MSc thesis done by the author in 2004. The cases of Birmingham and Helsinki are also partly based on the research *The Student City : Strategic Planning for Student Communities in EU Cities* done in 2002 by the author together with A.P. Russo and L. van den Berg (2003).

### 1.1. The increasing use of culture in urban (re) development

In 1987, for example, the Municipality of Rotterdam issued the policy memorandum *Revitalising Rotterdam*. The document backs policies developed in that period in order to increase urban quality of life and to improve city image through huge investments in cultural infrastructure and cultural events, urban design and public space. Another well-known example is the case of Glasgow, a city severely hit by the decline of the manufacturing industry during the recessions of the 1970s and early 1980s. The city was able to gain substantial benefits from a cultural upgrading strategy including environmental improvement initiatives, the opening of the prestigious *Burrell Collection* in 1983, the launch of the successful *Glasgow's Miles Better* advertising campaign and the organisation of a coherent annual programme of cultural festivals. Glasgow's efforts culminated in its nomination as European City of Culture in 1990, the first city to use the event for urban regeneration purposes.

Urban cultural policies were mainly used as an instrument for economic purposes, to construct images of new post-fordist, consumption-oriented cities and to attract tourists, businesses, investments and residents. An increasing number of cities invested heavily in promoting their historical and cultural resources and making them accessible to residents and tourists. Encouraging the tourist industry was perceived as an engine for economic regeneration and the transition towards a post-industrial city. The growth of the cultural tourism can be explained as a result of social and economic trends such as the increasing amount of leisure time and disposable income per capita, the increasing convergence between culture and economy, and the contradictory tendencies towards globalization and glocalization. These shifts have been responsible for the transfer of the logics of efficiency and rationality inside the cultural sector, showing how a better organization of the cultural institutions could increase the number of visitors, thus the income and the level of the cultural supply. Therefore the increasing tourist demand for cultural activities and the need of the cultural activities to attract a larger audience have resulted to converge.

The book by F. Bianchini and M. Parkinson (1993), *Cultural policy and urban regeneration : the West European experience*, still offers one of the most comprehensive overviews of the use of culture in European cities in the 1980s and the consequent changes in cultural policy making. In his examination of the historical development of urban cultural policy in Europe, F. Bianchini (1993, 1999) refers to this period as "the age of city marketing". The use of culture was linked to an aggressive redefinition of city images and identities, increasing competition among cities and substantial changes in urban governance, a shift from managerialism to entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989) with growing partnerships between the public and the private sectors.

### 1.2. From culture to cultural industries

A new terminology entered urban policy documents : « cultural industries ». Influenced by one of its consultant, Nicholas Garnham, the Greater London Council (GLC, created in 1981 and abolished by the Thatcher government in 1986) published in 1984 the document *Cultural Industries Strategies*. Furthermore it created the Cultural Industries Unit within its Industrial Development Agency in order to stimulate local economic development through support and promotion of small cultural industries strongly localised within the urban area. The activities carried out by the GLC are often referred to as one of the most interesting experiments in the development of strategies for cultural industries. Following the example of London, many cities in the UK established cultural industries strategies, using them as a rationale to develop initiatives such as planning "cultural quarters" and "cultural districts". In particular, the city of Manchester endorsed an explicit strategy focused on cultural production activities as growth sectors for the local economy and the community, catalyst for socio-economic recovery and city branding. The Northern Quarter in Manchester is one of the most interesting examples of cultural quarter based on mixed use : housing, cultural consumption and cultural production spaces. On account of low rental costs, the central location and the opportunity to exploit some disused warehouses, alternative and small cultural businesses began to re-colonise the area. In 1993, the Eastside Association made up of small businesses in the area and

Manchester City Council jointly commissioned a development strategy for the area - *Northern Quarter Regeneration Study* (Urbanistics, 1995). By the mid 1990s the area became an official part of the new urban policy of the city (Blanchard, 1999) and the label NQ emerged as a new public brand name to identify the area. Following the *Cultural Industries Development Service Feasibility Study* (1997), the City Council established, in 2000, the Cultural Industries Development Service (CIDS) as a non-profit limited company to assist the development of creative industries in Manchester.

### 1.3. From cultural industries to creative clusters

In 1998, in the *cultural policy documents* of the UK's New Labour party, the cultural industries term was substituted with a new one : the "creative industries". An inter-departmental Creative Industries Taskforce was created in 1997 and the Department of National Heritage was transformed into the new Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Its first report, the *Creative Industries Mapping Document* (DCMS, 1998), included a definition for the creative industries that is still very popular although in some circles, also criticised. Since then, almost every national government has adopted its own definition of cultural and creative industries, broadening or narrowing the range of activities part of the sector. Creative industries mapping documents and studies on the impacts of culture at national and local level have been and are made worldwide. In particular M. Banks and J. O'Connor (2009) draw attention on the continuous debate on how to define, classify and measure the creative industries, the lack of strategic and comprehensive national and regional policies, a global narrative which involves consent on their meaning irrespective of the different national contexts, an utopianisation of the creative labour not acknowledging its precariousness (Gill and Pratt, 2008), and the already mentioned contradiction-free marriage of culture and economics.

Another fashionable debate about the cultural and creative industries deals with the development of economic clusters. The idea behind the development of cultural clusters is that cultural industries have strong place-bound characteris-

tics, relying on local production networks. They are typically labour-intensive; their organisation model is rather the network interaction of micro and small producers than the supply-chain hierarchy of fordist industries. The nature of these industries induces them to cluster in space. They are highly dependent upon each other's proximity, as this provides them with competitive advantages through creative exchange and networking (Scott, 2000). Because of the difficulty of substituting capital for labour, it is difficult for them to achieve significant economies of scale; hence economic advantage must be sought in economies of scope. These are generated through spatial proximity, which induces them to share production facilities, draw on the same audience and engage in collaborative marketing. Cultural clusters are usually developed and initiated by local or regional governments in form of public-private partnerships, although national authorities also recognise the importance of promoting and fostering the development of such clusters. Examples of cultural clusters include the pioneer Cultural Industries Quarter in Sheffield, the Northern Quarter in Manchester and the Arabianranta in Helsinki. Cultural and creative clusters policies are often part of the national industrial strategy aimed at the creation of innovation or competitive clusters (Braun and Lavanga, 2007). The main trend emerging at national level is the development of creative clusters fostering innovation through strong links between art, new media and technology, education and businesses. In addition, mixed-use (mix of property, activities, employment sectors, temporal use, production-consumption) helps to develop a more vibrant and sustainable model of creative cluster. The diversity of the environment is indeed very important (Jacobs, 1961). There should be a diversity of (vacant) buildings on hand in the area, and flexible spaces within the buildings, which can be used for a variety of functions - ranging from the accommodation of restaurants, cafés and institutions such as museums to working spaces for artists and exhibition space, and in which living and working can be combined (Lavanga et al., 2008). Nevertheless, creativity cannot be copied from a city and imported into another, « but must be organically developed through the complex interwea-

ving of relations of production, work and social life in specific urban contexts » (Scott, 2006 : 11).

#### 1.4. Creative cities and the creative class

To give a further impulse to the creative industries debate, in 2002 the bestseller book *The Rise of the Creative Class* by Richard Florida was published, causing a sort of creativity fever among policy-makers and increasing "cultural competition" among cities. According to R. Florida (2002), the so called creative class is strongly oriented to large cities and regions that offer a variety of economic opportunities, a stimulating environment and amenities for every possible lifestyle. Rather than being driven exclusively by companies, economic growth is powered by creative people who prefer places that are tolerant, diverse and open to new ideas. Then the formula for successful cities is derived : to generate innovation and to stimulate economic growth a city should possess the 3 Ts - technology, talent and tolerance. Florida's theory has been very receptive worldwide thanks to his easily readable and not strictly academic book, his large figures on the size of the creative class in US and his "touring" across the world. The result is that many cities today want to attract the "creative class" and want to become "creative cities", copying and pasting each other policies - a trend labelled by J. Peck (2005) as "fast policy". Numerous critiques have been written concerning Florida's theories. For the sake of this paper, we will focus only on the most relevant ones. First of all the definition of the "creative class" has been and continues to be highly criticized. A. Markusen (2006) argues that the creative class concept lacks a group identity and that not all the occupations are inherently creative. The creative class and the creative city discourse is characterised by « *fuzziness of conception, weakness of evidence, and political silence* » (Markusen, 2006 : 1924). Secondly, Florida's theory offers no causal mechanism and suffers from a circular logic (Peck, 2005). Florida's theory relies on the idea that, once the creative class has been attracted to a place, then « *its innate entrepreneurial and cultural energies will automatically be activated in the construction of a vibrant local economy... The mere presence of "creative people" is certainly not enough to sustain urban creativity over long periods of time. Creativity needs to be mobilized and channelled for it to emerge in practical forms of learning and inno-*

*vation* » (Scott, 2006 : 11).

#### 1.5. The artists : their cultural and economic value in the urban renaissance

In her study of artists as one element of the creative class, A. Markusen (2006) concludes that artists are not simply attracted to amenities as R. Florida (2002) argues, but their locational choices are shaped by investment decisions that cities and regions make in artistic space and organizations. This often happens in old industrial buildings where free or cheap spaces and other facilities are available to artists. Most of the time the artists themselves are the initiators, they find and occupy an old industrial building ; other times cities and/or private investors realise the potential of an old industrial building, start a re-development process and try to attract artists. However in both cases the risk of gentrification is high. The enhancement of the quality and price of the real estate properties could indeed chase away the very social forces that are behind the regeneration process. This may cause the regeneration cycle to become sterile and the benefits for artists and the community in general to die down fast. Evidence of such processes have been widely examined by S. Zukin (1982), who charts the rise of the loft market in New York as being one unwittingly created by resident artists and subsequently exploited by the real estate sector. This argument has been reiterated by D. Ley (2003 : 2540) « *The result is the displacement of artists to cheaper districts. Eventually, they could be displaced from the city altogether - a precedent that has been occurring for more than a decade in New York* ». According to D. Ley (1996), artists are the "advancing or colonizing arm" of the middle classes. These considerations raise important issues for policy-making as they clearly demonstrate the inadequacies of unrestrained property-led regeneration strategies. S. Cameron and J. Coaffee (2005 : 39) argue that « *the main driver of gentrification is "public policy" which seeks to use "positive" gentrification as an engine of urban renaissance. This involves the use of public art and cultural facilities as a promoter of regeneration and associated gentrification* ». In her analysis of artists housing programs in US, E. Strom (2010 : 376) arrived to the same conclusion when listing the reasons why artists are important in urban regeneration projects, at least in the eyes of the city officials : « *Artists are*

*uniquely vital actors in this process : their low incomes make them legitimate recipients of public subsidy, but their high status and links to the middle and upper classes give them the power to add significant value to the spaces they occupy* ». This significant value is not only cultural, but mostly economic.

The use of artists as an element and catalyst of re-development strategies masks serious dilemmas regarding strategic choices in economic, cultural and community development. Short-term economic returns are often privileged by policy-makers. Economic feasibility is limited as an argument for cultural regeneration, as it does not take into account cultural impacts and legacies. Urban development based on culture is a composite and complex concept, encompassing economic, environmental, social, cultural, symbolic and political dimensions. When the cultural dimensions are not considered, artists are "abused" and do not benefit completely from the process, as we can see in the empirical cases of Amsterdam, Birmingham, Milan and Helsinki.

## **2. ARTISTS IN URBAN REGENERATION PROCESSES : FOUR EUROPEAN CASE STUDIES**

The trend to reconvert old industrial buildings and brown fields into creative ones has become increasingly widespread around the world. Old industrial buildings can offer the perfect location for cultural industries, thanks to their identity and symbolic value and to the externalities that can rise from spatial clustering. These types of buildings, usually located in the inner urban rings, are abandoned and somewhat derelict, which provides potential for a whole range of different adaptations, e.g. large rooms with high ceilings for large-scale sculptures, isolated buildings for noise-generating artists such as musicians (Lavanga *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, these redundant complexes are usually readily available, easily accessible and perhaps even more important, affordable. They are re-used as museums, art galleries, artists' studios, centres for design and new media activities, cinemas, performing spaces and along with them as cafes, clubs and restaurants, stimulating the regeneration of the whole area where they are located. Some examples of re-used buildings include the

TATE Modern (a former power station) in London and the Baltic Museum (a former flour mill) in Newcastle-Gateshead. Santral Istanbul is an ambitious project to preserve and regenerate the first electricity power plant within the Ottoman Empire, that will host a museum for contemporary arts, an energy museum, university facilities and spaces for artists-in-residence.

In that point, we describe four European case studies in order to analyse the role of artists in (re)development projects. Each example is a kind of "ideal type" in the complex relation between artists and urban regeneration policies. In Birmingham, mixed used spaces have been developed in the Custard Factory where one can find workspaces for artist studios, galleries, cultural industries, along with cafes and shops. This case is a perfect example of a bottom-up, private initiative that then became embraced by the public sector in its regeneration plans. In Milan on the contrary, La Stecca degli Artigiani, an old industrial building renovated by artists and cultural associations, has been demolished by the Municipality to allow a redevelopment project where culture has no central role. In the case of Arabianranta in Helsinki, artists were directly involved in a Brownfield/waterfront redevelopment plan since the beginning. Public authority leverage was used in a flexible and creative way to build an Art and Design City, promoting the development of a cultural and creative cluster. But the starting point of our analysis is the provocative case of the Redlight project in Amsterdam, where artists were explicitly instrumentalised to renew the image of a historical district connected with 'sex industry', drugs and criminality.

### **2.1. The temporary 'use' of artists in the Redlight Amsterdam projects**

The case of Amsterdam is a small example of a regeneration strategy where artists are explicitly used for a short period of time to renew the image of an area. As part of the urban regeneration of the Red Light District, the Municipality of Amsterdam has initiated a series of projects – Redlight Fashion, Redlight Design and RED A.i.R.-Redlight Art – where artists (fashion designers, jewellery designers, visual artists respectively) are invited to occupy the vacant brothels<sup>3</sup> and use them as their studios for a temporary

period of time (Serino, 2009). The artists are explicitly placed behind the windows of former red light districts as part of a gentrification process initiated by the local government. However, some differences can be highlighted in the use of the brothels according to the types of artists and in the cultural impacts of the regeneration strategy according to the different artistic sub-disciplines. Fashion designers and jewellery designers basically used the spaces as both studio and shop to both create and sell their products. They were "used" by the municipality but they also benefited from it. They had the opportunity to work and sell their products in a free studio/shop in the centre of Amsterdam, in the most famous part of the Red Light District, enjoying the chance to get known nationally and internationally (e.g. during the Amsterdam International Fashion Week). Visual artists instead used the spaces only as their studio. Furthermore being located not in the so touristic Red Light District but in a more residential area in the centre, they were less visible and probably less part of the gentrification process. However, by questioning their role within the strategies of the local government they were able to genuinely contribute to regeneration process while keeping their autonomous position. In all the cases, however, the artists had to leave the studios and no other places were provided. They have been clearly 'used', however they have also benefited from the initiative in different ways. The Redlight project in Amsterdam is in fact a provocative case. The case studies discussed in the next paragraphs instead refer to larger urban regeneration projects where artists played a role as agent of change, as initiators and/or an integral part of the process.

## **2.2. Artists and the re-use of redundant spaces and buildings : the Custard factory in Birmingham**

The Custard Factory is located in the Digbeth area in Birmingham, an old industrial quarter abandoned in the mid 1980s. The area was home to the custard factory buildings owned by Alfred Bird and Sons Ltd. After attending a symposium on the future (re)development plans of the City of Birmingham in 1988, Bennie Gray - a London

real estate developer of creative spaces - saw the potential of the abandoned estate and acquired it. At the beginning the very artists approached him about the possibility to temporarily use the spaces. The central location, the cheap premises, the identity and features of the industrial place certainly played a role. A successful period of restoration and marketing of the place for creative businesses has followed (Porter and Barber, 2007). The project was called Custard Factory, and it attracted numerous artists and cultural industries. The initial development consisted of a community of five hundred artists and small creative businesses, as well as a broad range of facilities such as theatre, café, antique shops, meeting rooms, dance studios, holistic therapy rooms, art galleries, bars and nightclubs.

The second phase, completed in 2002, targeted new media sectors and comprises one hundred offices/studios, galleries, restaurants and stores. The Custard Factory is currently run by the Society for the Promotion of Artistic and Creative Enterprise (SPACE), a non-profit organization created and owned by Bennie Gray. Grants from the City of Birmingham, the national regeneration agency English Partnership, the regional development agency Advantage West Midlands and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) have also been an important factor in the success of the Custard Factory. Several other projects have been initiated at and near the Custard Factory quarter. Some of these are the Custard Factory Creative Hub, which provides business support to creative entrepreneurs ; the Custard Factory Theatre Project, which supplies training and technical facilities and theatre space to both creative firms and local residents; the Screen Hub West Midlands which provides firms within the movie industry with specific facilities, business support and business units. The impact of the Custard Factory reaches beyond the edges of the complex itself. In recent years, the larger neighbourhood has welcomed many stores, bars and restaurants that target the young and trendy audiences. The favourable image boost has lured two important educational institutes in the field of media to locate in the area : the Art and Digital Media centre of South Birmingham College

<sup>3</sup>Business establishments for prostitution.



and VIVID Media. The Custard Factory is a perfect example of a bottom-up, private initiative that then became embraced by the public sector in its regeneration plans. However, L. Porter and A. Barber (2007) urge the City Council to develop policies and initiatives to foster a stronger organic process of dynamism and change in order to reduce the risk of gentrification and the risk that it evolves into a mono-functional area. They argue that the City Council approach is a narrow one focusing mostly on economic priorities without any engagement with the art and cultural communities in the area, apart from the appointment of an Eastside Art Ambassador in December 2004.

### **2.3. The Stecca degli Artigiani versus the Porta Nuova in Milan : two visions of what a cultural district must be**

The Stecca degli Artigiani (the Craftsmen's Stick) was an old industrial building located in Milan within the Isola quarter and re-used by local artisans, artists and cultural associations. It has been recently demolished by the Municipality in order to allow the Porta Nuova (New Gate) re-development project. The Porta Nuova development plan implies the renovation of a central brownfield, empty and derelict space into an area combining houses, offices, education facilities, fashion, art and design activities. According to the plan approved in May 2007, Porta Nuova is the new name of the regeneration project known as Città della Moda (Fashion City). Porta Nuova involves three adjacent areas located in the northern part of the city of Milan : Garibaldi-Repubblica, Isola Lunetta and Varesine.

In 1999 indeed, the Municipality of Milan, together with the private developer Hines Italia, launched the planning process Fashion City for the regeneration of the area Garibaldi-Repubblica. The name Fashion City came from the Trussardi family (one of the oldest and traditional family-run fashion companies settled in Milan) which was pressing the Municipality for the creation of an area entirely devoted to fashion. The Fashion City, with its shops, restaurants, clubs would have served to animate a space that otherwise would have run a high risk of being desert and desolated at night and during the week-ends. However, since the beginning, the Milanese

fashion stakeholders, or at least a big number of them (e.g. Armani, Prada, Dolce&Gabbana), were disagreeing on the need for such a project. So, the reluctance of the Milanese fashion world combined with the intrinsic contradiction of a mono-functional development and the resistance from the Isola quarter residents certainly played a role in the abandonment of the Fashion City project.

However, due to its central location and excellent accessibility, the whole area has been recognized of strategic importance to re-orient the polycentric development of Milan. In the past decades the three areas (Garibaldi-Repubblica, Isola Lunetta and Varesine) have been the object of different and separated redevelopment plans which have been now reunited under one big brand, Porta Nuova, and a multinational real estate developer, Hines Italia. According to the new plan, Porta Nuova will host green, residential, commercial and cultural areas connected through cycling and pedestrian paths. An institutional area has been planned, which will host the new buildings of the Lombardy Region and Milan City Council departments. Of the three areas involved in the Porta Nuova project, the Isola quarter needs a special attention as it is the one which has been and will be affected the most. The Isola quarter took the name by its isolated position ("isola" means island), separated from the city centre by railway tracks and by an urban empty space - the Garibaldi-Repubblica and Varesine areas. This morphology gave the quarter a specific internal, physical and relational structure. The whole image is one of a multifunctional quarter, traditional and innovative at the same time, rich of relations and vitality, a place open to diverse and multiple identities, in continuous transformation (Cognetti, 2007). In 2000, the Association Cantieri Isola was born to respond to the launch of the project Fashion City by the Municipality of Milan. The Association is a group of residents, shopkeepers of the area, representatives of other associations and institutions working in social, environmental, artistic, architectural and urban research fields. The Association has been acting as a privileged observatory to the policies underpinned to the Fashion City project, trying to find possible opportunities for a dialogue and mediation

between the large project and the dimensions which affect the Isola quarter. The Association was located inside the Stecca degli Artigiani. It was the main actor in renewing the Stecca degli Artigiani building and the flanking two small parks, and then in allocating the available space to new born cultural associations such as Isola TV, an independent and self-produced TV channel, and the Isola Art Center, the first centre for contemporary art in Milan.

At the end of 2007, the Stecca has been completely demolished; all the associations based inside had to move and find new locations. The abandonment of the Stecca by the institutions meant its end. There is still no agreement on the cultu-

ral development of the area, neither from the public or the private sector. Artists and culture more in general were not meant to be an integral part of the plan. The interests of a big developer prevail; offices and expensive residences have the priority. The area Isola Lunetta hosts now the Fondazione Catella<sup>4</sup>, and should host in the future the Art Incubator (Nuova Stecca degli Artigiani) and the Isola Community Centre. The Repubblica-Garibaldi area should host a fashion school and the museum Modam.

The case of Milan illustrate the instrumentalization of creative industries for political purposes in an agreement with private actors. The speculative vision of the redevelopment project prevail

Table 1 : Two visions of urban regeneration in Milan. Artists' use or creative industries ?

	<b>Isola Quarter Project (First step)</b>	<b>Porta Nuova Development Project (Second step)</b>
<b>Origins</b>	Resistance from the Isola Quarter residents to the Città della Moda project (1999) ; for dialogue and mediation	Città della Moda project (1999) : a top down urban project from the municipality together with a private developer based on an idea of the Trussardi family
<b>Actors</b>	Association of residents, shopkeepers, artists, social and environmental associations, based in the Stecca degli Artigiani, an old industrial building	Porta Nuova project : the municipality and a multinational private developer (2007)
<b>Functional Profile of the quarter</b>	Traditional multifunctional quarter ; artists, local artisans, commerce	Expensive residences, offices, education, commercial and cultural areas
<b>Profile of population</b>	Diverse and multiple identities ; social and community life	Creative class and upper middle class
<b>Cultural and creative activities</b>	Artists, independent TV channel, cultural associations  Isola Art Center, the first centre for contemporary art in Milan, in the Stecca degli Artigiani	Fashion and Design activities Museum Modam  Fashion school  Art Incubator («Nuova» Stecca degli Artigiani)
<b>A vision of architecture and urban design</b>	Associations and institutions working in architectural and urban research fields	Studies of best practices in architecture and urban planning by a private foundation linked to the private developer
<b>The urban sign</b>	Stecca degli Artigiani, old industrial building demolished by the municipality in 2007	High residential buildings by renown architects

led when the organic artists-led regeneration process was denied by a top-down approach of what a creative and cultural district must be (table 1).

#### **2.4. Artists and cultural cluster strategies : Arabianranta in Helsinki**

Arabianranta is an Art and Design City and a Brownfield/waterfront redevelopment that combines art, design and technology with business, education and community development. The area has specific roots in arts and design as it is the home of the Arabia Ltd. Ceramics Company since 1873. The economic recession during the first half of the 1990s was an important incentive for the redevelopment of this industrial area. In the midst of this recession, Arabianranta was selected as an area in which new economic opportunities should be stimulated, while at the same time the redevelopment of this district should provide a solution to the housing shortage in the city of Helsinki (Heiskanen, 2002; Kangasoja *et al.*, 2007). The aim was to create a pilot area for local information technology services and for supporting a rising creative economy (Penanen-Rebeiro-Hargrave *et al.*, 2003). This was meant to be achieved by developing a cluster of culture, design and media activities while focusing on the integration of education and R&D within these sectors. In addition, residences and workspaces for students, creative and knowledge workers were developed. The Arabianranta project built upon the impulse provided by the relocation of the University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH) into the area in 1986. The project was enabled by a decision taken in 1995 amongst key land-owners and interest groups, to form a single public-private development company : Art and Design City Helsinki Ltd. The partnership included the City of Helsinki, the Ministry of Industry, the UIAH, the Helsinki Pop and Jazz Conservatory, the Hackman Ltd (owner of the main site and holder of the design rights to the former Arabia Company), two other property owners and a number of construction companies. The programmes and funding of the Ministry of Trade and Industry were fundamental for the development of projects and institu-

tions in Arabianranta. The University of Art and Design Helsinki has a key role in the development of the area. Among the UIAH initiatives are the Media Centre Lume (the largest centre for audio-visual research and development in the Nordic countries), the Finnish Design Management Institute, the Designium - the New Centre of Innovation in Design (built in close collaboration between the UIAH and other university institutions, polytechnics, businesses and public organisations) and the Media Lab. Thus, several actors – ranging from the public to the private sector – played an important role in the redevelopment of Arabianranta. Today Arabianranta is home to 10 000 people, 5000 workers, 6000 students, and hundreds of art works in the public spaces or within the buildings. The role of artists is also very strong in the area. As a prerequisite for the redevelopment of Arabianranta, the local government set a condition : 1-2 per cent of the construction works in the area has to be reserved for art. Artists therefore were involved in the planning processes from the beginning. In addition, the Arabia Museum and Gallery and the Aralis Library Centre with three specialised art libraries and one art gallery further support the development of the visual arts in the area. This approach not only has the aim to make the area more attractive but also to foster artistic growth and artistic collaboration and to shape and strengthen the identity of Arabianranta.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The empirical cases revealed that there is not a straightforward answer to the question whether artists are used and instrumentalised for other means rather than the artistic ones. In some cases economic priorities prevailed, in some other there is a more balanced relation between economic and cultural dimensions. In the case of Amsterdam, artists have been explicitly ‘used’ for a short period of time to renew the image of an area connected with sex, drugs and criminality. However artists have also benefited from the initiative in different ways according to

<sup>4</sup>The Foundation Catella is a private foundation recently set up for the study and analysis of best practices in architecture and urban planning. It is dedicated to the real estate developer Riccardo Catella, the father of Manfredi Catella, managing director of Hines Italia. In June 2007 the Info Point Porta Nuova has been opened within the Fondazione Catella.

their artistic sub-disciplines. In the cases of Birmingham and Milan a more organic artists-led regeneration process was started, however with different results. In the case of Birmingham, the City Council integrated the Custard Factory in its regeneration plans, while in the case of Milan, the City Council demolished the Stecca degli Artigiani.

The Custard Factory is a private initiative that has been further developed by the creative industries themselves, and supported by the local, regional, national and European governments. Even though public support has been important, the private initiative and early involvement of artists and creative entrepreneurs have been decisive to the success. The example of Porta Nuova in Milan can only be labelled as a good example of interaction between different levels of public administrative bodies and private actors within the Italian boundaries. The speculative part of the redevelopment project prevails as well as the instrumentalization for political purposes. What happened in the Isola Quarter is not an exception in Milan : top-down and sectoral approaches, real estate speculation, suppression of grass-roots initiatives are the rule. Finally, in the case of Arabianranta in Helsinki, artists were directly involved in the planning processes since the beginning. The case of Arabianranta shows

how public authority leverage can be used in a flexible and creative way. By collaborating with other stakeholders, a fruitful urban regeneration plan has been developed, which can not be characterized as a top-down approach nor can it be called a bottom-up process.

Policy-makers should keep in mind that urban re-development based on culture is a complex process which raises sustainability issues. Economic feasibility alone is not enough as an argument for urban cultural regeneration. It is necessary to find a balance in the nature of investments so that all the pillars of sustainable development are maintained and enhanced : the economic, the environmental, the social and the cultural ones. Local governments can give artists vacant city-owned buildings or they can run arts centres themselves, or they can help developing artists' studios, combining economic development, tourism and art management policies. Finally, further studies are needed to evaluate the short-term and long-term impacts on the artists themselves of the "use" of culture in local development. Differentiating among artistic sub-disciplines and adopting a long-term longitudinal analysis could be helpful in the future to shed light on the changes in the locational patterns and careers of artists across time.

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