INTRODUCTION: CREATIVE DISTRICTS AROUND THE WORLD

EDITORS INTRODUCTION

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Creativity has been a "buzz" word that seems to characterise the first years of the young 21st century. Although arts and culture have been playing a role in the life and development of cities for centuries, it has been only recently that studies have been considering the role of culture and, in a broader sense, creativity in the life and development of the city. Traditionally, arts and culture were mainly accessible for the elite, restricted to specific cultural locations. Creativity has also long been an important element of the image of various cities (for example, arts and bohemian life are embedded in the image of Paris). However, the more recent development of culture and creativity in cities has been a more diffuse, organic process, sometimes motivated by decision makers and sometimes stimulated by people living in these quarters. Creative districts are increasingly an integral part of the city and they are at the heart of the artistic life, often side by side with bohemian and alternative lifestyles.

Bairro Alto, in the heart of Lisbon, is a district full of history, stories, struggles, creations and bohemia. In December 2013, this historic district celebrated its 500th anniversary and provided the catalyst for creating a snapshot of what is happening in creative districts around the world. Having undergone many historical, cultural and social changes, Bairro Alto has been redeveloping recently as a hub for night life, art and creativity in Lisbon. The Bairro becomes then an example of a variety of development processes, features and roles that entail diverse consequences in different places around the world.

The case studies in this volume show that the core presence of creativity in some districts is not new, but has developed along many different trajectories over time. In each era of development, different stories are given a voice, and each phase of development has its own timeline. Creativity becomes part of an organic process of

developing the district, being born, or implanted, and sometimes dying out. Some creative districts stem from medieval city quarters, others emerged in the post-industrial era or were part of the reconstruction of cities in the post-World War II. Some districts are more traditionally orientated towards culture (cultural districts with museums and galleries), while others are mostly connected to 'popular culture', hubs for alternative lifestyles.

Despite the variety of creative district forms and development trajectories, there are some common features. The life of the creative district is anchored in different creative businesses and is highly embedded in the local culture. Creative districts are often linked to alternative lifestyles and subcultures and increasingly they are becoming the place where creative networks are shaped.

The co-existence of these features, along with their diversity, means that these districts are in a permanent state of flux, which is part of their organic development. Although this allows for great flexibility, it also means that, on the one hand, it is difficult to identify particular development stages and, on the other hand, people (artists, inhabitants, visitors) also experience constant adaptive processes. In what we could call the 'pop-up' era, the phenomena observable in these districts are themselves temporary and ongoing. However, this is not simply a superficial or insignificant process. The impacts in the quarters themselves, but also in the cities as a whole, are significant and entail different aspects such as a sense of community or gentrification. Creative districts often provide the space and time in which people come together to experiment with new forms of relationality in 'trusting spaces', allowing people to form new, creative bonds within the network society.

We can often see in different cases that these districts are originally in poor developed areas of cities, sometimes run-down and desolate. Some of these districts are seen as problems that need to be solved (e.g. Surry Hills, Sydney). Often close to the urban centres, ateliers, bars, restaurants and other facilities attracted by cheap rents and whose core activity is based on short term fashions and trends. Often these processes are at the edge of or beyond the law, as in the case of squatting actions for example (e.g. the ruin bars in Budapest). Precariousness is also a keyword when understanding the relationship of these districts to place but also to business and employment. Nothing seems to be fixed or permanent and risks are involved. As Anett

K. Tóth, Barbara Keszei and Andrea Dúll state, it is a 'romance of transition', both for people and space. Gentrification often emerges, and although it is often felt that this can threaten the creative district itself, it can be argued that gentrification is after all part of the ongoing process of changes inherent to urban development. Independently of how the creativity became a major feature of the district, whether via grassroots activism or policy-induced, the need for a deeper reflection on urban planning and policy making in these districts is evident.

In the present publication, we present a collection of cases from creative districts in different parts of the world, both as an ebook and as an interactive platform. This publication aims at giving visibility to creative districts that gained a new life from the creative dynamics of the cities around them. The aim is to provide an analytical resource for researchers and students, rather than to provide an exhaustive list of all the creative districts in the world. Each case presented here demonstrates salient features of the dynamic landscape of global creativity and the places where this 'lands' in cities. But there are many others. Our journey around the creative districts of the world starts in Bairro Alto and continues towards East, against the clock, travelling through different continents (Europe, Africa, Asia, Australasia, America).

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