

The socio-spatial relation of innovative artistic production in Piedmont and Liguria
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Summary

Over the years creativity has been shown as a central concept for urban regeneration strategies and economic development plans. Arts and culture have become important drivers for economic growth and social inclusion, and several local policymakers have been attracted by culture-led urban development to stimulate places attractiveness. After almost thirty years of applications, the “creative city” and “creative class” concepts have been deeply studied, revealing interesting results as well as unwelcome surprises. In the meantime, “supporters” of this development scheme looked at opportunities represented by real-estate operations in urban renewals of abandoned and/or underused areas, with growing attention to self-entrepreneurial dynamics in cities’ labour market, more and more oriented to be characterized by creative people in action. In order to take advantage of these opportunities two factors should be ensured: the presence of investments of big companies available to settle their headquarters in the cities and, second, the existence of people attracted by the vibrant and positive environment in which they could live and work. On the other hand, strong critiques have been issued toward neoliberal dynamics embodied by the conceptual framework of the culture-led urban development schemes. If on the one hand a rhetoric has been developed to promote coolness and liveability of places and richness and freedom for workers, on the other hand scholars put their attention on gentrification processes, spatial inequalities, gender disparities and so on. Influenced by past industrial development schemes, economic and urban policies have been often developed referring to “creative clusters” and “cultural districts” as the main spatial unit of analysis, but several artistic practices work not only at the local scale involving actors within networks at different spatial levels. In this sense, our point of view about the innovative production process could be shifted, no more bounded in place but developed within a “space” that is generated through relations.

The aim of this research is the analysis of the spatiality of social relations in contemporary innovative arts and cultural organizations and the pathways in which, through individual networks, they can exchange knowledge, information, and services with actors located in some other place. In this way, we could stress the mainstream conception of culture-led urban development with three objectives. First, we will observe independent cultural production as an emerging cultural system, i.e. those ecologies of creative workers and producers living in cities operating outside of (but more and more in collaboration with) institutional or market-oriented levels, taking into consideration their spaces and conditions. Second, we will investigate how rhizomatic and viral spaces such as networks, rather than fixed clusters, could influence the exchange of knowledge and resources in contemporary innovative cultural production. Considered the transient and fluid nature of artistic practices, we support the axiom that networks are a more appropriate spatial context within which creative projects can be practiced.

Finally, adopting a micro-spatial theoretical approach, we will develop focus groups, surveys, and interviews with the aim of studying art innovators via social network analysis and individual network analysis methodologies. With the first attempt, we will reconstruct dynamics working inside a specific group of cultural organizations (winner of Bando ORA! – the first grant-in-aid in Italy oriented to support innovative artistic productions). Secondly, we rebuilt individual narratives for each actor, underlying nature and contents of the relations that have taken place inside the team-work.

In this way, we are able to evaluate how geographical and cognitive proximity works inside innovative art production. In addition, several cultural organizations based in Birmingham (UK) have been interviewed to match findings with the Piedmont and Liguria context as a control measure of the research results.