# Culture and Urban Regeneration. The Role of Cultural Investment for Community Development and Organization of Urban Space

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*Abstract*: The opportunity of observing the long-standing cultural events (performing arts festival in particular), processes and strategies for regeneration through cultural programs (European Cultural Capitals) along with the evaluation of their success in terms of social and cultural regeneration, make the subject of the present paper work, which introduce you to theoretical aspects of a broader research, which are part of my PhD thesis. The practical part of the my work will follow the case study of the city of Sibiu, which was appointed in 2007 by the European Commission, European Capital of Culture, to which I participated as an employee of the Office for coordination of the program (coordinating projects).

*Key-Words:* Urban regeneration; Cultural programs, Cultural events, Community development; Social Innovation; Creativity; Participation; Civic involvement; Cultural tourism; City branding.

## 1 Introduction

For the purpose of my research, **"culture or cultural dimension"** includes the performing arts (with an extension in the creative industries), events, and cultural-artistic programs, cultural infrastructure, cultural tourism, with emphasis on cultural events and programs. Culture generates social cohesion and creates the foundations for the local and regional regeneration. In an age in which the rules of the social environment is changing in the middle of the game without warning and without a coherent, perceivable model, the effects of this status quo do not have a unifying role for those who are in confusion, instead it will divide and separate them, perpetuating a state of insecurity, fear of the future and identity dissipation. Employment relationships, where creativity, as a premise in the past for the "work well done", was displaced with the "routine work" characterized by futile in the industrial era, self-perpetuating this decline [1].

**"Regeneration"** is defined as renewal, revitalization or transformation of a place or community being a solution to decline, or degeneration. Regeneration is both a process and an effect and it may have physical, economic, social or cultural dimension and they can co-exist in the common way.

## 2 Role and implications of cultural investments in urban area

"The assessment that I make at first glance is that if regeneration programs do not have a cultural dimension, they will not work. Communities must be animated, they need hope and must release their creative spirit [2]".

As suggested in the quote above, communities are in need of hope – some would say "trust" [3] – related to the regeneration effects and processes, especially since this instrumental process is controlled in large part from "outside". We can analyze this feeling from two perspectives: culture is a critical aspect in the mediation and defining the need of a community, as the development is planned and takes shape throughout the culture "potential" to mobilize and animate. This should lead to participation and to challenge the regeneration from the part of the residents and other beneficiaries of the area. Alternatively, the regeneration based on culture can be used to divert attention from the power manifested upon the urban space in the form of projects and scenarios required in communities that go through the process of regeneration. According to Klunzman [4]: "Every story related to regeneration begins with poetry and ends with the real estate sector". How cultural facilities and programs contribute positively to the

regeneration zones and residential districts, subject to the economic decline and physical but also the many social problems-unemployment, lack of education, crime, lack of housing stock, poor amenities – has become a central concern of governments and of the structures involved in regeneration. We can see this in the duration of this phenomenon, the repetition in the postindustrial era and in the demand for supporting this process that comes from the cities and cultural organizations.

Culture (both capital and cultural policy) is instrumental (through the knowledge of specific types of events, projects, management of the organizations and participatory involvement of citizens) in the definition of a new format of the community, in such a way that it can promote a targeted use of social planning. The increased level of knowledge and relationships between individuals and groups, formed as a result of participation in cultural activities, social inclusion and the building of skills offered by a cultural process are fundamental aspects to improve the living conditions and increase the level of well-being in areas where cultural projects are implemented, promoting therefore processes of sustainable development in urban areas. In the most recent decades, it has become customary to talk about the enormous changes that have occurred in the cities, in particular those in the West, fueled by the globalization process changes. Since the 1970s, these areas, characterized by an advanced socio-economic development, have experienced a massive re-drawing of sectors but also of the whole economic system. Economy, infrastructure, natural areas underwent processes of renewal in order to meet the needs of the social dimension, which also have changed.

Following the example of the Grand Council of London [5] and recognizing the impact of cultural investments for economic, social and environmental issues, many of the current strategies of urban planning have adopted **culture** as an instrument for stimulating new development opportunities.

It is quite obvious that in Western societies, social fragmentation increases, the cities offer  a far greater human diversity than in the past, and part of the area can be seen as an "entrance gate" to newcomers. If on one hand, these aspects are a source of development for the society [6], on the other hand they produce a few social externalities that will affect the living conditions, saying that this "human mosaic" could pose a constraint on the formation of a social and human capital.

Intangible and tangible forms of cultural capital works to invalidate this constraint. Participation and consumption of the different forms of capital represents an opportunity to build and create relational and network activities that influences the development of a stronger connection an individual and groups. This process has led to diminishing mistrust, favoring the growth of social

relations, of social material, of networking between individuals and communities without the use of instruments. The results of this process will be the improvement of living and social opportunities related to the use of the zone, which will lead to an increased social life, but also to satisfaction and sense of accomplishment of the individual existential perspective [7].

It is interesting to note that from a technical perspective, usually on a single dimension such as infrastructure, strategies have embraced a multidisciplinary approach, where the policies and actions have been directed towards the integration of capitals within the framework of the plan. If in 1950 the focus was on physical capital expansion and exploitation of the natural-two elements which led the sectors of economic production during the industrial era-starting 1980, the plans were changed. The new debate about the consequence of such a process of increasing the environment, the evidence of the negative impacts produced by it on one hand, stating that new generations will be affected, the outcomes of globalization phenomenon and the loss of economic sectors related to the industrial age on the other hand, created the discussion of the need for "sustainability" in development processes in the West, transforming the booster elements in intangible assemblages, related indeed to human, social and cultural capital [8].

Since 1950, the role of cultural capital in this framework varies over time. Blessi [9] describes the role assumed by this resource in the process of urban transformation. If in the decades immediately after World War II, the goal was to provide a political and cultural structure for the society, thirty years later it is possible to observe the increase of interest in cultural resources from the part of those who define policies and from the urban planners.

### 2.1. Brand image and community effects

Starting 1980, many cities have proposed projects in which the cultural goods play a crucial role in the renovation of some specific parts of the city. Investment in cultural facilities have been promoted, for example, for the rehabilitation of industrial operations, in which culture is called for a process of regeneration, centered on the physical renovation of the physical and on a deep rethinking of social logic usability.

Other approaches Ho [10] have been chasing the seductive growth of city images, introducing "iconic" facilities like events, mostly oriented towards marketing and cultural tourism operations of the city. In many cases, the areas benefiting from such operations are strategic locations that belong to the historic center of the city, the use of the site, giving birth to serious issues of sustainability, both economical and environmental and

also social. Culture is often seen as a policy-sophisticated tool, which even if it does not fix the problems listed above (putting into question the economic viability of the new facilities) offers without a doubt a platform for collective accountability and debate that help redefine them in a more constructive manner.

Analyzing the case of Russia, Moss [11] concludes that "Cultural growth patterns of Western civilization are not always the most suitable to be followed ... because the history and development of cultural consumption followed different patterns; There are differences in the concepts about the fundamental role of culture and the regeneration through culture should solve different problems from those existing in the West ". Increasingly more and more researchers examine the impact of these major projects on existing status quo. Writing about Shanghai, which had a long tradition of attracting and support the artists and which invests heavily in iconic buildings today (cultural and otherwise), Gilmore [12] describes the "the hunger of the city to absorb innovations from the outside". The author states that "today, the city's own creativity affects the permeability: specific traditions and culture are covered by foreign influences. Shanghai has the mission to encourage inner force -the imagination of the people that live in the city ". By preserving the inner force, cultural tourism can be generated.

Bailey, Miles and Stark [13] have argued that culture-led regeneration is not "about an effect of the results of experiments, but represents a counter-balance to the more extensive processes of cultural globalization". They assert: "Only a deep understanding of historical and geographical features will help us to understand the way in which cultural regeneration strengthens potentially the existing sources of identity rather than imposing new ones."

The case of the city of Sibiu, designated as European Capital of Culture 2007 might be set as an example. Social and cultural relational activity of the local community was developed and reinforced by new forms of cultural and institutional communication, a highly visible outcome consisting on the development of a long term volunteering program for the community, developing of cultural tourism and increasing in economic investments and cultural infrastructure.

Culture and its management of diversity, often challenges the urban realities through the creation of opportunities and motives for dialogue. Cultural facilities are the key in determining the attractiveness of a city. I believe that vibrant and diverse cultural offer can be an important location factor for attracting people and the creative industries, providing those conditions that will encourage both individual and creative industries. Furthermore, local pride, identity and image of a city are the effects of the quality of the local cultural scene.

"If you imagine the town as an "urban product", the municipality as a "producer" of images of urban sites and its residents and other people as prospective "customers" of the product then, the urban image, in a good social marketing philosophy (not oriented towards the product, but to the consumer needs and thinking), can be a factor for success, and the image can become a symbol, a brand image for several reasons:

-It bears the semantic load given by the identity of the city, and the brand is precisely the consolidation at symbolic level of the *story* of the place;

-Through its identity and personality, the brand image adds itself unique and coherent set of qualities, which gives the city distinctness from other city and a rank in the hierarchy of local, regional or global competition;

- The brand image, by its unique features and added value, conferred to the urban areas, ensures the loyalty of citizens (as consumers of services and urban spaces);

-Brand image becomes a platform for social interaction, inviting people to meet, exchange ideas, opinions, knowledge, and, most importantly, to react. So the brand image becomes more practical from social point of view, generating active people and even activists in this spirit [14] ".

# 3   Cultural Infrastructure and Programs – key elements for community development

The cultural dimension is important for all the cities, but in particular for changing images of a city that goes into decline. Its role sometimes influences the success or failure of the regeneration of urban areas. Festivals, exhibitions and cultural events are very important in creating the symbolic image of the city. Culture can also be a significant tool for intercultural dialogue. A cultural center is the place where communities are gathering or where cooperation projects are developed offering the possibility for people from different neighborhoods to meet. Cultural diversity can also be a source of innovation and entrepreneurship, and can become a positive force in the socio-economic development of towns.

Culture became a field investigation of the development processes of societies today, beginning to assume a strategic role in the definition of a new environment for competitive cities and regions of post-industrial society, due to the accepted thinking, according to which investment in cultural infrastructure, cultural activities and policies are paying off at social and economic level. Furthermore, the definition of a local development strategy based on exploiting the cultural capital/cultural policy is seen as a priority and as a quick way to increase the value of urban areas because this

affects all social actors.

At European level in general and at European Union level, in particular, we observe greater emphasis in recent years on the quality of urban environment and the adoption of policies and actions to ensure compliance with the principles of sustainable development. Beginning with "Spatial planning charter" (translated in Romanian from French as "scheme for territory organization"), adopted by the Council of Europe, in 1983 and ending with very well promoted – in 2007, "Charter of Leipzig" concerning the sustainable development of towns (document of the European Union), these issues are a constant concern of the deliberative or decision-making structures in Europe. In Romania, although a series of normative acts and measures in consonance with the requirements of European cities, have been promoted, the overall condition of the territory and cities do not reflect the existence of policies, measures and effective action in the spirit of European principles. In particular, the urban environment in the capital of the country is the subject of vehement criticism from public opinion and civil society as well as from some specialists in the field of spatial development. For European objectives, is not sufficient institutional and legislative action, educational-formative measures are also needed. **It is important for the citizens of the city to acquire a certain level of understanding of urban life and aspire to certain quality standards.**

Griffiths [15] describes the European Capital of Culture Program (ECC) as a significant catalyst for regeneration through culture and it is true that many of the winners of the title of ECC (including the city of Sibiu) claimed that it helped in achieving the objectives of their regeneration. There is, however, a current disagreement about how to do this. In his research about the experience of the city of Porto as the city of culture, Balsas [16] concluded: "Despite well-funded events with a large participation from the public, too much emphasis has been put on attraction of public investments for the regeneration of public space and modernizing infrastructure, replacing the cultural facilities. They were made at the expense of building institutional capacity, the preservation of buildings and encouraging civic creativity ". Evaluating the impact of European Cultural Capitals in 2001 on the image of the city of Rotterdam, Richards & Wilson [17] have said that while the city's reputation as a cultural destination increased marginally (at least in the short term), pre-existing physical characteristics of the city of Rotterdam and its port operational picture, continued to dominate the public perceptions of the city. Deffner and Labrianidis [18] concluded that opportunities were not exploited in Thessaloniki (capital of culture in 1997) because of the concentration on huge projects and lack of policy and strategy in tourism marketing.

In a longitudinal evaluation of the European Cultural Capitals and Cultural Months [19], the authors found that: "Too often, Cultural Capitals turned their efforts to the funding of events and projects that are part of a celebration that takes place over a year, and have devoted too little time and investment for the future". Newcastle-Gateshead started a longitudinal study on ten years of the cultural impact of new developments in the two communities, while at the Liverpool School of social and environmental studies; experts are identifying changes to the social, economic, cultural and environmental areas in Liverpool (ECC in 2008).

### 3.1. Monetary preconceived judgments for cultural investments?

Culture is a minor concern for most governments (though in the past was often in second place after the defense sector). It is as if cultural expenses would affect the well being of citizens. The criticism of the cultural expenditure consists, for example, in criticism of giving subsidies to the theatre, that money being required to buy cars for roads or hospitals for children. Of course this is a deliberately false and sentimental analogy. There is no reason why the theatre should not be financed from public funds before another domain. It would be more logical, if anyone wants to compare requirements with losses, to compare expenditure on unnecessary urban traffic plans with health and military parades with theatre. But culture is a sensible subject and indeed, its vitality comes from the emotional load that cultural discourse can generate, that is why it comes as no surprise that it uses the negative and unreasonable arguments with as much passion as the reasonable and positive ones.

While culture can and should have some fun aspects, actually it means more than just distraction. The reason why people choose to spend increasingly more of their disposable income on cultural goods, is not only due to the fact that they are inherently desirable, but also to the fact that, often, the ideas they contain bring consolation, relief, explanations and fulfillment, along with pleasure. Perhaps there is no reason good enough for a government with limited budget to feel obliged to subsidize the fun [20].

Certain aspects of the arts and heritage are in many ways an extrapolation of the environment; a large number of arguments for maintaining a clean and sustainable environment can be also applied to culture. Society needs a balance between conservation and novelty, between youth and old age, between particularity and diversity.

➢ For an official or politician (at local, regional or national level) who is in charged with achieving this balance between the provisions and stimuli within a limited budget, such a holistic concept can be irritating at best, and may be nearly impossible to live according to it, in the worst case. Culture, as well as health and

education, can be a bottomless bag for resources. There are never satisfied. There is never enough money to do everything and often too few to really make everything right. And yet, this is the strength of the culture. Because investing in culture means to showcase the achievements and to explore possibilities towards the limits; people will always have new plans and brave initiatives that will want to finance by someone else. A society, a culture, without this tendency and ambition is not going forward – an no politician, of any color would he be, will not want to rule over a period of stagnation [21].

# 4  Conclusion

Urban local development model, which includes the idea of culture as a basic resource for urban regeneration processes, is related to the idea of a cultural community, a model that highlights the role of the social network and relationship between the individual non-instrumental and socio-economic sectors, in the direction of providing the best condition to generate a process of development. Michael Porter [22] and other experts defined the idea of the relationship and social network as a competitive advantage for the local system, in 1920. These theorists have pointed out in different ways the role that social relations have in the development of local systems. These two factors working for the creation of favorable conditions disseminate the idea, that a better access to knowledge and information will bolster the local system.

There are systems in which the human and social capital is becoming the basis of the development process, within a framework in which the cultural capital offers elements for improving the previous resources. It is possible to say that this mechanism that goes towards the sustainability of the local system, in the sense of promoting local resources, improving social capital, leads to a process of strengthening local communities.

In the process, communities will become the main actor for defining goals and policies of the local development processes, with greater awareness regarding local characteristics and orientation for all social actors towards innovation and growth capabilities, thanks to the exploitation of cultural capital and cultural policies.

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