

*Roberto Grandi**
*Adriana Galvani**
University of Bologna

Art and the Modern City: From the Ivory Tower to Society

Forewords

The European City of Culture is a city designated by the European Union for a period of one calendar year during which it is given a chance to showcase its cultural life and cultural development. Since its beginnings in 1985 with the selection of Athens, a number of European cities have used the City of Culture year to transform their cultural base and, in doing so, the way in which they are viewed internationally. In 2000 the decision was made to select not one, but nine cities for the year which has resulted since then in the election of two or three cities every year.

Introduction

As such, this text will argue that the system could be modified into a more diffused cultural plan. This idea stems from the fact that the competition to gain the title of 'City of Culture' is increasing, due to the expansion of cultural preservation and restoration in Europe, leading to economic development and amelioration of the services sector. It can therefore be conceived that every city is a city of culture (or should be) and even that some cities, who apply for the title, despite the honor and any real need for the increased tourist flux that it brings, should reconsider it in light of the danger it could pose to their fragile environments.

1 - The European City of Culture

Venice, for example, is applying for the title of 'City of Culture' whilst simultaneously curbing the fluxes in its urban precincts. The local government does not appreciate backpackers and homeless eating and drinking on the street. Furthermore, local managers have noticed and published the serious impact that large-scale events cause to the city. Venice doesn't have any need to enhance its attractiveness, because in some aspects it is a cultural city in itself and has been since its naissance.

On the other hand, the title can have positive effects when it is bestowed upon cities that will use it to secure long standing positive changes. As such, perhaps the title would be more appropriately bestowed upon cities who do not already have a pre-conceived identity as a cultural city and would therefore adapt themselves more readily to the services sector, as was the case in Glasgow. In some ways, this idea may seem like a contradiction. However, this text argues that, as every city is - or should be - a cultural city, everyone of them could be prized ; if it isn't that , then it should be given the

assistance to become one. This is the way that every local administration in Europe is headed and therefore efforts should be spent in helping them realize their goal, even if their population will never technically define them as a 'city' as such.

"Cultural activities and the demand for cultural goods are spreading, with unprecedented access thanks to new communication tools "... "The Commission considers that the time is ripe for a new European agenda for culture, which takes account of the realities of today's globalizing world." (EU Commission, 2007, pp.3-5).

2 - A Cultural Examination

The distinction between major and minor heritage has all but disappeared between scientists, administrators and tour operators. More and more we are discovering the value of newly revealed forms of art and the increased tourism sees them passing through entire circuits with various itineraries such as the cheeses and castles of France, wine and food circuits of Italy and the historical reminders and cycling tracks of Germany and Austria, which are also famous for the Alpenstrasse and the Romantischestrasse. The greatest cultural circuit is that of the 'Silk Route', an initiative of Unesco and UNWTO over an extended distance which covers two continents. This route has also served as a model for other extended itineraries such as the 'Silver Route' and the 'Ruta Maya' in South America (www.untwo.org).

This evidence supports the idea that the programming of cultural events should be a systematic process accompanied by a holistic vision such as the work of the World Heritage Committee since 1972. The organization of Unesco recognizes natural heritage even in remote areas such as deserts and primeval forests and, more importantly, the protection under their classification could stand indefinitely. Unesco promotes the maintenance of its protected areas whilst still providing fair access and presentation to visitors. However if the access jeopardizes the sites themselves, the site becomes listed as endangered and undergoes restoration, possibly resulting in the prohibition of access.

The cultural section of Unesco is currently undertaking a parallel process to that of its natural section to protect and promote intangible cultural heritage. Until recently, the number of listed sites were not very numerous, as the project was still in its foundations, however the section is set to expand significantly with the growing recognition of oral traditions throughout world cultures. This development would be crucial in maintaining the foundations of contemporary culture, as oral traditions are the most unreliable in terms of intangible heritages. Amongst this list, we can also add myths, novels, popular and public festivals, and so on.

3 - The European City of Culture

The continuing support of this program is required to enhance the important role it plays in our cultural life and this is where the European City of Culture comes into play. The European City of Culture can help to discover, enhance, stimulate, diffuse and appreciate the common roots of European culture. This is the most positive effect of the project and we would argue that the process could, or should be continuous, in other terms not temporarily or locally limited. The fact of limiting the designation to one year push the cities of cultures to exaggerate in spending in ephemeral events through public money, events which sometime don't fit the scope of the Union. As such, the UNeECC could

afford to take on an enlarged aspect and its activities could be expanded with a perpetual image with the UNeECC assuming a role of connectivity between European cultural activities and Unesco programs.

For example UNeECC could put into force a jury of experts determining the values of the cultural projects proposed by all the European cities and not the value of a single cultural city.

UNeECC could take hold of the opportunity to extend its code of rules not only because it could grow to include villages or separate pieces of work under a new cultural umbrella, but also because it could include predetermined cities of culture such as all the university cities, which are multiplying at a fast rate all over the world. In this way UNeECC could assume a worldlier role, rather than its current, quite limited one.

The ECC Program could find an interface with EU's Culture Programme 2007-2013, in order to assure a continuity to projects and initiatives. In fact both intend to celebrate Europe's cultural diversity and enhance our shared cultural heritage through the development of cross-border co-operation between cultural operators and institutions.

"The EU Culture Programme is a multi-annual Programme, which aims to support cultural cooperation within Europe in order to bring the European common cultural heritage to the fore. The Programme proposes funding opportunities to all cultural sections and all categories of cultural operators contributing to the development of cooperation at European level, with a view to encouraging the emergence of European citizenship. The programme mainly promotes:

- ✓ trans national mobility of cultural players;
- ✓ trans national circulation of artistic and cultural works and products;
- ✓ intercultural dialogue and exchanges."

The Culture Programme also enables a wide range of cultural organizations, coming from various countries, to cooperate on cultural and artistic projects (EU Commission, 2007, p.16).

The concept stated by EU: "Europe and Europeans are constantly modified by the interaction of groups across borders and civilizations" is supported by the philosophy of David Canter, an innovative geographer who questions about the assumed dichotomy between environment and behavior, and replaces it with a dynamic interplay between action and place. He would argue that in design activities and in research, we should be looking for dialectical processes which continuously create changes in the pattern and meanings of actions in relation to places. Intentions and actions are themselves structured by place related rules, negotiated with others, their outcomes reflected in expressed satisfaction with pleasure in a given place. These many themes have their origins in giving human agency pride of place. (1987, p. 47).

4 - Bologna

Bologna was nominated as the European City of Culture in 2000 (Grandi, 2001).

Its cultural projects and programs have been very intensive and rich, but its privilege has been the investments on "fixed culture" in architecture, opening new museums or conference centers, in equipping a great library, in restoring monuments...maintaining vivid the efforts of the year 2000 (Galvani, 2001).

Bologna has always enjoyed the fame of a cultural city, as for centuries it has been characterized by the landmarks of its towers, its university and its food. There are many aspects to this unique city which, combined with its historic urban center, present an

open dialogue of a university city with a living and breathing culture. The nutritional culture of Bologna represents yet another form of living culture due to its complex and traditional ways of food preparation, highlighting the modern attitude towards biodiversity as a nutritional factor of good health and prevention against illness. These factors are characteristic of a living city, but nevertheless, its cultural origins were and remain tied to its scholarly past and university way of life that constitutes an urban *enclave*.

Bologna is both a cultural, economic, regional capital and more than other cases it represents the combination of culture and affairs. This connection is profitable for both the aspects, so they are continually enhancing each other. The effects of the 2000 Capital of Culture are vanishing, but at the same moment cultural contributions derive from the exhibition center where products are presented through conferences or spectacles or from the University.

Bologna's built-up urban area is dominated by commerce and businesses that deal in world-wide affairs and reflect in their intense activities, so that even the cultural aspect are connected to the commercial interchanges whose cathedral is the Bologna Fair. Their large exhibitions courts and buildings or conferences rooms are also seen as an enclave of affairs which are not limited to internal tightly defined spaces. In fact some exhibitions are at the same time cultural events and productions' show rooms. In the last few years, progressively the two 'boxes' of the city and the Fair have been opened to each other and blended into a combined city under the aegis of culture.

Along this process the city and the fair center have created "cultural corridors" because they are continually concentrated in the research of external spaces for expositions and manifestations which had previously remained under the umbrella of predefined spaces, separated before between cultural and commercial. In this way and along this connection, it really is possible to talk of a city of living culture.

5 - Fiera di Bologna

In 2006 the 'Fiera di Bologna' (Fair of Bologna) celebrated thirty years of the most noteworthy and appreciated art market in the entire world, the Fair of Modern and Contemporary Art. With the passing of time the event has expanded and extended itself beyond the traditional exhibition sites of trade shows and made use of urban spaces, firstly in sites delegated to artistic exhibitions, then somewhat curiously, in unused spaces such as building establishments, banks, uninhabited historical palazzos and piazzas.

For the 30th anniversary of the Bologna Fair of Modern and Contemporary Art, the works were given life by leaving the traditional trade show spaces and expanding throughout the city, adorning it with various works and installations, interweaving museums and corporate institutions as well as the programming of painting, cinematographic presentations on private galleries or festivals in public squares. (Q.N. in *Il Resto del Carlino*, 26/1/2006, p.12).

Researchers have shown that bringing contemporary art out of the traditional viewing spaces and mixing them throughout the city, they become part of everyday life and turn into something that could become *street culture*, especially if combined with pop music. Art complements science, from the political to the philosophical disciplines, to produce the *conceptual art*. It combines with medicine and genetics when it gives a body to art in an exhibition space named *Dnart*.



Fig. 1 - The towers of Bologna (Photo Galvani)

The names help define the intentions of projects which arrive to the masses through art work; insofar as it is innovative, and in time will surely become pervasive (*Bologna da Vivere*, 2006.) The visual arts brought outside must evidently involve space, in an interweave of art and life that reflects the binomial nature of art and geography in living processes.

In the 2006 edition of 'Arte Fiera' the artist Pistoletto presented the project: *Geographies of changes* in an open square of a workshop named *Methods or Research Projects on Art-Society Relations*, which was stretched to investigate methods and changing projects towards creative processes, addressing the transformation of social responsibilities. At the workshop, the projects of various nations were presented that simplified the social weave of the role art plays towards the educative, formative and corrective paths of socially ostracized groups or those involved in projects of urban revitalization. The association of international co-operation and education development in Africa and the Mediterranean promote a culture of peace towards the confrontation of dialogue between diverse religions and cultures present in Europe, using the comic strips as instruments of

communication and development of immigrant integration, financed by the European Commission to understand the multiculturalism of the Union. The project aims to communicate the presence of fundamental common values that are at the basis of major religions and secular thoughts. It is financed by the European Commission as well as the project for children in orphanages *Art for Social Change Play*, which aims to channel aggressive energies towards circus exercises and theatrical performances and also to work towards improvements in the level of self-esteem of immigrant children.

6 – New forms of Art

Art is the perfect representation of nature and society working together and is a cultural living action, which constitutes a communicative mediation and renders a message of elite origin for an ample public. Art ECCELSA has an everlasting and ever expanding communicative value that extends beyond conventional spaces, becoming a universal medium. Art is multifaceted, as it represents the outside world whilst at the same time representing the interiority of man. It knows how to make tangible that which is intangible. It constitutes a complex phenomenon which can also understand works of craftsmanship or of everyday work, as everything that is well made should be considered, as an appropriate title, art.

As such, it is not only the connection between art and life that is inseparable, but also that between art and the activities of men. From here, it is necessary to perceive the inference between art and economics, as well as that between art and politics.

The emergence of art from the ivory towers to the artist's opening of the world is a phenomenon that is verified and attested. Even though the origins of art's involvement in society are ancient, historically, the art works were answerable to the patrons who commissioned it and were later under the management of local or national governments. This process has been repeated many times through the pages of history.

Art is an economic fact, "The development and funding of the art market of emerging countries runs parallel to their economy" (Comunicato Stampa della Fiera di Bologna 2007, b). The establishments and enterprises that invest in art acquire historical buildings, they reflect the political and social messages of the artists, so that their works are given the opportunity to shine to greater effect and reach larger audiences. This new phase of development in the art world asks for more knowledge of its subject matter, as the economy is much more dynamic if it encompasses more incorporated knowledge, but it's also weaker because the knowledge that isn't transformed into well being is lost.

According to Daverio (www.BolognaFiere.it. 2007), art wants to return to its foundations, rooted in our community. The museums should be transformed from sterilized monuments for the solitary researcher in meetings places that moulds the community of tomorrow. In the last few centuries, art has been continuously adapting to the requirements of the industrial world, creating for itself an unceasing mirroring of the society in which it has been produced. Colonnetti (2006), director of IED (The European Institute of Design), foresees a new path of original ties between art, design and industry.

The merging of art into the public system is so important that cannot be avoided, what it may lose in quality it makes up for in the opportunities to broaden our perception of what constitutes art. From this, we can discern that art is continuously drawing itself closer to a union with the financial world, creating a different way of facing processes and issues in the financial world that are not always clear cut. This emergence from the museums and onto the streets of the outside world, utilizing the communication of social and economic

values, as well as the suggestion of politics and the pressures of finance drive enable art to be considered as a phenomenon that is intimately tied with geography and sociology. Such an interconnection is accentuated not only topologically representing objects and subjects, but political and social values, influencing a society on a global scale which has thus far been only partly realised. The artist therefore becomes a sociological, political and geographical subject.

The way in which modern art distorts the traditional conventions of realistic design is intended to illuminate the chaos of the modern world, the lack of communication and the chaos of diverse communities that are interwoven into a given society. Furthermore, these days, it is intended moreover to influence its own society, leaving critical messages and propositions to cure the evils of our civilization. "The grand international artistic events are characterized by the capacity to activate and debate around the themes of major interest of society and transform a place to give a representation of a "community culture" (Comunicato Stampa 2006,a).

7 - Innovation

Bologna is continuing along the path open in the 2000 celebrations with new realizations. The *Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio* in Bologna has given birth to a project of services to the city, a new model of open museum, without borders, that would open its monuments for general spectators and would be interdisciplinary in nature. This move is in line with the current social tendencies of European museums that are breaking ties with their conventional roles, allowing them to be seen in a new light and hopefully providing a key to interpret the complex realities of the twenty first century. Therefore, the museum becomes a living exposition, it let us to understand not how to converse, but how to communicate, to become a laboratory of projection for the future of the city, "for the understanding and the experimentation of contemporary art". Therefore it's not simply a museum, but a "Urban Journey", a path that would know how to "completely express a binomial connection between history and the contemporary, with particular attention to the urban-architectural and artistic evolution, and, at the same time, how workshops can demonstrate and implement these changes for the future of the city." The project aims to "add places and different urban territories which express the community as a whole, to encourage appreciation towards a strategy of repair and reordering of knowledge, of education and of cultural production for the future." (Roversi Monaco, 2006, p.1). More than simply a museum, this urban and cultural path, not solely artistic, shows how the history of the city can be recovered, not only on an artistic or literary level, but also in terms of social, urban, architectural, economic and institutional transformations. Everything is translated into the term *BonOmnia*, which signifies "all good" but it is connected to the sound of *Bononia*, the Latin denomination of Bologna.

These Covered-Museums - which could also be referred to as 'Iter-Museum' present works that are interconnected with the buildings they are staged in, in the sense that the buildings themselves are antique exhibition halls of such complexity and detail that they are art forms in themselves, with significant historical value. Additionally, an open-air museum deviates from the previous concept that museums are largely static, implicative of a defined physical space, together with artistic objects and with a particular historical date. The works and monuments interwoven in open-air museums reflect the historical and cultural evolution of centuries gone by, visible to all, but nevertheless still a part of day to day life along with boutiques, cinemas, and cafés.

A covered museum which is able to be observed as a living, functional art piece that combines the past with the present is an example of how the aesthetic can combine with the structural functions of a city, breaking away from the static and immaterial interpretation that one can sense from material objects. The dislocation of the palazzos in the city form a 'rose of winds' which act as a metaphor for the openness of the world, instead of one that is closed, as could be represented by the perimeter of the city walls. The palazzos are Palazzo Saraceni, Palazzo Pepoli Vecchio, Palazzo Fava, Oratorio di San Colombano; the first is the seat of the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio, the last three were recently purchased by the same company and are already open construction sites for the necessary restructuring, after centuries of unfathomable abandonment. During the event 'Fiera dell' Arte' (Art Fair) they were visited in a cycle of white nights where the artistic route benefited from various concerts in real routes. The cinema also benefited from the showing, presenting the course 'CinemArte' to recount the events of artistic communities.

8 - Art in Daily Life

An exhibition named *Nutrirsi con l'Arte* (Nourish yourselves with Art) was exhibited in Torino at the Museum of Antiquity between 2004 and 2005, under the curatorship of Giovanni Barbero, and was above all an expression of how art is interconnected with daily life, in as much as "nourishment is an art and art is a nourishment of the soul." One especially exemplary work, which became the pinnacle of political and social communication, is that of Picasso's 'Guernica', a work of multiple messages and profound political critique. 'Guernica' signified a revolution in the artistic movement for the change that it provided in the style and inspiration behind classical paintings to arrive at the contemporary. The painting is a complete story of world history and geography, highlighting once again the connection between art and modern life, in particular between paintings and geography as well as the rich pictorial representations of the sociology of different countries and how we have come from cave art, to 'classic' art and arrived at what we now know as contemporary art.

New evolutions in the art world have produced the emergence of the event "Eastwards-Emerging Markets" which highlights the promising market of Eastern Europe. The implications of the work of young artists of these countries are reflective of the social and political changes within their countries. This is seen in critical representations regarding precautions taken in rural areas of communist Romania and in the provocation of the artist Vlad Nanca whose work remixes the symbols and the flags of the actual moment that signals the passage from a political blockage to an open economy in Romania.

Matthew Ronay asserts that to look at a work of art implies the same process as that of reading a short story, the thought unfurls slowly; it presents an allegory of the politics and society of present day US America, provoking thoughts and observations whilst in the mind-frame inciting reflections.

This communicative interconnection was assumed by the Pistoletto Foundation, which proposed the regrouping of young artists as a valuable insertion in the business world. Pistoletto is closely tied to the business world and is of the mind that it is impossible to dissociate it with artists. In fact, it created the project of "art districts". "The art is therefore seen not as a work in a museum, but as an instrument of aid, the creation of a 'beautiful aid' inasmuch that it is filled with life."

9. Art and Commerce

A practical summary of these concepts were realized in relation to the manifestations of the Art Fair of Bologna, one of the major exhibitions in the world, second only to New York. The board placed high emphasis on the organization of the task, the direction that it took and borrowed ideas from the co-ordination of the Art Fair of Shanghai. From the 6th to the 9th of September in 2007 the first edition of (Shanghai) SHContemporary, the new contemporary art fair of the Asia-Pacific area, had the objective to create a network between galleries, collections and artists to combine a mixture of the cultures between Western and Oriental art, and in the process changing the emerging market between them. Shanghai was chosen as a means of rendering the door of China more open to the outside world. It used the faire in extremely effective way to integrate the oriental art and its culture with the city itself, offering with its exhibition centre a place in the heart of the city, and of the world itself.

A reclassification is emerging between the many international manifestations that Bologna hosts at the art fair, where the major galleries of the world are exposing. Started in 1975, the art fair represents the most important art convergence of buyers and one of the most qualified European manifestations of its kind, in terms of its attraction of over forty thousand people. It is also favoured by the financial market by the way in which it views art as a means of investments whose value grows over time. The rise in prices corresponds to the interests of the European and American public institutions or banks that see the value in the connection between economy and culture, based on the reflections expressed by the fair organisers “It seems that the financial uncertainties and the difficulty of the economy doesn’t restrain the art market, insofar as many entrepreneurs choose to entrust their finances in these sectors, considering it the best alternative way to invest and making a break from traditional investments.” (Comunicato Stampa, 2006, b). The event therefore becomes experimental theatre, encompassing a revisitation of past works in a new atmosphere.

The fairs are becoming catalysts for conventions, conferences and also for world events that require the presence of the experts of their given fields. Initially the fairs were limited to the exposition of material and objects related to the characteristics of the establishments and the companies. Then, hand in hand they broadened their horizon to become inclusive of experts, of meetings, hosting professional informative conferences that integrate social activities such as toasts, banquets and theatrical endeavours.

The Art Fair, which has been an annual occurrence present in Bologna for more than thirty years, since 2005 has opened new paths of communication and has set the stage for integration between the economic world and artistic world in a project known as ‘Art First’. As a concrete demonstration, the fair expanded into expositive spaces to encompass the city in its complexities, in an expositive frame, applying concrete conceptions of how art-society-economy are interlinked, demonstrating the large effects of art and culture sustained by economy.

10 - Art First

Art fair offers an occasion for exhibitions within the urban-public spaces, the governmental buildings of the city, in the antique palazzos. Many of these palazzos are under-utilized and in need of restoration. Through the art fair they are given a chance to be revitalized by the art exhibited within them, instilling and infusing an experience that

starts them on their path back to their restoration. The visitors are also attracted to the broadening of this line of thought because it doesn't require tickets for entrance like the fair stalls, generally reserved for organisers. The success is therefore noteworthy insofar as the idea of broadening the spaces and commercialised objects was also applied to expose the industrial sectors of the city, as was described in the previous sections (2007). One of the most noteworthy fairs is that of the ceramic constructions, product that is typical of the traditions of the region. Such an exhibition requires more ample space, given the typology of the goods and highlights how the limited use of space impeded the exposition of certain artworks. New constructions broaden the spaces arranged in the *fiera*, going from private expensive spaces to public squares and public buildings. The shift from the private fair to the free public areas is advantageous for all in many cases: when the fair will exhaust its spaces it will host the last exhibitors outside; private spaces hosting exhibitors can be reimbursed; public building not charging fees for exhibitions can nevertheless gain some more forms of compensation by hosting a display.

The modern broadening of recognition towards the need for communication is both mediated and semantic, brought from the research of new spaces, possibly open, in which new paths of communication and attraction of new spectators can be found. As such, we speak of open museums, with architectural passages where there aren't any doors that hide away their objects. Local bars and boutiques also gain success by association of the frequency of visitors as soon as these ample open spaces are put into action.

The entity of Bologna Art Fair has taken on the expansion of such activities within the fair by commissioning the construction of new pavilions and new communal spaces. These spaces were designed in such a manner that would incorporate both the physical (aesthetical) and functional aspects of a building that would be a more open, hospitable environment, thanks largely in part to the use of glass in connecting the sectors to let in maximum light. The project was treated as an amalgamation of public services with social, cultural occasions. Particular attention was given to the phenomenon of utilization of spaces lapsing in the interior of the urban walls. The most notable cases refer to the organization of musicals in the city theatres, or the prize giving that was done inside the university sector for the 'best illustrations of fairy tales'. This particular example was for the Book Fair for Children, which commemorates a great scientist famous for illustrating the passage in which works of art complete a university museum. Another example is the historic palazzo of King Enzo in the central piazza, a beautiful building from the 13th century that offers a suggestive frame of diverse events.

When it comes to the Art Fair, a particular combination of different locations are offered, from the nearest Galleria d'Arte Moderna (GAM) which as of 2007 was transferred into the historic centre and rechristened MAMBO (Museum of Modern Art of Bologna), to underline its membership to the city. As a gallery of modern art, it is limited in its ability to embrace the 'openness' of the fair, or of temporary frames, as it has opening hours to be observed. However, its terrace and its gardens act as a living room for cultural encounters and its walls offer space for exhibiting the manifestations of the fair. For a number of years now, the art fair has been stimulating an artistic and cultural fruition that is expanding to include the rich history of the city as a whole and using the occasion to rediscover forgotten or neglected treasures in the *baillame* of the commercial frenzy and affair-driven nature of Bologna, or abandoned due to a lack of financial elements that are necessary in their upkeep.



Fig. 2 - The image of the city of Bologna from one of the tallest towers (Photo Galvani)

Conclusions

The connection between the Art Fair and the city is favoured by the town authorities that utilise the occasion of offering public spaces with the connection of exhibitions of the fair. The organisers of the museums and art galleries also utilize the occasion to exhibit important works within the specified dates of the fair. Even palazzos and the like are recipients of the financial benefits that the artistic success of the fair can bring, especially in terms of the restoration of buildings. Therefore it is not only an artistic, but an economic advantage to highlight the connection between modern art and historical buildings of architectural merit.

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*Roberto Grandi is Professor at the Department of Communication Sciences
Adriana Galvani is lecturer at the Department of History, Archeology, Geography

The work is the result of a common vision, in fact the Forewords, the Introduction and the Conclusion are of common responsibility, but

Roberto Grandi is the author of the chapters: 1-2-3-4-8-9

Adriana Galvani is the author of the chapters: 5-6-7-10.