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Participatory Practices in Sustainable Development and Management of City of Art

This abstract sets out to conceptualise ‘City of Art’ by comparing it with European Capital of Culture. It aims to explore what kind of participatory measures and effective management strategies can ensure sustainability and maintain the uniqueness of City of Art’ under the rapidly changing environment as a result of globalisation. In an attempt to qualify cities as City of Art, it is important to consider not only the historic cities with intrinsic cultural heritage but also the recent trend of creating contemporary “creative cities” (cultural hubs).

In terms of city development, since the city is inhabited, it has to be convenient during and after the participation in the “culture marathon”. The “City of Art” is both a blurred and a fragile concept that is based on the maintenance of a proper leverage on art, heritage and the uniqueness attributed to such cities, and the possibility to keep the cities functional and simultaneously fulfil other obligations as well. Undermining the fragile balance is one of the main risks that the cities are facing in their development.

To maintain a comfortable living space, the administration of any city is required to include social agenda in the development programmes. In the case of City of Art, the difference lies in the necessity to implement the requirement within the settings similar to a museum. Analysing the good practices ensuring social inclusion, diversity and considering all stakeholders’ interests is crucial for City of Art conceptualisation.

Against the background of increasingly polarized urban societies, stimulating place identity among the local population becomes a means of building a sense of community and fostering social cohesion (Cyprus 2017 relied on engaging excluded groups or different cultures through shared cultural projects aimed to connect the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities shifting socially-targeted activities into the political domain).

Among the “real and lasting benefits” creation of economic growth by cultural programmes is named first (each euro of public money invested in 2015 is estimated to have generated between 5.5 and 6 euro for the local economy). The ECoC is considered to benefit in regenerating the participating cities with the initiatives intended at social infrastructure development, involving the local communities and, thereby, solving the long-lasting social problems.

However, the necessity to maintain the uniqueness of City of Art is often contraposed by the economic gain. Tourist flows attracted by cultural sites constitute a desired target for franchise stores and restaurants or entertainment facilities that could hardly match with the cultural and artistic identity of the city, resulting in either the subversion of the taste and the quality of the cultural offers in the city of art, or with an unresolved conflict (case study: a McDonald’s restaurant banned from Florence city centre and allowed in the Vatican property in Rome).

Concluding, City of Art, although relatively an old term, not only has different meanings and interpretations possible but also faces an array of challenges with respect to lack of institutionalization of definition, management, sustainable development and preservation of

uniqueness which could be dealt only with help of strategic planning and implementation in long term.