

# Art contribution to cities' transformation

## The role of Public Art management in Italy

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### ABSTRACT

Since the mid 80s the evident objective of public art has been to intervene in some infrastructures so that the historical function of a square or of a monument could be re-found with a completely new approach, thus defining a spatial whole as a social whole.

Through a qualitative research approach that enlightens artists and commissioning agencies' points of view, this paper seeks to document the creative processes that characterizes public art and to explore the democratic potential in urban artistic interventions.

Although in the past, through instituting public art projects in disadvantaged and fragmented communities, policy makers consciously tried to promote a fallacious sense of shared space, true urban art would not embrace a purely decorative function and would not hesitate to break with the conventions that mark the political use of public art.

Even if it is recognized that past expression of public art spoke of universalist and modernist themes, some recent Italian practices of public art are characterized by a strong collaborative effort between the public artist and the community: intended both to design the physical appearance of the city and to rebuild the relationship that underpins urban life.

Thus the paper will show how the recognition of the value of public arts can lay the foundations for more integrated urban regeneration strategies driven by cultural policy imperatives.

### Keywords:

Public art  
Cultural policy  
City development  
Art-led urban regeneration

# 1. Art and the city: the historical evolution of a dense relationship

Art has always been one of the leading actors of the city-building process. In the past artworks were considered tangible signs of society living in the city. The relationship between art and the city was mainly expressed through the realization of civic monuments or through the construction of large religious buildings such as churches and cathedrals. On the one hand arts' funding came from the city and its citizens, and on the other hand the monument acted as a media for the transmission of political, economic and social values (Romano, 1997, 2008; Sacco, 2006). Artistic contribution to urban planning has been alternatively interpreted as civic aesthetic or as mere embellishment.

We usually talk about civic aesthetic till modernity. To then the *urbes*, or in other words the materiality of the city, has often been considered a work shaped by the *civitas*: the design of urban space was in fact an holistic practice touching a wide range of art practices - from traditional arts, such as painting and sculpture, to architecture and urban planning - and able to make legible the life, the history and the thoughts of inhabitants, insomuch that citizens felt represented and responsible of their urban space.

The paradigm of civic aesthetics, as synthetically stated above, is basically characterized by: a) a fertile, instinctive and simultaneous use of traditional visual arts - such as sculpture, drawings and paintings - and of typical design disciplines in urban planning practices<sup>1</sup>; b) the acknowledgment of the city as a whole as an object of intervention; c) the acceptance of beauty as an end.

In such a context the recognition of the identity of each individual as part of a collective body, the *civitas*, is strictly related to beauty itself: urban transformations, in fact, act directly on streets and squares, turning them into living spaces<sup>2</sup>. Such a fertile and mutual merge depended on the common training course followed by artists, generally intended, and architects. Until the late Nineteenth Century, in fact, the former were trained in the same school as sculptors and painters. In other words those who drew churches and palaces were trained as artists and had attended academies and art shops. Architects were also painters, sculptors, or designers (Pulini, 2009).

During the industrial revolution, however, the relationship between art and architecture and, therefore, art and city entered into a crisis and the idea

of art as mere embellishment took the first paradigm's place. As the division of knowledge became more clear and stable, engineers and architects became the only ones in charge of city construction and the contribution of art to urban design turned out to be limited to decorative or celebratory functions.

Many reasons can be acquainted in order to explain such a dramatic change. On the one hand, and since the very beginning of industrial era, art and architecture start pursuing different paths: innovations in the field of materials, for example all technical innovations introduced by the use of concrete, encouraged firstly the birth of industrialized architecture and the use of standardized components and, secondly, induced a shift in architecture from the art field to the one of engineering. On the other hand, especially on late modernity, the power of public spaces toward civic representation becomes weaker<sup>3</sup> and the paradigm of civic aesthetic gave way to the logic of embellishment.

The term indicated, and still indicates, town planning that encompasses all the approaches that consider the aestheticization of urban public spaces as their ultimate goal. In such a context the arts, deprived of their role as urban design directors, seemed gradually to abandon the partnership with urban planning and architecture and to consolidate their position as autonomous disciplines. The virtuous and inextricable intertwining between functionality and aesthetic, which for centuries had been guaranteed by the binomial "art and architecture", collapsed and the relationship between art and the city vanished.

While the arts took the path of *venustas*, architecture walked along the trail of *utilitas*. Painting and sculpture found new sponsors among the collectors of the nascent commercial bourgeoisie. Works of art entered palaces and became objects of furniture or luxury items, to show off with pride in the prestige and honor of the owner, a sign of social distinction, or in other words, to serve as status symbols. Later, when collecting for private hoarding exhausted, museums and galleries open their doors to painters' and sculptors' works of art. Architecture, however, approached engineering and it ended up flattened on the technique. The link between the arts and urban design discipline was transformed and greatly reduced to the application of the "technique of inclusion": a work of art was essentially included in urban space only after its design and building had been completed and with the effortless aim of softening the lines.

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<sup>1</sup> The civic aesthetic paradigm distinguishes, for example, the Italian renaissance urban planning in which all major architectural projects - churches, public and noble buildings, squares, schools, monasteries, hospitals, bridges, factories, ports and so on - were born together with works of art (cfr. Pulini, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Let's consider, for example, the importance of squares planning in the Italian, but also in the European tradition. Being the place of political, religious and economic power, squares represented the heart of collective life for all citizens. In Italy, confirming the importance that square building has had in city planning, examples of architectural excellence of square planning can be appreciated also today. Let's think, for example, of the Piazza del Plebiscito in Naples, Piazza del Duomo in Florence and Piazza del Campo in Siena.

<sup>3</sup> The death of public space was announced as early as 1964 by Melvin Webber and related to the massive use of automobiles (Webber 1964).

“ARCHITECTURE AND MORE TRADITIONAL VISUAL ARTS ARE ASKED TO FACE THE LACK OF DESIGN CULTURE, WHICH HAS CHARACTERIZED THE INCONSISTENT GROWTH OF MANY CITIES IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY.”

Such a dense relationship, however, doesn't end with modernity. Later, and especially with the advent of the historical avant-garde, artists promoted a first real stylistic update: a total rejection of the academic tradition in favor of a conception of art as free from the needs of symbolic and allegorical celebrations (Heinich, 2004). In particular, since the fifties, artists seek a new relationship with the city and the urban area and interact with the environment, abandoning purely decorative or ceremonial purposes (Miles, 1997; Miles, Hall, 2003; Sacco, 2006).

Over the past twenty years arts started addressing the issue of urban regeneration. The latter is conceived not only in terms of aesthetic appreciation of the building environment, but rather as a general reflection on the quality of citizens' lives and on inhabitants' relationship with the urban space. Art returns to play a primary role in designing the city and artists are more and more asked to use their sensitivity in order to transform “spaces” into “places”.

## 2. The cultural turn in urban planning

The recurrence of a more holistic approach to urban space design is primarily related to the crisis of traditional rationalist planning and to the changed relationship between citizens and city. Many authors put in evidence that as the city grows, public planners and city administrators are no longer able to keep up with the pace of change since they rely on outdated models of interpretation and governance (Bovone, Mazzette, Rovati, 2007; Bovone, Ruggerone, 2009).

In such a context, the technical language and the technological tools which traditionally characterized urban planners' background and expertise, essentially based on the validation logic rationality as the only likely to understand urban change, clashed with the need to engage with inhabitants' everyday life.

The search of new instruments, which could foster the dialogue between urban and everyday life, drives to an increasing use of artistic intervention. In contemporary European cities integrated urban policy approaches call into question actions and practices which mix art and urban planning tools. Architecture and more traditional visual arts are asked to face the lack of design culture, which has characterized the inconsistent growth of many cities in the second half of the nineteenth century and which represented the weakest point in the construction of modern suburbs of many industrial cities, whose rapid development was mainly driven by consistent economic and social contingencies. Arts and architecture are asked to face the physical and the social transformation of urban sites, to investigate the relationship between cities and the new cultural and ethnic identities that populate them; finally, the arts, wholly considered, are called upon to interpret contemporary society, to deal with the morphology and the history of places.

Such a remarkable change in the design culture fostered the birth of an heterogeneous panorama of artistic interventions in the public space, to which we commonly refer to as public art (Miles, 1997; Cartiere, Willis, 2008; Knight, 2008). These actions rarely have a purely decorative or commemorative function. Rather, as we will see in the following pages, they aim to enable policy-makers building languages closer to peoples' concerns. They aspire to widen the power of land government to city dwellers mixing technical languages and social sensitivity.

However when talking about public art, the use of the conditional tense is a necessary requirement. As far as the city stops being the place of production and becomes the place for consumption or the point of attraction for creative class people and financial investment, public art represents a winning formula in terms of urban regeneration. Since the 1980s, either in Europe or in the USA, urban regeneration policies have relied on culture as an engine for reanimating the decline of post industrial cities (Landry, Bianchini, 1995; Miles, 1997) and local governments

commissioning of work of public art has become an established practice for regenerating urban spaces as well as being an effective means of promoting city profiles capable of attracting investments and visitors.

As a consequence of this cultural turn in urban regeneration, thousands of pages have been written to prove or disprove this common and widely-held belief. Advocates, on the one hand, have produced investigations aimed at demonstrating how art can positively impact communities with a relatively low budget. More or less explicitly, the intention was to encourage a wide use of these practices to tackle social exclusion (Landry, Matarasso 1996; Matarasso, 1997). On the other hand, the most skeptical critics have argued against what they define as a purely rhetorical use of arts (Zukin, 1991). The cultural geographer Tim Butler, for example, noticed on several occasions that regeneration is really synonymous with gentrification (Zukin, 1995; Butler, Robson, 2001; Butler, 2005) and that, as a consequence, the renewal and regeneration of entire industrial areas - which has been called the urban renaissance (Rogers, 1999) - is accompanied by a process of hygienisation and standardization of public spaces that instead of encouraging greater social cohesion, has led to the "bourgeoisification" of less prosperous areas.

Although I recognize that, especially in the past, through instituting public art projects in disadvantaged communities, policy makers consciously tried to promote a fallacious sense of shared space (Hall, Robertson, 2001; Hall, 2003; Miles, 2003). In this paper I concentrate on recent examples of public art actions that do not embrace a purely decorative function and do not hesitate to break with the conventions that mark the political use of public art. I will concentrate on examples of public art interventions that truly engage with social practices and in which their social dimension represents a starting point for the realization of the intervention itself.

My intention is not to ideologically assess the justness of public art. I would rather try to analyze it as an example of community planning and I would try to export from its experience good practices and effective tools for urban planning.

### **3. Public art and the chance of social inclusion**

Recent practices of public art are intended both to design the physical appearance of the city and to rebuild the relationship that underpins urban life. As a consequence of this transition of art works toward a social dimension, all interested parties - artists, local and regional authorities, public art agencies and civil society - are requested to reconsider their role and to actively take part in the decision-making process.

This more participatory form of public art practice has been termed "new genre public art" (Lacy, 1995).

In such a context artists move to engage with communities and existing social struggles, to develop collaboration and dialogue with residents, and to employ different modes of address. "New genre public art", since it considers society, or more in general the social dimension as the focal point of observation, is built upon the relationship between artists and an audience - residents, inhabitants or, in other words, the city - and is defined not as an outcome, but rather as a process (Hein, 2006).

"New genre public art projects generally involve complex negotiations - with local property owners; art and building commissions; state, local and federal government agencies; environmental organizations; founding sources; professional associations; trade unions; neighborhood and citizens' groups; purveyors of materials; immediate abutters of projects; and the actual performers or producers of the artwork" (Hein, 2006: 75).

The new role played by art questions the traditional role of artists: today's public artists, more prone to ask questions than give answers, try to animate public debate fomenting public discussion and a critical eye. Moreover, artistic interventions being the result of a pro-active cooperation between designers and inhabitants, promote public participation and thus call back the original meaning of art as *res publica*, capable of interpreting, serving and lending added value to a community of people who live in a defined, circumscribed space.

This is, for example, the aim of *Nuovi Committenti*, a program for the realization of art works for the public space undertaken by the Adriano Olivetti Foundation in Turin. The program outlines practices of artistic production as a possible factor of social change and promotes citizen participation in the patronage and production of contemporary art projects that acknowledge a concrete demand and are conceived as installations in the everyday living and working environment of the same patrons (Bertolino, Comisso, Parola, Perlo, 2008).

But how is this social aim translated into operative practices? How does the foundation operatively foster civic engagement? Is it successful in terms of urban governance? And to which extent?

In order to answer these questions in the following pages I will try to account for the whole process of public art realization within the *Nuovi Committenti* project. Through a qualitative analysis of in depth interviews with artists, mediators and city administrators, I will explore the democratic potential embodied in the artistic interventions realized within the framework of the *Nuovi Committenti* program and I will challenge the view of public art as a collective good.

However before introducing such a specific case, a brief introduction to the Italian management of public art is necessary.

## 4. Public art practices in the Italian context

It is widely recognized that in Italian history, art has always played a central role in city building. The industrial age marked the Italian landscape in the same way it did in many other European countries. The fertile association of art and city planning, which characterized many Italian cities in the past, collapsed. Architecture and urban planning disciplines moved away from the field of visual arts and became more and more technical. As a consequence, cities grew paying less attention to their aesthetic dimension and giving preference to functional buildings. Although residents' general needs (housing, electrical and water facilities, green areas) were taken into account, no opportunity was given to them for playing an active role in the decision-making process. The physical landscape of every city, also within public areas, ended up reflecting the elites' wishes and wills instead of being the outcome of negotiation practices between "public" and "private" sector as the "collective" nature of public space would generally report.

Right after the Second World War, reconstruction programmes started to spread throughout the Italian territory. At the same time, local and regional authorities started paying new attention to the arts and artists: actually the awareness that art, in the variety of reference models, was one of the tools for renewing the image of Italian cities, but also for restoring a sense of belonging to Italian people by acting on the quality of places, increased.

In step with the above scenario, in 1949 the Italian government approved the law 717, also known as the 2% for art rule. This law, proposed by Giuseppe Bottai, Minister of National Education since 1936, and prompted by a public debate involving many protagonists of contemporaneous Italian culture - such as Gadda, Longanesi, Montale, Quasimodo and Ungaretti assigned two percent of the total costs invested in new buildings or in large scale development projects to create works of art.

The proposal was innovative and potentially prolific for the development of further public art projects. The law, although still in existence, has for the time being rather been respected or applied. Many reasons support the un-success of the 2% rule: the most firm detractors have underlined that that law doesn't provide for an authority to verify the respect for the regulation and have enlightened how the lack of control agencies seems to convey the idea that the 2% rule is rather a suggestion than a directive; other critics question the social quality of the works of art realized within the law assessing that the directive, instead of involving the civil society in the construction of public space, allocates the decision power to political and economic elites.

The latter issue is unquestionably true. Public art works realized within the 2% rule were typically modernist abstract sculptures placed outdoors to "decorate" or "enrich" urban spaces, especially plaza areas fronting federal buildings or corporate office towers.

With the exception of 717 law adjournments, since 1949 no rules on public art have been approved and, although in the Nineties the government showed a genuine sensitivity towards programs and policies aimed at promoting artistic projects in the area, the regulation of the public art sector in Italy has never been taken into account.

In such an unclear normative context, the most interesting practices of public art, and especially those which better express the civic nature of the artistic intervention in the territory, are created outside the institutional arenas thanks to the active action of largely apolitical actors such as residents, community representative, artists and curators. Faced with processes and actions that people perceive as the outcomes of top-down decisions, artists, often organized in groups or collectives, try to understand the concrete demand of urban quality expressed by the inhabitants and to transform it into art while local and regional authorities mainly act as a passive audience.

As a consequence of such a lack of a public art system, the comprehension of the Italian attitude toward artistic intervention in the public space can't exempt ourselves to take into account the analysis of program for the realization of artworks for the public space funded and promoted by private bodies such as *Nuovi Committenti*.

## 5. *Nuovi Committenti*: a programme for the production of art works for the public space

*Nuovi Committenti* is a programme for the production of art works for the public space in which citizens, as far as they commission works of art for the places where they live or work, act as patrons. It has been promoted by the Fondazione Adriano Olivetti since 2001 and it is currently implemented in Turin through the mediation of a local non-profit organization, named *a.titolo*, whose mission is promoting contemporary art oriented toward the social, political and cultural public space.

The program is based on the active collaboration between citizen-patrons, mediators, and artists: the artists are called to share the concept of the work of art with the citizens-patrons and to give rise to an open collaboration model; the mediator invites an artist to collate and cooperate with the community; finally patrons are citizens who gathered in groups - an association, a committee, a classroom, the staff of a hospital etc. - require the presence of a work of art in the places where they work or live (Bertolino, Comisso, Parola, Perlo, 2008).

The patrons' initial requests and expectations are the foundation of the project. According to this the mediator transcribes the inhabitants' desires into the Chart of Intentions, an official document on which artists will base their art project:

We always work on this table. We seat around this table extremely different actors: from artists to citizens, from patrons to public authorities, from architects to anthropologists. The main object of our first meeting is always the lack of something. You can call it, if you prefer, a desire, a need. It's a long process. Because before we start collaborating we have to help all these subjects to build a common language. Only after that we can translate residents-patrons desires into the Chart of Intentions. [MEDIATOR 1]

Mediators are chosen by the Olivetti Foundation according to their competence in the artistic sector, but also in relation to their knowledge of the territory and their willingness to listen to the needs of both citizens and artists. They choose the artist, present the said artist to the patrons and must be able to interpret the latter's projections and needs as well as act as intermediaries with the local administrators (Bertolino, Comisso, Parola, Perlo 2008):

We didn't start working as a mediator. We are all art critics. We didn't start managing art or public art projects but we were all devoted to historical study and analysis of art. After that we start collaborating with the City of Turin on some artistic initiative. I believe that all these expertise either in the art and in the city made possible our first collaboration with the Adriano Olivetti Foundation. And after that we started working as mediator. [MEDIATOR 2]

Artists involved can either be those who identify with the socially engaged practices sphere or those who wish to locate their work within the community so as to reactivate the relationship between art and society:

In the *Nuovi Committenti* programme the figure of the artist is somehow "resized". He certainly has to deal with the dimension of collaboration and dialogue. [...] Its authorship is not decreasing [...] because the artist still has to translate the inhabitants' request, so something that comes from people, from customers, into its own language, into its own poetic; I would rather say that he is given the opportunity to compete and work with civil society. But this is an equal circumstance. This is the case of collaboration, joint planning and sometimes even co-creation [MEDIATOR 3]

*Nuovi Committenti* formally privileges collaboration among equal partners. Mediators, artist and patron

converge in the artistic action and affirm that participation doesn't exist a priori but, on the contrary, has to be nurtured by true common feeling and actions.

The first Italian experience of the program, as mentioned above, has been realized in Turin within the area of Mirafiori Nord and the support of the European requalification program *Urban 2*, the Compagnia di San Paolo and Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Torino.

The project gave birth, within the borders of the industrial suburbs of FIAT workers, to the realization of four different works of art.

**A) *Totipotent Architecture*** by Lucy Orta was designed to respond to the demands of the students of the two local High Schools - Liceo Scientifico Majorana and Liceo Artistico Cottini - for a place suitable for meeting, stopping, reading, chatting and finding shelter.

**B) *Multiplayer*** is the work of art by Stefano Arienti which was conceived to respond to the demands of a group of children and teenagers residing in the buildings of Via Poma having access to a protected area open to all for collective ball games. Confrontations with the child purchasers led the Courtyards Project mediators and accompaniers to develop the idea of an area outside the aesthetic and functional standards of other town playgrounds.

**C) *Aiuola Transatlantico*** is the outcome of a work by Claudia Losi done jointly with the inhabitants of the ATC buildings of Via Scarsellini.

**D) Massimo Bartolini's *Laboratorio di Storia e Storie***, is a library consisting of a series of shelves along the Anselmetti chapel and archive walls and it is the result of a long collaboration between the artist and the elementary schools of Mirafiori Nord.

## 6. *Nuovi Committenti*: a programme for fostering civic engagement

Over the past several decades all major cities have undergone a series of linked yet often contradictory transformations. In response to waves of technological change, globalization and privatization, traditional kinds of urban public space are being eroded. From Arendt (1958) to Sennet (1977), social scientists have regularly questioned the collective nature of public space pragmatically showing, especially in more recent times, the reduction of the areas of social life, democracy and freedom within contemporary cities' borders (Davis 1990; Zukin 1991) and the increase of places of transience (Augé 1993, 1999). Others, such as Innerarity (2006), suggested that as far as historical and traditional public spaces – such as squares – are concerned the latter have also become areas unable to represent collectivity, and different public arenas emerged – such as the internet.

“THE SPACE, AS LEFEBVRE (1974)  
SAID, DOES NOT PREEXIST, BUT IS  
CONTINUOUSLY PRODUCED BY  
INHABITANTS’ EVERYDAY  
PRACTICES.”

Actually none of the above interpretations is truthfully correct: although the merging force of public space is undoubtedly weaker than in the past, although people seem to hardly have a territorial identity and, finally, although the sense of belonging is mainly expressed through virtual communities, tracks of community resistance to globalization are therefore visible (Bauman 2001).

“Judging by the number of references to public space in contemporary aesthetic discourse, the art world is “taking democracy seriously”. Allusions to public space have multiplied over the last decade along with a highly publicized growth in public art commissions, and even the most ingenuous accounts of public art agree: public space is inextricably linked to democratic ideals” (Deutsche, 1992: 34)

As the *Nuovi Committenti* programme demonstrates, public art itself acts as a form of urban resistance to the progressive loss of public meaning which seems to portray contemporary public spaces: public art, in fact, takes into account the process that undergo public space construction and make more concrete the ideal of public participation obliging artists, inhabitants, public agencies and public and private financiers to collaborate. Thus it is increasingly becoming a concrete form of action in the public realm and as a consequence, especially as far as its participatory quality is stressed, its collective nature is definitely increasing. Public art effectiveness in fostering citizen participation toward public and political life is evident at least at three levels.

### **Relational Level**

It enables the creation of new social relations either within different groups of inhabitants living in the same quarter or within them and local and regional

authorities:

As far as art exits typical art places, such as galleries and museums, it creates new worlds and new point of interactions between the city and the artists. When we started this project, new relations grew in the quarter. If before the project inhabitants were more concentrated on their private sphere, when the project started they become more and more collaborative [...]. They had to collaborate with me. But participation means also listening to other residents, listening to the mediators. [...] It was like creating a community. And it was not a mere artistic event. It would rather be a social or a political experience. [ARTIST 2]

### **Decision-Making Level**

It promotes citizen participation in the decision making process. As far as it proposes an innovative method of cultural mediation between the artist and the citizen-patron, it replaces a top down design logic with a bottom-up requalification action and it strengthens the idea that designing a space is not sufficient to create a place or to enhance a given inhabited situation. The space, as Lefebvre (1974) said, does not preexist, but is continuously produced by inhabitants’ everyday practices: along a timeline they produce culture, memory, meaning; in the spatial dimension they project images and shape places:

The main idea upon which public art is built is the idea that if every citizen starts to have an active role in the decision-making process that underpins large urban development projects, it will feel more responsible for the place where he is living or working. He will therefore take care of public space [...] It will pay more

attention to its tidiness, he will take care of maintenance and he will definitely perceive that space as its own space. [...] He will probably start participating in community meeting in order to defend or preserve its spaces. He will have an opinion to share and compare with other inhabitants. [ARTIST 4]

### **Social Inclusivity Level**

One of the more pressing issues characterizing contemporary cities- certainly one which preoccupies much academic and policy debate - is how to achieve greater social inclusion in cities which, locked into the task of enhancing their competitive position in an increasingly globalised economy, are characterized by deepening socioeconomic inequalities and increasing segregation.

When working on participatory projects, artists are frequently dealing with communities who have been marginalized in mainstream urban histories. There is a general sense that they have been made invisible within the cityscape and therefore a key strategy in overcoming this sense of non-recognition is to render their history visible in some form. The very visibility of public art deals with the fact that it is a leading vehicle through which minority groups can affirm their history and physically mark their place within the layered histories of the urban space - the past being a keystone upon which to build for the present and future. One of the mediators active in the *Nuovi Committedenti* programme clearly express this belief describing a project realized in Turin which involved the Islamic community living in the city:

At that time I was working with an Italian female artist whose name is Adriana Torregrossa. She was experimenting projects which involved an immediate participation of the audience into the performance. She wanted to do something in the area of Porta Palazzo which at that time was, and probably it is still, one of the most ethnic areas of Turin. [...] Her idea was to give a voice to that community, the Islamic community which was undoubtedly a minority in Turin. So she organized a performance on the last day of Ramadan which involved a public pray in the squares. It was the first time Islamic people could publically pray in Turin. If you ask the community they all remember that day and since then Porta Palazzo started belonging to them more than it never did before. [MEDIATOR 2]

According to what is outlined above, *Nuovi Committedenti*, but more in general all participatory forms of public art and, indeed, art itself, can be the first step toward full citizenship: it gives inhabitants a concrete opportunity to take part in the decision-

making process and thus it becomes an effective instrument for social inclusion. It should be recognized that yet the capacity of public art to foster inclusion is only partial. Without fertile collaboration with local and regional authorities, in fact, public art seems to be able to address symbolic needs more than material needs (Sharp, Pollock, Paddison 2007).

The case study proposed, for example, far from being an institutionalized programme for the production of art works for the public space, encourages direct citizen-patron participation in the conception of an art project and identifies art and culture as determining factors in the design and requalification of urban areas, but it can get out of a policy makers involvement. All the four projects realized show a widespread awareness in addressing the impact of deindustrialization, putting contemporary art at the heart of urban policy. As far as art becoming a community project and acquires a central role in major urban transformation processes, the dialogue with local and regional authorities cannot be put aside. The *Nuovi Committedenti* programme doesn't assign an official role to public authorities, but in the four art projects realized in Mirafiori Nord, public administrators were continuously involved.

## **7. Conclusion: public art or public service?**

As stated throughout this paper, as the city grows, public planners and city administrators are no longer able to keep up with the pace of change since they rely on outdated models of governance. For cities to thrive, to be communicative and alive, and to function as catalyzers of public life it is necessary to stimulate civic participation and community involvement.

Designing a space, as stated in previous paragraphs, is not sufficient to create a place or to enhance a given inhabited situation. As a consequence, effective urban planning actions or projects should deal with citizens and, more precisely, have to involve inhabitants in the decision-making process. This because the perfect aesthetic of the physical appearance of a city or of a suburb itself does not guarantee successful regeneration actions. Policymakers, as far as they don't want to build a fallacious sense of place, have to rely on participation and urban governance: planning should mean focusing on identities, values, and images as real actors able to engender behaviors and, thus, to shape places.

In such a respect, a plan would better work if conceived as a process, whereby the inhabitant could recognize its identity, and identify the necessary factors for a path of growth also corresponding to an evolution of meaning. In other words, a planning project and intervention should not simply correspond to the realization of an artifact: urban planning depends on the quality of the interaction between local administrators and the involved inhabitants.

Structuring the relational exchange since the very beginning will assure a deeper motivation and, thus, a higher level of sustainability.

As community participation has become a constant expectation in urban regeneration, so too has public art been celebrated as a way to deliver it. Because of its dynamics and because of the collaborative process that undergoes its realization, public art, since its very beginning, engenders the development of a relational layer, either within residents and between residents and other social actors which is certainly a structural condition for a sustainable planning process.

Public art procedure involves the inhabitants through the whole process, starting with an analyzing phase, developed with a few representatives, and continuing with a dialogue addressed to the entire community involved. In this way the artifact is built on the basis of shared values and perspectives of commitment, engendering motivation. Moreover, the emotional factor accompanying the shaping of the

populations to specific artistic projects, widens the social interest of people and drives their attention to other projects. In other words, public art seems to lead actors to participating in broader forms of urban life and governance.

Opportunities and risk incorporated into the use of public art within the context of urban regeneration practices have largely been described throughout this paper; the latter doesn't align itself with either point of view but it tries to present the limits and advantages connected to the use of public art in the context of urban regeneration. It deals with the reality that public art and cultural initiatives are widely used in urban contexts under the banner of regeneration, with the intention to achieve some degree of social impact.

Nevertheless a critical issue is finally addressed: can urban regeneration and citizen participation truly be considered the main aims of public art? If public art yields to institutional urban planning what became of its alternative/radical nature?

The risk of exploitation of public art programmes is

“NUOVI COMMITTENTI SEEMS TO REPRESENT A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC ART PROGRAMME AS FAR AS IT BRINGS A NOTEWORTH MODEL OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP .”

relational text imprints the sense of involvement even with higher effectiveness.

According to the premises outlined above, *Nuovi Comittenti* seems to represent a successful public art programme as far as it brings into being a noteworthy model of active citizenship. The value of the social impact of public art appears as a useful tool for the development of social capital and civic identity. Moreover, the incorporation of historical elements in the art work itself reinforces a common sense of territorial belonging, as well as it helps to develop a sense of community.

Being sincere what we really liked a lot of *Nuovi Comittenti* is that it is a program that doesn't really need to work properly for political activist artists or policy makers. The programmed itself is political and especially the methodologies used is political [...] the dynamic in which this project has been realized is highly political because it calls into question a civic role of all the actors involved [MEDIATOR 3]

The study revealed that the participation of urban

not disregarded. This is especially the case in Italy where public art actors have to deal daily with the lack of formal regulations. Programmes such as the one presented in these pages seem to integrate either the urban planner's requirements or inhabitants' desires. The equality assured to all actors assures opportunities for opposing the establishment and for avoiding policymakers' exploitations.

In conclusion, as long as *public art* takes into account issues such as participatory design, social responsibility and active citizenship and building on relationships, and, moreover, as long as it focuses back on the relationships, on the uses and on the functions brought into play by the specific inhabitants of a territory when they utilize a space, it becomes a concrete tool for effective community planning policies. More specifically, as long as public art practices trigger a participatory mechanism which involves different urban actors, both individual and collective, aimed at improving the quality of public spaces, it can be considered as an innovative instrument of governance, whereby central and local government bodies can interact with citizens and approach their social demands for urban quality.

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