



The Rocking Cradle of Creativity. Tales of Inertia and Frictions, Cultural and Urban Transformations, Creative Actions

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Abstract

Through the metaphor of a rocking cradle, the author describes the relationship between cities and creativity. Creativity is intended in its wider meaning, encompassing a range of creative activities which contribute to urban and human regeneration and advancement. These processes often run faster than the city itself (city inertia), both in its spatial and administrative dimension. Different velocities of cultural and urban transformations cause frictions that can hinder creative processes. Focusing on the city of Bologna (Italy), the chapter highlights common challenges and potential solutions. Final remarks highlight the general importance of co-designing, co-governance, compromise (the “co-”paradigm), but also the specific role of people and places in governing the balance between power, problem and solution in order to nurture cultural commons.

1 Introduction. Culture and the City

What do we talk about when we talk about creativity? The last couple of decades have seen the rise of creativity as a popular concept. At European level, creativity has been seen as a means to build a shared culture while highlighting the value of the different local identities. At the national and city level, creativity has been regarded as a driving force for the economy, with investments made in cultural and creative industries (CCI) and the like. Increasingly, and particularly at the very local level of cities or city areas, creativity has in recent years become one of the ingredients of a much needed urban and human regeneration.

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The word itself has nuanced, often multiple meanings. Some people have taken on the label “creative” themselves, somewhat blurring the lines between creativity, innovation and culture to the point of making others wonder if those are not just empty words rather than fundamental concepts. The following sections do not aim to define this word or subscribe to a specific, limited or prescriptive meaning, but rather to tell stories and report ideas about what creativity might mean in cities, and how it contributes to nurture and even generate cultural commons.

Creativity in the urban landscape can be about creating new values, products or services, or inventing new ways of making them work. Culture regarded in its wider sense is very close to creativity as intended in this discussion, be it for similarity or input-output relation. Inertia and frictions, cultural and urban transformations, creative actions, the challenges that people and places encounter “when things are moving”—and above all the specific solutions they put in place and that could inspire fellow citizens of another city—are some of the topics that are discussed in this chapter.

“Consciously producing culture” is not limited to the production of cultural goods or services and their placement within society, but it also means claiming a role in the formulation of norms and values that regulate that very society (Zobl and Klaus 2012). If we consider cultural production as a circular, and thus relational process that involves various levels of society, we can discover pockets of culture and creativity in unexpected places of the urban fabric. This means that citizens are cultural producers and as such have the right, duty and power to influence the context within which culture is produced.

Among the distinguishing traits of this process is its intrinsic dynamic status that triggers and nurtures a chain reaction affecting the surrounding context: the production of culture is not only dynamic per se, but it can directly and indirectly affect city structure and life. This state of movement, evolution and transformation is all but homogeneous. For instance, self-organised community centres, cultural phenomena or bottom-up innovative services usually go faster than innovation processes within the public administration or top-down development of infrastructures or urban areas.

These different velocities can be recorded on different levels of the civic scenario, but differences do not always bear negative effects. Sometimes the faster pace of creativity in an informal or non-institutional community can stimulate innovation on a much bigger scale, to the point of being recognised and developed by public administrations themselves. On the other hand, there are many instances where these different velocities cause frictions, which can hinder, stop or even reverse what begun as positive grassroots creative processes and urban transformations.

Sometimes city governments put in place solutions to face these challenges, which stand out as additional instances of creativity in the city. Going beyond theory and speculations, the following sections touch on some stories of creativity in the urban landscape. These are not presented as perfect, ready-made solutions, but rather as specific manifestations of creativity that can and should inspire equally specific responses to local issues and provide some more keys to the comprehension of the current paradigm and where it is leading the world.

In order to focus on a smaller portion of the spectrum, the examples that are used to highlight the relation between city, creativity and urban commons are drawn from a specific local context. Stories are pooled from the city of Bologna,¹ capital of the Region Emilia-Romagna in Northern Italy. Bologna is home to the most ancient university in the western world and well known for its history and tradition around participation, collaboration. The city is a fertile cradle for cultural processes and has developed quite some actions and research² in the topics of creativity, active citizenship and cultural urban development.

A note to the reader. Labels, such as creativity, innovation, culture, good and bad, are nothing but shortcuts that help people communicate in a more efficient way. For this very reason, the final sections of this chapter are divided into shorter paragraphs that make it easier and more efficient for readers to draw (or literally, jump to) conclusions.

2 The City, Cradle of Creativity

Cities can be considered as specific frames of space in time: comprised of both infrastructures and symbolic places, they are the product of local identity and express the relation and constant negotiation between past and future. As entities in perpetual evolution and change, cities vary through time. The spatial location, people that live there and those who pass by, institutions and government are elements that keep moving within the city determining its unique evolutionary path. This means that the pace of change of the city as a whole is connected to that of its building blocks, the interrelations among them and interaction with the surrounding context.

Because of their specific and heterogeneous nature, cities have always been the stage of cultural production in its manifold meaning. As introduced above, cultural production is a circular, dynamic process that involves various actors across society. Citizens, artists and institutions, actual and potential audience, managers and even places themselves are involved in the production of culture. Consciously avoiding the debate around “what culture is (and what it is not)” and adopting a permeable and open view with regards to culture and creativity, the range of what contributes to defining the cultural grounds of the present can be widened considerably.

¹Bologna is the seventh most populous city in Italy with about 390,000 inhabitants and 150 different nationalities. Its metropolitan area is home to more than 1,000,000 people. Source: Wikipedia.

²In recent years the Region Emilia-Romagna has addressed the topic through extensive research. The Report on the creative economy in the Region (ERVET 2012 and 2018), extensively analysed regional data in order to feed into a creative development strategy. In 2019 the latest research was published in the book *Il valore della creatività. L'economia arancione in Emilia-Romagna* (Bologna, Il Mulino) edited by Michele Trimarchi. In the publication, the topic of creativity and the city was explored by the author of this chapter (Mariangela Dalfovo “Una mappa della creatività: esperienze e fermenti” in *Il valore della creatività*).

Cities are natural attractors for ideas, new inventions, creative minds. They are the centre of art and culture, the stage and frame where cultural values are negotiated and defined. Digital connectivity, international networks and transportation infrastructures allow cities to be extremely connected to one another and provide a fertile ground for comparison and dialogue. However, especially in the fast and interconnected present times, changing and evolving takes up an increasingly significant importance, not devoid of efforts and challenges.

Urban transformations take place on different levels. There is the development of infrastructures, such as bridges or squares, and the advancement of the “urban software”, such as mobility systems or ways and rules for the city-user relation. Transformations also happen in the way people interact with the city and its elements, such as service providers who adapt the shape of a service to a new need or audience. City users themselves can be initiators of change, from the (creative, innovative) way they use a service to proper citizen-activated initiatives. All these different elements form an integral part of what shapes and dictates cultural and social transformations in the urban dimension.

The never-ending evolution process does not prevent cities from being perceived as specific or even immutable entities, from within and without. The transformation of their tangible aspects runs at a slow pace: the time span for a square to be built, from idea to ribbon cutting, may take well up to ten years. On the other hand, cultural and creative processes run at a much faster pace: cities are fertile ecosystems, “rocking cradles” where innovation can happen.

The image that a city conveys has very much to do with the cultural and social sphere, besides its looks and shape. Cities tend, however, to conserve inertia. That is, they tend to maintain their characteristics for quite some time despite generalised or local changes in the socio-economic scenario. Cities doing well (e.g. on tolerance, inclusion, services, etc.) tend to retain their positive characteristics for about a decade, while cities in decline find it takes decades to improve the quality of life.

3 *Urbanauts Change (the Way They Use) the City*

3.1 Socio-Economic Changes Pose New Challenges

The socio-economic changes of recent years pose important challenges to urban life and dynamics. Increased life expectancy draws policymakers’ attention to the ageing population and their needs; a changed job market affects the separation and connections between life and workspace; gender equality battles reshape roles within families; higher education levels equip the population with a widened range of needs.

Institutional structures and grids often tend to be rather static when confronted with needs arising from a transforming society and new economies. Much of the change happening in cities is propelled by those population segments who are more

likely to find themselves toggling between cultural, social, work and family needs. *Urbanauts* in the rocking cradle are bound to find creative solutions to their everyday urban life.

3.2 Altering Service Configuration. Cinenido (Bologna)

An example of an alteration in shape—in this case, of the cultural offer—in order to improve content accessibility without deteriorating its quality is provided by the *Cineteca di Bologna*.³ Through its programme *Cinenido*—*Visioni disturbate* (literally, *disturbed screenings*) the Cineteca opens up to a specific audience segment. Since 2010, the programme offers morning and afternoon film screenings for parents with their young children (0–18 months old), providing a full range of services such as parking space for strollers, dim lights, softer sounds and “freedom to disturb”, cry and nurse. If on the one hand, such service alterations need monetary investment in organisation and resources (e.g. opening times), it is evident how the social benefit, improved quality of life and even audience numbers outweigh the effort.

3.3 New Nodes on the Map: Coworking Spaces

Citizens themselves can modify the urban fabric and create new content and containers. Creativity is a useful tool to make activities and products compatible with work and life. The specific positioning of places in the urban fabric helps urbanauts draw more effective trajectories. This shifting and moving of people and routes has frequently contributed to the regeneration of urban areas that used to receive scarce attention and support on the part of public administrations.

Making the most of existing infrastructures, citizens have created new nodes on the map. This is true for coworking spaces, now a quite established phenomenon, usually located in well-connected spots. Initially set up on the cost-efficient solution of sharing office space and expenses, coworking spaces have quickly gained importance in social relations, culture, community building (Pais 2016). They have thus become hybrid places where a varied range of activities take place, including training, career fairs, social and cultural events and even welfare services.⁴

Evolution is not limited to the services they provide. From functional aggregators of heterogeneous workers, some of these places have naturally bent towards specialisation (e.g. culture and creativity, IT, etc.) and evolved as an interconnected ecosystem and even international networks. Pooling from the skills and knowledge

³Official site: www.cinetecadibologna.it.

⁴For instance, back in 2015 *Spazio Kilowatt* (now known as *Kilowatt*—www.kilowatt.bo.it) in Bologna started a pioneering nursery school for its co-workers’ children. Today *Kilowatt* has become much more than a coworking space and the *KW Baby* (www.edu.kilowatt.bo.it) is still up and running at the new location, where it keeps being co-developed and tested together with parents, educators and the University of Bologna, becoming a transferrable model.

of co-workers, some coworking spaces work almost as private companies providing integrated creative services, from design to event management, or as tech innovation labs and incubators (fab-labs, impact hubs).

3.4 Advocacy and Soft Power Change the System. Dynamo (Bologna)

*Dynamo—la Velostazione di Bologna*⁵ provides another great example on the topic of shared space. Their focus being green mobility, Dynamo started off offering a wide range of services around bicycles for both local and temporary citizens (bike parking, rental, repair shop, bike tours, relax area, etc.) and soon developed its offer to address a wider range of city matters. Since its opening Dynamo has been both a producer and aggregator of social and cultural events (exhibitions, parties, markets, etc.), opening up its space to citizens and organisations.⁶

Dynamo started off as a dream. A group of active citizens who strongly believed in green mobility as an answer to climate, socio-economic challenges and that, as such, should be supported, protected and made easier for all. In 2016, Dynamo was among the winners of an open call issued by the local government to allocate public buildings to creative projects. Through this call, Dynamo settled in a quite peculiar although strategically located place, a former parking garage between the train station and the city centre.

Ideas that become real such as Dynamo can bring real change to cities. They can influence policies, legitimise or validate the changed behaviour of citizens and help create new, updated institutional rules. For instance, it was also thanks to Dynamo's support, advocacy and negotiation with the public administration and policymakers that in 2019 the "continued behaviour" of many citizens on (bike) wheels led the public administration to declare some Bologna streets "one-way except cycles".⁷

The value and importance of these people-driven hybrid organisations in the urban scenario is evident. Besides the leading—yet much varied—services provided, they contribute to the soft power of cities. Usually referred to nations but extendable to cities as well, the term soft power⁸ refers to the ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce or pay (hard power) in order to obtain the desired results.⁹ These organisations contribute not only to reach certain noble objectives such as

⁵Official site: www.dynamo.bo.it.

⁶In 2018, Dynamo issued a public call aimed at Third Sector organisation to share its space (as headquarters, meeting place, etc.). From April to October it also made its space available (and free Wi-Fi) as a study hall and coworking space.

⁷Paolo Rosato, *Bici contromano Bologna. "Il doppio senso è sicuro"*, www.ilrestodelcarlino.it, Bologna, 15/02/2019.

⁸The term was made popular in 1990 by Joseph Nye with his book *Bound to Lead* (Nye, J. S. (1990). *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power.*).

⁹Source: "Soft power", en.wikipedia.com.

social or environmental sustainability, but also feed into what is called cultural diplomacy: the negotiation power that a state (or city) has thanks to its composing elements.

4 And the Cradle Rocks. Participatory Budgeting and District Labs

4.1 Participatory Budgeting and District Labs

The examples in the previous section illustrate creative urban transformations generated by bottom-up stimuli. However, some of this creativity trickles down—or filters up—to the level of public administration. City governments are tied to their citizens by a double-edged mandate that bonds them together in a two-ways relationship which should be founded on trust and responsibility. With relatively small territories under their control and a relative freedom from central governments, cities are the governmental level that is more open to innovation, creativity and experimental policies.

The city of Bologna is not new to creative actions and innovation. Since 2010, the city has promoted *Incredibol—Bologna's creative innovation*,¹⁰ a region-wide programme to support creative innovation and cultural and creative industries. The programme provides coaching and training and issues several calls to support innovative start-ups and the internationalisation of the cultural and creative industries (CCIs). Through public tenders, it also manages the allocation of public buildings to such organisations and projects (such as the parking garage which is now home to Dynamo).

The problem of empty, unused and underused public spaces and areas is very dear to Bologna. In 2016, the city set up a participatory budgeting process to involve its citizens in public decision-making around strategic issues, policy development and to re-think the use of public space in certain areas of the city. *Laboratori di quartiere* (district labs, begun in 2017) are the main tool for participatory budgeting and stand as a space for dialogue between city-community to co-design and define the use, function and development of urban places.

In district labs, citizens suggest ideas for specific places or buildings in the area. Proposals range from use and function to actual urban development and regeneration, they are discussed, developed and then put up for vote. Successful proposals become projects that translate into actual budget lines and work plans in the public programme. In 2017 and 2018, around 7000 citizens participated in these labs and presented 60 projects for participatory budgeting. A total of 30,932 votes were cast to select the 12 final projects for implementation.

¹⁰More info at www.incredibol.net/en/.

The work-in-progress of selected projects can be monitored by any citizen through a dedicated webpage.¹¹ In spring 2019, one project was marked as completed and one project under construction, four projects at the stage of public procurement for the construction works, one at the stage of recruiting the project manager. The remaining five projects had yet to begin their route to implementation. For the third edition (2019–20) the total budget for participatory budgeting was doubled to 2 million euros, including the additional million allocated to activities (versus construction and development work).¹²

4.2 The Regulation of the Commons

Another important tool developed by the city of Bologna to foster and channel the creativity of citizens in order to take care of the common good is the *Regulation of the Commons*, also known as the *Regulation of Bologna*.¹³ The document enforces the constitutional principle of horizontal subsidiarity,¹⁴ which establishes that public administrations should support citizens in the development of autonomous initiatives of collective interest. This game-changing tool allows formally or informally organised citizens to establish partnerships (Collaboration Pacts) with city governments to take care of a public good or provide a service of general interest.

The Regulation represents a clear attempt to provide an administrative framework for citizen-driven activities that were already happening in the city, building on Bologna's long history and tradition of citizens' participation in decision-making.¹⁵ The growing buzz around common goods is also connected with the historic moment marked by economic crisis and cuts in public spending. The Regulation on the collaboration between citizens and the public administration on activities aiming at the care and regeneration of urban commons was approved in Bologna in May 2014,¹⁶ many other Italian cities soon followed suit.¹⁷

¹¹“Bilancio partecipativo: realizzazione dei progetti 2017 e 2018” on www.partecipa.comune.bologna.it.

¹²During the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 the municipality published an update. Participatory budgeting processes were stopped in order made those resources available for the current more pressing challenges.

¹³The full text in English and Italian is available on the website of the Municipality of Bologna www.comune.bo.it.

¹⁴Italian Constitution, art 118, par. 4.

¹⁵Entry: *Bologna Regulation for the Care and Regeneration of Urban Commons* at www.wiki.p2pfoundation.net.

¹⁶The Regulation was developed with the help of *Labsus—laboratory for subsidiarity*, a not for profit organisation inspired by Art. 118. Since then, Labsus has kept track of the debate, actions and circulation of the Regulation of the commons. www.labsus.org.

¹⁷As of early 2020, 211 municipalities have adopted the Regulation, sometimes with minor variations.

The latest national report on the state-of-the-art written by Labsus in 2019, counts more than 1000 recorded Collaboration Pacts across Italy¹⁸ and analyses a sample of 830 pacts. A particularly interesting phenomenon highlighted in the analysis is represented by the so-called “complex agreements”,¹⁹ which are those pacts that specifically focus on the regeneration and reuse of buildings. With construction works, multiple actors involved and higher interests at stake (and, consequently, a higher added-value potential), it is in this sample that the most interesting instances of creative citizens expression are to be found.

5 The Community and the Commons

5.1 INstabile Portazza: From Virtual to Real to Virtuous

INstabile Portazza Community Creative Hub,²⁰ is an example of creative use of the Regulation. Started out as an urban and architectural regeneration project, INstabile soon became a “civic centre 2.0”, an informal organisation that has something to do with entrepreneurship and everything to do with community, cooperation and social and cultural value. Located in Savena, a residential district in the southeast periphery of Bologna, the centre has a varied and hybrid role, aiming to be a community-led aggregator and coordinator of community and civil society initiatives.

The story of INstabile begins with a social street. Social streets were born in Bologna in 2013. People started to create virtual aggregative spaces (i.e. Facebook groups) for those living in a specific area or street. These communities often go from virtual to real, establishing or nurturing social ties through real relationships and social events. In 2014, in via Portazza (a street in the Savena district), people met at a social meal had an idea: reclaiming an abandoned building to answer the needs of the local community. The building was a former civic centre built in the ‘60s, which had been empty since 1984.

After many meetings within the community and with the public administration, the group signed an agreement with the Municipality through the Regulation of the commons. With the Municipality as third party guarantor, they were then able to stipulate an agreement with the public housing agency, owner of the building. While the owner took care of some major interventions on the building, the remaining renovation works were done by the local community, pooling from the

¹⁸The publicity and documentation of collaboration pacts depends on local administration, the actual total number of pacts is surely much bigger.

¹⁹7.8%, 65 pacts over the total sample of 830. Most agreements focus on parks, gardens or green space (46%), urban public space such as streets or squares (17%) and involve two parties (public-private) for small actions of urban care. Source: *Rapporto 2019 sull'amministrazione condivisa dei beni comuni* (by Labsus).

²⁰Official site: <https://www.instabileportazza.it>

skills, competencies and resources found among its members and fulfilling the core principles on which collaboration pacts are founded.

This circular economy of resources is reflected in the governance mechanism, where decision-makers, implementers and beneficiaries coincide. The general assembly is supported by a coordination team who monitors projects and processes (horizontal governance). Community meetings are held regularly and allow citizens to suggest ideas and activities, and to participate in the structuring of the programme. The activity programme and services offered have a particular focus around culture, work and welfare. In 2018, INstabile's events were featured in the citywide Bologna summer cultural programme.

Working together, the community created a physical and relational space that local citizens can use, populate and fill with their ideas. This new kind of places that are fundamentally made of people are the “where” local communities express themselves and participate in redefining their own identity—and therefore, that of the city they are a part of. INstabile is a community centre but also an open space for projects and ideas, keeping a steady eye to the future, yet grounded in a fertile ecosystem of collaborations with public and private institutions and organisations.

5.2 From Spaces to Places

It is no coincidence that community experiences such as INstabile develop in urban peripheries. Often neglected by public and private investment, infrastructure and service development, peripheral and internal areas are where some of the more innovative instances of change are taking place. Populated by a varied mix of people—intergenerational, intercultural, etc.—these places are now increasingly reclaiming their right to updated infrastructures, services and resources. They do not wish to become a new “city centre” or hip area, but they are rather reclaiming their dignity and purpose as places for people.

The success of INstabile and the like is connected with specific factors. Local social capital, the knowledge and experience found among community members (architects, engineers, social innovators), the ability to create a productive relationship with the public administration, the knowledge of administrative procedures, the timeliness of the regulation on the commons. Peripheries have stepped in the spotlight, not just asking for resources, but also increasingly providing virtuous solutions that central areas and local government should take into account for further development and planning.

The discourse on peripheral and neglected areas was met with an increased interest in local development, leading to what has been called²¹ a new course of social innovation. Private and public investment have shifted from assets or buildings to the support of holistic urban solutions that comprise social and community functions, often co-produced with not for profit organisations. This has

²¹Paolo Venturi, *È ora di inaugurare un nuovo ciclo dell'innovazione sociale—partendo dal 'senso' dei luoghi*, 24/02/2020, www.che-fare.com.

stimulated a shift from spaces to places, which, in turn, enables the convergence of the relational value with the practical use of spaces.

6 Challenges

6.1 Different Velocities Cause Frictions. INstabile, Dynamo, District Labs

However well some situations might turn out, it is undeniable that urban development, cultural processes and public administrations have a different pace. Running across the same urban scenario, the trajectories of change sometimes intertwine, sometimes collide: city inertia, the procedure-driven pace of bureaucracy and public administrations, the rapidity of cultural, creative and social processes interact in the construction of our present and future.

In 2018, INstabile was told by the local administration that some renovation works had to be done on the building (property of the public housing agency). With the space undergoing restoration, INstabile's activities were put on hold, waiting for the assignment of a temporary space, a smaller empty public building in the area. One year later INstabile finally got the new provisional space and could get started on the works and adjustments to make it suitable for their purposes.

Nevertheless, INstabile is, by definition, *unstable*.²² Their “light structure” (not a formal organisation) actually allows them to be resilient, adaptive and flexible—three of the most fundamental keywords of present times. While waiting for the new, provisional headquarters INstabile kept on developing projects that could take place outside their space, such as a construction workshop with local university students to build a library. And yet, because INstabile is fundamentally made of people, being homeless for one year has made it extremely difficult to hold the community together.²³

Dynamo, the cycle-green mobility centre mentioned above, went through a similar situation. In order to make room for some major renovation works that had to be done on the building,²⁴ Dynamo cleared out the affected area (event space bar, kitchen, stage, etc.). Works should have started in late 2018, to last 12 months, but in early 2019, the public tender was still tangled up in procedures and technicalities. For Dynamo this delay meant a prolonged stop of the cultural and social activities

²²The name INstabile is a pun, being both adjective and adverbial of place. In Italian, the word “instabile” means “unstable”, while the phrase “in stabile” means “in (the) building”.

²³As everything else, this situation became more precarious since February 2020, by the global pandemic Covid-19.

²⁴The construction plan was approved in 2016, and consisted of necessary interventions (such as the heating system) on the event space, adding up to a total of 1.5 million euros co-financed by the Region and the Municipality. (Micol Lavinia Lundari, *Velostazione di Bologna, il Comune: “Il cantiere potrebbe partire anche fra un anno e mezzo”*, 15/02/2019, www.bologna.repubblica.it).

of the event space, which affected revenues, jobs and implied an interruption in the public social and cultural service.

As opposed to the natural flexibility of informal organisations like INstabile, structured organisations²⁵ have more tangible downsides. Given the uncertainty around when works would actually start, in early 2019, Dynamo launched a crowdfunding campaign to rebuild the event space and temporarily resume its activities. The space reopened in May 2019, while construction works began in September 2019. Over the course of 2019 Dynamo not only resumed social and cultural events, but it also reinforced a thriving public debate around the commons and the role of administrations in nurturing or hindering a sustainable and responsible management.

Participatory budgeting and district labs have their own challenges too. The implementation of projects selected in the first edition (2017) only started in 2019. It is no surprise that the route from idea to reality in the public sector is slow and full of procedures. What this means for citizens is that expectations are not met in the short term. The doubling of the budget for the third (2019–20) edition with one million euro allocated to activities might represent a reaction to the problem. With activities (festivals, exhibitions, courses, events), the lag between idea and reality is much smaller than with construction works. This can absolutely be read as the public administration's response to its own slowness.

6.2 The Dark Side of Active Citizenship (Plus Some Good News)

Recent years have seen the development of debate and actions around active citizens. Dynamo, INstabile, the Regulation and district labs belong to this process. With active citizenship increasingly considered as a miracle cure for deteriorating urban and social landscapes, horizontal subsidiarity²⁶ can become a double-edged sword. While it allows citizens to act upon a public good or provide a service of public interest, administrators might sometimes be led to think that they can delegate regular day-to-day urban care or take citizens actions for granted across time.

This flawed approach to active citizenship could thus become an obstacle: on the public administration side, to recognising the necessity of supporting these cultural processes, on the side of those very cultural processes, to striving and fighting for their own economic sustainability (and freedom). This also ultimately feeds the misleading paradigm of creative and cultural processes being the output of voluntary actions carried out for one's own pleasure and in one's own free time, thus "free" from any sort of monetary valorisation or compensation.

²⁵As a legal entity, Dynamo is a cooperative organisation with 20 + employees. It provides an essential mobility service to both residents and tourists.

²⁶Horizontal subsidiarity is the constitutional principle that regulates the relationship between government and citizens to take care of common goods and services, which is further articulated by the Regulation on the commons.

The recent Italian reform of the non-profit sector²⁷ (*Riforma del terzo settore*, law 106/2016) actually tries to address these issues by regulating and restructuring the sector and setting standards, indicators and boundaries that organisations must comply with in order to fall under the Third Sector Reform umbrella. There is a thriving debate in and around the so-called third sector, as many organisations (including those driven by active citizens) do not fall under the public or the commercial sector. These organisations, often operating in the social or cultural realm, are driving a new paradigm, where “common interest” is associated with “economic sustainability” rather than just with voluntary work.

The third sector is a fertile ecosystem where new ideas, skills and professions are being developed. Grassroots instances of creativity based on the two core concepts of community and place can build relevant answers to local needs. Working at the core of what is deemed most “valuable”—art, culture, society, urban space, etc.—, they often take common assets and concepts (home, school, factory, community, district, etc.) and return them to the community. Taken apart and freed from bureaucratic boundaries,²⁸ these assets are reframed through new social and creative purposes that respond to true community needs.

7 More Frictions and Some Grease

7.1 Causes on the Podium: One, Two, Three

The previous sections have outlined some stories of different velocities in the city, if self-organised citizen initiatives are virtuous examples, city governments must also do their part in nurturing these processes. Among the innumerable reasons that hinder the development of bottom-up, citizen-driven experience, there are three main causes. From the more evident to the deeper (and thus less visible) they are: (1) financial and human resources (how much/how); (2) the lack of managerial figures in the public administration; and (3) the priority of culture and creativity in political agendas.

The lack of financial and human resources is usually the first that comes to mind. Although scarcity of money and personnel does prevent the public sector from running fast enough and keep up with cultural processes, pointing fingers to the mere amount of resources can be an easy excuse not to address real issues.

²⁷The reform involves more than 300,000 associative, cooperative and voluntary organisations, as well as more than six million volunteers, gathering them (i.e. associations, foundations, social enterprises, philanthropic entities, voluntary organisations, etc.) under the common status of “Third Sector Bodies”. The Code for the Third Sector harmonises the bodies’ characteristics and activities and establishes a national Register. The reform pushed the organisations to be socially and economically sustainable and has a strong focus on accountability (towards all stakeholders, including sponsors and communities). Many smaller organisations will probably be wiped away, whereas larger organisations will have to adjust and make important choices.

²⁸Paolo Venturi, *ibid.*

The deeper challenges around resources are related to soft aspects (how budgets are managed, skills and competencies) rather than mere quantitative or hard factors (amounts of resources).

The lack of experienced managers within the higher ranks of public administration is linked with the “process” dimension highlighted above (how versus how much) and earns the second place. The public engine needs project managers, resourceful people capable of making strategic choices at the right moment and carrying them on. People with hands-on experience, ready to take risks and with a mandate linked to clear and measurable objectives, with knowledge of bureaucracy and procedures but above all packing people skills and the art of mediation and compromise.

This cannot really be possible without political backing: the key to unleashing a culture and creativity-based revolution lies with the top levels. The position innovative cultural and creative intentions and actions get on political agendas is the number one reason for which innovative experiences are subject to frequent hiccups. It is not only about mentioning culture, but specifically about what priority level culture and creativity are assigned in political agendas compared with the rest. Attributing high priority often requires making choices that might be risky, and sticking with them.

All in all, the true challenge lies with people. Many of the glitches in urban and human development processes lay in what could be called the bureaucratic and procedural evolution of guilt—a most ironical overlap of illuminist-inspired structure, socialist-derived control and catholic-inherited morals. The Bologna examples outlined above could be successful also thanks to a visionary (even though perfectible) public policy centred around culture, welfare and sustainable mobility. Courageous politics is not so easy to find, and always bears some room for improvement.

7.2 The Third Way Through the Threshold of the Future

The holistic or “combined” approach (top-down meets bottom-up) is a recurring mantra among scholars and policy experts. This has proved to be absolutely right: there can be no true paradigm shift if grassroots experiences are not met by institutional efforts and public policies. This is not limited to the recognition or acceptance of such grassroots practices, but it needs to translate into targeted public policies that nurture existing experiences and allow new ones to grow. It also means compromise, investment, risk and sacrifice.

The bottom-up side should be more sympathetic to the other party. Public administrations are often unprepared to provide relevant answers and generate adequate responses to innovation. This grey area could actually make room for negotiation and discussion to innovate the existing technical tools in order to facilitate access to common goods and to redefine the concept and idea of sustainability, measuring them on co-designed objectives.²⁹

²⁹Filippo Tantillo, *Quando i margini assediano le città: i nuovi centri culturali stanno cambiando la provincia profonda*, 17/02/2020 www.che-fare.com.

The encounter between bottom-up and top-down, between public and private, is an important node in the analysis and potential solution of frictions. The commons are known for their power to blur the clear-cut division between public and private and give birth to new hybrid ways, such as public goods managed by private organisations in the public or collective interest. All these grassroots experiences that populate cities and peripheries get to a point where, in order to scale up their cultural, social and civic value, they need to be properly processed and understood by the system. This can only be achieved through a productive dialogue with institutions and infrastructures.

Like public administrations, private organisations and individuals (e.g. artists and professionals) are also often unable to address and manage this delicate transition towards integrated solutions. Crossing the threshold from the present to the future paradigm can be made easier by the intervention of third parties who put aside personal or professional interest in the name of the public good. This is a call upon public servants, mediators or external organisations who can act as facilitators in this process towards a better future for all.

8 And There Is Hope. An Attempt to Drawing Conclusions

8.1 The Managerial Turn

Good news. A paradigm shift in people's minds is taking place, even where one would least expect it. In the public administration, some cities (such as Milan in Italy) are appointing managers recruited in the private sector to executive positions. The managerial approach introduced in public administrations enables a quicker implementation of projects to the benefit of citizens and their expectations. Being appointed by the local government, their mandate is usually limited in time, often project-based and almost always changing with a change of flag.

If regular administrative-nominated executives run at a slower pace and pay the price of a procedural approach to project management, they can, on the other hand, ensure more continuity in time. Is this a dilemma between swift and temporary versus slow and steady? There is no right answer, but there are attempts to find different shades of grey. In recent years, Bologna and other municipalities introduced flexible hours and telework for their employees and started to test a project and objective-based approach to work streams.

8.2 Space is the Place³⁰

As seen through this chapter, one of the main issues or friction-factor around urban cultural commons is related to space. As introduced at the very beginning of this

³⁰Disclaimer: the paragraph title does not refer to jazz composer and musician Sun Ra's Afrofuturist science fiction film released in the 1970s.

chapter, the spatial context is a fundamental element of the cultural production process, together with the interaction of the different actors across society. This is also true for urban transformation processes, which can be considered as cultural production themselves. The management of public space and the allocation of public buildings are, therefore, crucial subjects in the political discourse, regulation and innovative practices.

Most cities are aware of the importance of public space and the different pace at which processes, policies and the city itself run. How fast is the cradle rocking? How can it keep up with what is inside? City governments often find new ways to manage these processes and bypass their internal limits. The issue of priority levels does not only lie with the political agenda, but also with individual departments within the administration and what they feel needs to be prioritised. This is why the call for third parties, mediators and facilitators is fundamental even within administrations themselves, where they should act as translators, coordinators and guarantors of the public good.

8.3 New Tools Foster Cooperation on Cultural Grounds. Laboratorio Spazi (Bologna)

Besides political and administrative priority-setting, the Regulation of the commons and public-tender mechanisms for the allocation of buildings to cultural projects have shown their limits. Bologna, initiator of the Italian “revolution of the commons” through the first steps that brought to the Regulation, is on the front line to find more effective and sustainable solutions. In 2019, the city’s *Fondazione per l’innovazione urbana* (Foundation for urban innovation) started a new project, *Laboratorio spazi*, which brought together cultural organisations to discuss the topic of public space and how the limited number of available buildings could be managed in a more efficient way.³¹

The Laboratorio Spazi started out with an internal analysis to appraise the existing administrative tools for space allocation and management. The second stage consisted of individual and collective consultations with cultural actors and civil society organisations aimed at developing new and better tools. The result was a new experimental procedure for building allocation. Instead of relying solely on the traditional application-selection process, selected candidates are called to present their project ideas to the group of fellow applicants and invited to formulate joint applications for the final selection.

This assembly works as a sort of co-designing platform, inspired by processes that spontaneously take place in grassroots organisations, social and community centres (such as INstabile). The process is coordinated rather than imposed from above and members have the freedom to choose if and with whom to join forces. This tool works towards a more efficient use of scarce resources through the

³¹More info on the project on the website www.fondazioneinnovazioneurbana.it and in the 2018 report *Per una nuova politica degli spazi a Bologna. Laboratorio spazi*, Bologna.

promotion of the “co-”paradigm. Co-existence, co-governance, co-programming and (more often than not) compromise are values that push cities in the right direction, working together in the name of a higher, common interest.

8.4 Common Good, Common Wellbeing

Urban commons also mean common wellbeing. The efficient and smooth running of public administrations, combined with a more managerial approach and an attitude to taking risks, often prove rewarding in the bigger picture. Cultural and creative processes that are born in cities can and should affect the management of the city itself, and should also be less strict with public administrations, who will continue to be tangled up in bureaucracy and procedures for the foreseeable future. Third party entities or individuals could be the catalyst of a true paradigm shift, taking both cultural producers and public administrators by the hand and helping them through the threshold between past and future.

The growing multitude of grassroots practices is a positive phenomenon, but in order to be scaled up and lead to diffused change, it has to be understood and digested by the system. By no means, this has to happen through radical change or value abdication, but it does mean that some experiences will have to change and grow and gain more structure in order to deal with hard institutional procedures, standards and times. Having the right credentials to dialogue or even partially “entering” the system gives them more chances to change it from within.

The regulatory function of the public sector is fundamental, especially in this process (even though incompetent people do exist and they must be confronted).³² A well-thought and coordinated process is what makes it possible to adjust the trajectory of the present and re-frame processes and experiences: from the sum of individual interests to a higher collective interest.³³ This is the true and only cure to tackle the procedural evolution of guilt that cements the barrier to taking relevant, innovative, visionary, creative choices (and risks), on the part of any actors—public and private alike—across and beyond every urban level.

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³²As urbanist Maurizio Carta wisely pointed out at a presentation of his book *Futuro. Politiche per un diverso presente* (2019, Il Rubbettino), “(...) la funzione regolativa del pubblico è fondamentale—poi ci sono gli incapaci, che vanno combattuti”. At Due Punti bookshop in Trento on 21/02/2020.

³³The concept of the shift from the sum of individual interests to the shared collective interest is drawn from Maurizio Carta’s book *Futuro* (2019, Il Rubbettino).

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