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Periferie
Dinamiche economiche territoriali
e produzione artistica

a cura di Giuseppe Capriotti e Francesca Coltrinari

Saggi

The role of art in urban *gentrification* and regeneration: aesthetic, social and economic developments

Luca Palermo*

Abstract

Cultural analyses of gentrification have identified the individual artist as an important agent in the initiation of gentrification processes: Public Art has been increasingly advocated on the basis of a series of supposed contributions to urban regeneration since the 1980s. A wide range of advocates have claimed that Public Art can help develop senses of identity, to develop senses of place, contribute to civic identity, address community needs, tackle social exclusion, possess educational value, promote social change, and encourage economic developments.

This paper, through the analysis of some study cases, would like to underline the importance of art, especially Public Art and its most recent developments, in urban

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gentrification and regeneration process. It is not only an aesthetic topic, but social and economic too. Regeneration is defined as the renewal, revival, revitalization or transformation of a place or community. It is a response to decline, or degeneration. Regeneration is both a process and an outcome. It can have physical, economic and social dimensions, and the three commonly coexist.

Cultural policy, and in particular Public Art, can be inclusionary/exclusionary as part of the wider project of urban gentrification and regeneration and can improve the quality of public life and public spaces. Many cities all around the world have looked at the Public Art such as a way to transform a space in a place. As case study I would like to describe the role of Public Art in regeneration and gentrification policies especially in the United Kingdom; for example Coventry Phoenix Initiative in Coventry, Blue Carpet and other initiatives in Newcastle upon Tyne, Up in the air and Further Up in the air in Liverpool and Sovereign Housing in Bristol. All these initiatives try to enhance the environment by creating a strong relationship and collaboration with the communities living there. They are interested in processes more than just in creating a work of art.

Gli studi culturali hanno individuato nell'attività del singolo artista un fondamentale punto di partenza nei processi di rinnovamento: l'arte pubblica a partire dagli anni Ottanta del secolo scorso è stata sempre più spesso scelta come strumento di rigenerazione urbana. Sono numerosi i contributi storici e critici che hanno dimostrato quanto l'arte pubblica riesca ad incidere sullo sviluppo dell'identità collettiva, del senso di appartenenza ad una comunità e, allo stesso tempo, riesca ad essere portavoce dei bisogni e delle necessità di una comunità, a permettere una forte inclusione sociale, a trasmettere valori educativi, a promuovere scambi sociali e ad essere volano di sviluppo economico territoriale.

Questo contributo, attraverso l'analisi di alcuni casi di studio, si pone come obiettivo quello di evidenziare l'importanza dell'arte, specialmente dell'arte pubblica e dei suoi più recenti sviluppi, nei processi di rigenerazione e rinnovamento urbano: non si tratta solo di una questione estetica, ma anche di andare ad incidere sul tessuto sociale ed economico delle zone interessate da questo tipo di interventi. La rigenerazione urbana, per tali ragioni, è, allo stesso tempo, un punto di arrivo e di partenza di processi nei quali le dimensioni artistiche, economiche e sociali coesistono e si influenzano. Le politiche culturali, specialmente quelle connesse alle pratiche dell'arte pubblica, riescono, dunque, ad accrescere e migliorare la qualità della vita e degli spazi pubblici.

Molte città in tutto il mondo si sono rivolte all'arte pubblica come strumento per trasformare un anonimo spazio in un luogo caratterizzato in maniera unica. Ho scelto di analizzare, come casi di studio, le politiche culturali legate all'arte pubblica messe in atto da alcune città del Regno Unito: l'iniziativa Coventry Phoenix della città di Coventry, Blue Carpet e altri progetti promossi dalla città di Newcastle upon Tyne, Up in the Air e Further Up in the Air fortemente voluti dalla città di Liverpool. Tutte queste iniziative sono accomunate dal tentativo di migliorare l'ambiente urbano creando relazioni e collaborazioni con le comunità che di esso quotidianamente usufruiscono e che in esso vivono.

1. Introduction

One of the major UK reviews undertaken by Graeme Evans and Phyllida Shaw for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport entitled *The Contribution of Culture to Regeneration in the UK: A Review of Evidence*, published in 2004, contains a practical definition of regeneration:

Regeneration can be defined as the transformation of a place (residential, commercial or open space) that has displayed the symptoms of environmental (physical), social and/or economic decline. Regeneration can have the effect of breathing new life and vitality into an ailing community, industry and area [bringing] sustainable, long term improvements to local quality of life, including economic, social and environmental needs. We are looking for evidence of culture as a driver, a catalyst or at the very least a key player in the process of regeneration, or renewal¹.

Since the 1980's, arts, especially Public Art, and cultural activities have become an increasingly important part of urban regeneration in the UK, Europe and all around the world. In many parts of the world, cultural facilities and activities are being exploited as a "driver" or an important player in physical, economic and social regeneration. Renewal, revival, revitalisation and transformation of a place or community are all part of the meaning of regeneration. It is a clear response to decline or degeneration and it could be considered both a process and an outcome.

Academic and political interest in regeneration processes led by art, culture and creativity is growing. This is evident, for example, in international initiatives such as UNESCO's *Creative Cities Network* (2005), in comparative studies such as *Creative Spaces* (2005)², and academic journals such as *Cultural Policy* (2004), *Local Economy* (2004), *Urban Studies* (2005), *Cities* (2006).

As already mentioned, towns and cities have been developing cultural, or creative industries, quarters and clusters since the 1980s. According to McCarthy (2005), cultural quarters

may involve uses related to cultural production or cultural consumption, or both, and further spatial concentration is assumed to lead to synergy, agglomeration economies and minimization of amenity loss. However, the designation of such quarters is contested. Firstly, the notion of cultural clustering and designation of cultural quarters in principle may be questioned in terms of its contribution to urban regeneration; and secondly, there is contention over the optimum orientation of such quarters— for instance, whether they should be oriented primarily towards consumption, production or both³.

Moving on, O' Connor (2006) emphasizes the importance of choosing arts and culture in order to respond to the specific historical, spatial and social

¹ Evans, Shaw 2004, p. 4.

² Evans *et al.* 2006.

³ McCarthy 2005, pp. 280-293.

context of each place: «Creative industries create economic value in cities, but require sustained and cumulative intelligence and experience which balances economic and cultural dimensions»⁴.

The main aim of this paper is to examine some case studies in which Public Art and cultural initiatives are widely used in urban contexts under the banner of regeneration and gentrification (as engine of urban regeneration) to achieve some degree of social impact. In order to do that, I will propose some examples of socially committed Public Art, exploring the contribution of Public Art to the achievement of social benefit through the involvement of citizens in place-making processes.

I think it is important to underline that there are different interpretations as to what may be considered Public Art. Miwon Kwon, in her essay, *For Hamburg: Public Art and Urban Identities*, distinguished three different paradigms of Public Art that could be schematically described in this way:

1. *art in public places*, typically a modernist abstract sculpture placed outdoors to “decorate” or “enrich” urban spaces, especially plaza areas fronting federal buildings or corporate office towers.

2. *art as public spaces*, less object-oriented and more site-conscious art that seeks greater integration between art, architecture and the landscape through the collaboration of artists with members of the urban managerial class (architects, landscape architects, city planners, urban designers, and city administrators) in the designing of permanent urban (re)development projects such as parks, plazas, buildings, promenades, neighborhoods, etc.

3. *art in the public interest* (or “new genre Public Art”), often temporary, city-based programs focusing on social issues rather than the built environment that involve collaborations with marginalized social groups such as the homeless, battered women, urban youths, AIDS patients, prisoners (rather than design professionals), and which strive for the development of politically-conscious community events or programs⁵.

According to Miwon Kwon there has been a broad shift in the practice of art over the past thirty years; we have seen a shift of emphasis from aesthetic concerns to social issues. I think that it is possible to add that we have also seen a shift from the idea of a work of art as an object to art as an ephemeral process and from permanent installations to temporary interventions in the social context.

Starting from that, it is possible to say that place-making processes could have a strong influence on social inclusion in communities; that art could be an important and constitutive element of regeneration and gentrification policies, and that art could also have a social and economic impact.

In 1994, the Policy Studies Institute summarized some physical, environmental and economic problems that Public Art can contribute to resolving. It was argued that Public Art is able to: contribute to local distinctiveness; attract companies and investment; have a role in cultural tourism; add to land values;

⁴ O'Connor 2006, p. 3.

⁵ Kwon 1997, pp. 30-35.

create employment; increase the use of open spaces; reduce wear and tear on buildings and lower levels of vandalism⁶.

Arts' advocates have argued that Public Art could help rejuvenate social connections by promoting community discovery and awareness and by enhancing social connections, «It's about community building», as Pat Benincasa has argued, «not simply building something for the community»⁷. In this way, Public Art could be one of the best vehicles through which a sense of community can be developed and promoted.

There are a lot of essays and contributions to the literature that argue that Public Art could improve the spaces of public culture, "humanizing" depressing urban forms. As regards this contention, I think the words of Swales are very important because he has argued that Public Art, «has been promoted as a way of enhancing well-being in cities, improving dismal spaces and uplifting bland lives»⁸. I would add that Public Art can improve safety, reduce fear of public space and can have a communicative function, generating and facilitating the exchange of ideas and opinions between people across physical space. In this way, Public Art and cultural activities are able to develop a strong sense of place too.

According to the advocates of Public Arts, sense of place aims to develop an awareness of tradition or identity unique to place and to furnish places with unique physical identities through the creation of artwork unique to sites. The words of John Dungey, member of the multi-arts organization The Company of the Imagination are illuminating,

We [...] believe that our relationships with places are as important as our relationship with people. And because places, like the arts, feed our senses, our emotions and our spirit and fire our imagination, we, in turn, want to nurture places and do all we can to ensure that what we value is not destroyed⁹.

These sentiments are echoed by Common Ground,

In encouraging people to commission craftspeople and sculptors to crystallise feelings about their place in a public and permanent way, we are emphasising that our feelings about everyday landscapes are important and should be taken seriously¹⁰.

The use of art and culture can also address community needs helping communities to understand their problems and facilitating their solution; Public Art, and art activity generally, is able to address the aesthetic improvement of

⁶ Policy Studies Institute 1994, p.38.

⁷ Quoted by Skarjune 1993, p. 19.

⁸ Swales 1992, p. 63.

⁹ Dungey 1990, p. 12.

¹⁰ Clifford 1990, p. 15.

environments, contribute to the environmental regeneration of cities, and offer a possibility of economic recovery.

For all these reasons, Public Art is not only art in public spaces, but also, and I think especially, art in the public sphere; a kind of art that can raise social, political and economic issues and that is able to activate public debate.

Relatively recent regeneration, gentrification and redevelopment policies are increasingly looking at the power of art and culture as means of leading the so-called “urban renaissance”¹¹ that is considered nowadays to be one of the most successful strategies for countering urban decay. What I would like to underline is the existence of different regeneration models although all of them use culture as a tool in all their strategic actions and consider Public Art such as a vehicle able to integrate the social, the physical and the economic dimensions of the regeneration (i.e. place-making, education, job creation, cultural participation and civic engagement).

I think that in choosing art (Public Art) and culture as an engine for regeneration and gentrification of urban spaces it is necessary to not consider the public space as an empty space to be filled with whatever work of art, and to consider citizenship as an active part of the aesthetic processes. In this way, the spectator becomes “spect-actor” and the artist becomes “spect-author”¹².

There are some different approaches to Public Art considered as art masterpieces located in publicly visible spaces. The first approach has as its main goal the raising of the international profile of the city by locating a work of art in regenerated areas or areas under regeneration. A second approach to publicness makes reference to the public spaces where Public Art installations or events are located. The main aim of this second approach is the re-branding of the city and the celebration of the resurgence of the city. In a third approach, provocative pieces of art are installed in public spaces. In this case, the word “public” refers not only to the work of art in a public space, but also to a strong link to the concept of public sphere; the work of art is not only a decoration or a complement to the environment, but also has provocative meanings and is able to start a dialogue between different people. A more recent approach considers the practice of Public Art as a vehicle to establish a collaboration and strong relations between the artist and the local community involved in the art project. Finally, it is possible to identify a fifth approach in which places and population are targeted by area-based regeneration programmes.

¹¹ For further details about “urban renaissance” refer to Rogers 1999; Department of Transport, Local Government, and the Regions (DTLR) 2000; Atkinson 2002; Lees 2003, pp. 2487-2510.

¹² The idea of spect-actor and spect-author has been created by Augusto Boal to describe those engaged in his theatre. It refers to the dual role of those involved in the process as both spectator and actor, as they both observe and create dramatic meaning and action in any performance. Boal was influenced by the interactive *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) of the educator and theorist Paulo Freire. For this reason he called his theatre *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

2. Case studies

As already mentioned, in The UK and Europe, cultural projects have played in an increasingly important role in urban regeneration since the mid-1980s. It is important to underline that an increasing interest is being shown in participatory arts programmes because they are low-cost, flexible and responsive to local needs. This kind of use of art and culture coincides with a shift in cultural policies and regeneration strategies that consider local people as the principal asset through which renewal can be achieved. In the United States, since the late 1960s artists and cultural organizations have shown how they can contribute to urban renewal thanks to the creation of cultural quarters in the city and in urban spaces. In the 1980s, British and European cities began to look at the American experiences in regeneration to find a solution to their economic problems. The most important criterion for the selection of works of art and for the use of cultural activity to fuel urban regeneration was an economic criterion. We only have to think that a survey carried out in the UK by The Policy Studies Institute, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, presented the arts as employer of 500.000 people and as the fourth biggest invisible export earner¹³.

In those years, Luke Ritter, as Secretary-General of the Arts Council, wrote in the Foreword to *An Urban Renaissance* that

urban renewal continues to be high on the national agenda. The architecture and quality of life in our cities are subjects of debate throughout the country [...]. The arts are making a substantial contribution to the revitalisation of our cities [...]. Arts activities provide a community with a focus and increases its sense of identity [...] an increased awareness of the community's needs, a determination to achieve change [...]. Art in public places enhances the value of developments for years to come¹⁴.

Britain and Western Europe have shown a number of important benefits arising from cultural programmes and from the use of works of art, especially Public Art, in urban gentrification and regeneration: enhanced social cohesion, improved local image, reduced offending behaviour, promotion of interest in the local environment, development of self-confidence, the building of private and public sector partnerships, the exploration of identities and the enhancement of the organisational capacity of individuals and communities.

In 1991 the Arts Council of Great Britain commissioned *Percent for Art: a Review*; where is possible to read about all the benefits associated with the commission of Public Art works:

to make a place more interesting and attractive; to make contemporary arts and crafts more accessible to the public; to highlight the identity of different parts of a building or community; to increase a city's/country's/ or company's investment in the arts; to improve conditions for

¹³ Myerscough 1988.

¹⁴ Arts Council 1989, p. 6.

economic regeneration by creating a richer visual environment; to create employment for artists, craftspeople, fabricators, suppliers and manufacturers of materials, and transporters; to encourage closer links between artists and craftspeople and the professions that shape our environment: architecture, landscaping, engineering and design¹⁵.

The artist's ability to see and to face the problems from a different point of view and a different perspective can offer new solutions and this is very important and almost vital for urban regeneration.

All that I have said previously leads to asking one important question: what is special about art? If we look at the dozens of examples in which arts programmes have brought a positive contribution to local vitality and urban regeneration, renewal and gentrification, it is easy to find some special characteristics that the arts have. Arts programmes engage people's creativity and so lead to problem to solution; they enable dialogue between people and community; they encourage questioning and by doing so they offer the possibility to find solutions for a better future; a direct consequence of this is that arts programmes offer a way for the self-expression which is an essential part of the active citizenship; finally working with art and artists is intellectually stimulating and, at the same time, it is entertaining. Nevertheless, it should be noted that arts programmes are not the only solution or an alternative to regeneration initiatives like environmental improvements, training schemes or youth development projects and initiatives, but they can be an important component of regeneration and gentrification policies and can have a significant effect in a given situation. As regards the above, the words of Zukin are very interesting; he has argued that «the boom in these sectors [Public Art] of business services [...] influenced sharp rises in the real estate and art markets in which their leading members were so active». Then, «investment in art, for prestige or speculation, represented a collective means of social mobility»¹⁶. This is sustained also by Selwood who have argued that

the fact that works by such prestigious artists as Richard Serra, Jim Dine, and George Segal are integrated into Rosehaugh Stanhope's Broadgate development doubtless contributed to attracting major American, European and Japanese companies to locate there¹⁷.

Cultural expressions offer to the city an opportunity to return to the classical urban values of civic pride, cultural identity and local independence. As a result, there is a growing interest in the role of the arts and wider cultural factors in restoring something of the quality of urban life.

Before speaking about some case studies, it is important to underline that the process of searching out and choosing some examples of the successful use of the arts in urban regeneration, gentrification and renewal has led me to form some conclusions as regards the key factors in that success.

¹⁵ Arts Council 1991, p. 16.

¹⁶ Zukin 1996, p. 45.

¹⁷ Selwood 1992, p. 21.

Starting points for a successful project are the enthusiasm and determination of all those who take part in the project: patrons, artists, local citizens and occasional visitors. In order to an artistic intervention to make successful, it is very important that it is able to strengthen the sense of identity of the place where it takes place; identity is about creating a distinguishing character that draws on the unique nature of a place and its people. Zukin wrote regarding identity:

By the 1990s, it is understood that making a place for art in the city goes along with establishing a place identity for the city as a whole. No matter how restricted the definition of art that is implied, or how few artists are included, or how little the benefits extend to other social groups outside certain segments of the middle class, the visibility and viability of a city's symbolic economy plays an important role in the creation of place¹⁸.

It is also necessary to be able to identify weaknesses and to turn them into strengths; the arts share a capacity to identify potential in the seemingly intractable and difficult. What seems to have no economic value is interpreted by the artists as a starting point for the development of regeneration and gentrification projects¹⁹. The presence of artists and other cultural producers in declining urban areas can help to break cycles of decline; a weakness can become a strength if looked at from different point of view.

Finally, regeneration is not an end in itself; it is about people and the quality of their lives. For this reason, involving people in renewal and regeneration projects it is not only essential for the longer term viability of the project, but also to inspire further ideas and participation. In such processes, Ley suggests that «the urban artist is commonly the expeditionary force for inner-city gentrifiers»²⁰ and these kinds of processes involve an aesthetic evaluation of the urban landscape, «It is the aesthetic eye that transform ugliness into a source of admiration»²¹.

3. *Coventry Phoenix Initiative, Coventry*

Coventry is a city in the heart of England, roughly halfway between London and Manchester. *The Coventry Phoenix Initiative* is the most important regeneration project for Coventry since the city was re-built following its

¹⁸ Zukin 1996, p. 45.

¹⁹ One of the first exemplary cases of such dynamics has been the total rethinking of a site abandoned by the Washington Gas Company in downtown Seattle in the 1956; in the 1970 the architect Richard Haag was commissioned to convert it into a park: the Gas Works Park was opened in the 1975 and has quickly become a landmark for the local population.

²⁰ Ley 1996, p. 191.

²¹ Ivi, p. 301.

destruction during the Second World War. The master-plan was initiated by the City Council in 1997, and involves the creation of a route through Coventry's central city area. According to the City Council, the master-plan was a sort of a metaphorical journey through the past, the present and the future of the city, starting from the Cathedral which had been bombed during the Second World War and rebuilt by Sir Basil Spicer, from the periphery of the city centre up to the prospective of the future represented by the Garden of International Friendship. As already mentioned, this project could be considered as a kind of reconciliation between history and the future.

The route begins at the Priory Garden where archaeology and the cloisters provide an immediate link to 1,000 years of history. The Millennium Gate at the city centre, now marked by the Whittle Arch, signifies the present and a future of optimism and cooperation. It is also posited at the end by the Garden of International Friendship²².

Richard MacCormac, one the best urban designers in the United Kingdom, has been involved in the project. He has always pursued an idea of design based on the integration of art, public and urban spaces. This theme is central for MacCormac's evolving view on art and architecture where he suggests that artists are extending the range of architecture by engaging with the subject matter of site.

The master-plan provides a pedestrian route with new destinations along the way that encourage people to stay in the heart of the city longer: a support for local businesses. One of the most important long term aims was reviving interest in and raising local and national awareness of the city of Coventry.

The project has created a series of connected new public spaces, two new public squares (The Priory Cloister and Millenium Place), two beautiful new gardens (Priory Garden and The Garden of International Friendship) and a lot of cafes, bars and shops. It has also created a lot of new interest in the area and attracted new investments.

The Coventry Phoenix Initiative has added significant value to Coventry's city centre, injecting new community life as well as economic life into the area. It is certain that the project's long-term legacy to Coventry will be of great benefit for many years into the future²³.

What is interesting about the project is the fact that it is not only an intervention on the urban structure, but an extensive Public Art programme too. In this project, each artwork is integral to the design and context of each new space and draws on local history and tradition to provide a new exciting urban experience. The close connection between works of art and their siting perfectly embodies the notion of site-specific artworks. The Coventry Phoenix

²² Waterman 2009, p. 148.

²³ Ivi, p. 162.

Initiative is, therefore, an interesting case due to its ability to create a dialogue, a strong relationship and an intense collaboration between urban designers, architects and artists. This means that each artwork will possess and shape the newly created spaces rather than be placed within them. Equally interesting are the criteria of selection of the artists and artworks; this process was delegated to a forum, representing the different interests in the city, who selected artists from a shortlist drawn up by the Public Art Commissions Agency (PACA). This is a clear example of a regeneration project in which the citizenship plays an active role; in this way it strengthens the sense of belonging, identity and sense of place.

Completed in 2004, the regeneration scheme has created new public gardens and two civic squares and has already led to new commercial investment on the site including new apartments to provide the city centre with its first residents.

Let me now examine in more detail some of the main changes to the Coventry's urban landscape: the Priory Cloister and Garden, the Millennium Place and the Garden of International Friendship.

3.1 *The Priory Garden and the Priory Cloister*

The removal of a 1950s church hall built over the medieval St. Mary's Priory has enabled the remains of the Priory to be revealed in a new garden. The Priory Garden and the Priory Cloister (fig. 1) are both inspired by their setting on the site of Coventry's excavated 11th Century Priory Cathedral that was destroyed during the Dissolution in the 16th Century. The Priory Garden is inserted in the excavated nave of the original Benedictine Priory. The contemplative nature of this place is well represented by the mosaic of Christine Browne Cofa's Tree (from which the name Coventry is believed to have derived) representing the growth of Coventry and installed in 2001.

The Priory Garden, designed by the Rummey Design Associates, has a quadrant of pleached lime trees that recall the contemplative nature of a monastic cloister. In this place, the artist David Ward has created a sound installation that gives the impression that there are voices murmuring in the branches of the trees. Archaeological details in the Priory Garden are highlighted and celebrated with *vitrines* – glass display cases. This detail shows the materials and methods of construction as well as the intended relationship between the viewers and the vitrines.

3.2 *Millennium Place*

The Millennium Place (fig. 2) is an extraordinary new public square for the City of Coventry. It is dominated by the twin, stainless steel-clad Whittle Arches, designed by MJP (MacCormac Jamieson Prichard) and Whitby Bird,

which act as a landmark gateway to Millenium Place. This new square offers opportunities for open-air concerts and plays and other cultural events.

The artist, François Scheinhas, designed a work of art for the Millenium Place which alludes to Coventry's history as a centre for clock-crafting. The work consists of a large clock based on the time zones of the world represented by linear LED displays set into the pavement. Each linear display lights up as the sun rises over the time zone it represents so that by midnight the entire display is illuminated.

The north boundary to Millenium Place is defined by a radial wall. Here we can see the *People's Bench* designed by the German artist Jochen Gerz. This artist was chosen because his past works had dealt with the themes of memory and reconciliation. Gerz's idea is that visitors will be able to buy a little steel token like a coin; the token must be inscribed with two names and then it will be glued into a pre-drilled hole in the bench. In this way, people from all around the world are able leave a moment of themselves.

Another important intervention in Millenium Place is a sandstone ramp that allows the visitor to have aerial views of both Jochen Gerz's and François Schein's work. The ramp becomes a spiral which is then transformed in a bridge which spans over the medieval city wall and leads to the Garden of International Friendship. The spiral is an innovative structure by Dewhurst McFarlane and has no central supports and is anchored at both ends by a 14m diameter cantilever. The steel structure of the spiral and bridge is enclosed in an installation of glass designed by the artist Alex Beleschenko.

3.3 *The Garden of International Friendship*

This is a collaborative project between Rummey Design Associates and British artist Kate Whiteford. The idea behind its construction was to give visitors the image of the city of Coventry as a city of international peace and reconciliation. Kate Whiteford has created a work composed of a fragment of a huge maze in white marble chippings and planted box hedges, based on a pattern take from a mediaeval floor tile (fig. 3). In front of it, a wall is inscribed with lines of text from newly composed Coventry carols by poet David Morley.

4. *Blue Carpet*, Newcastle upon Tyne

In 1994, Newcastle City Council (NCC) carried out a feasibility study into the potential for regenerating the physical environment of the city centre and stimulating economic activity.

When the project was conceived, the *Angel of the North* Public Artwork by Antony Gormley had recently been erected in nearby Gateshead and this had

greatly helped the regeneration of the town, "The primary motivation for the creation of Public Art is to provide a sense of place through unique works of art visible daily to the public which help to create a quality environment"²⁴.

The success of the project is connected to the ability to collaborate and to the creation of a consortium of public and private sector organisations with a presence or interest in the area of the Blue Carpet project.

Blue Carpet is an innovative project which has created a new public square outside the Laing Art Gallery in the city centre of Newcastle upon Tyne. This is one of the most interesting cases of a city centre regeneration. In 1996, Newcastle City Council, aiming to involve an artist in the creation of the new space, launched an international ideas competition, inviting a number of artists with experience in Public Art commissions, site specific and integrated designs to submit design ideas. After a two-stage selection process, Thomas Heatherwick Studios of London were awarded for the project by the selection panel. The proposed project was truly innovative; rather than design and install a sculptural work, Thomas Heatherwick Studios suggested a creative concept for the design of the whole place. They started from function rather than art, and it became clear that the square itself was an artwork.

Once Thomas Heatherwick Studios had been appointed, a group of local businessmen and residents met periodically with the design team throughout the design and the implementation of the project. The project was completed in autumn 2001 and the official opening was in February 2002. It was conceived as a resting place for shoppers or workers in their lunch hour within the busy commercial area of Newcastle, especially as Newcastle city centre is relatively short of public open space. Since the official opening, the Blue Carpet project has provided a sociable space which is used by the people of the city and visitors. The project (1,4 million pounds for an area of 1300 m²) was funded by the Arts Lottery Fund, European Improvement Fund and NCC. The main aim of this project was that it should appear as if it were a carpet loosely laid down on the space with edges curled up and seats uncurling from within the carpet with fluorescent lighting below designed to encourage night time use.

The surface of the new public square was completely covered by recycled blue glass (the paving consists of slabs made from the crushed glass of the blue bottles of a particular brand of sherry, mixed with white resin) which seems to have apparently dropped from the sky over the existing surface of the city (fig. 4). The seats in the new square are an integral part of the design. Created by cutting the carpet and turning it upside down (figg. 5-6),

by creating benches which appeared to be strips cut from the carpet, he also created voids which could be filled with coloured neon tubes. Lights could be installed beneath the bollards, shining up through the punctured fabric. In this way, it appeared that the whole carpet had

²⁴ Gateshead Council 2006 (quoted by Van der Graff 2008, p. 233).

been laid over some bright molten material which shone through gaps and fissures, rather as if the lava flow was still there but smothered beneath a rug²⁵.

It is clear that:

the Blue Carpet is essentially a paving scheme, but unlike conventional repaving, it does not fit tidily inside the usual boundaries provided by adjacent buildings and road kerbs. Instead, it has been laid, like an irregular mat, into a space which is itself oddly shaped²⁶.

Rather than Public Art, I think it makes more sense to talk about urban design. As already indicated, is not a piece of sculpture or a monument placed in open and public space; it is an intervention that affects the urban landscape as a whole. The Blue Carpet was intended to complement the existing buildings and give the city a contemporary icon. Martin Callanan, Conservative MEP for the North East, argued that, «The carpet is the unifying concept behind the design – it introduces humour, interest, colour and drama to a setting which contains a mix of building types and has no defining character»²⁷.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, since the inauguration of the square in July of 2002, the number of visitors to the Laing Art Gallery have increased by 57%. The Blue Carpet project also won the Paviers Award 2002, an award established in 2000 to signal excellence in the design and construction of urban pavements.

Newcastle's regeneration is about making the city a better place to live in, work in and visit. As a tourist destination, Newcastle Upon Tyne was voted, from 2002 to 2005, the best city to visit in England by Guardian/Observer readers, was voted "Best City in the North" by Daily Telegraph readers in April 2007 and named "New Capital of Britain" by The Times in 2004. It's not difficult to see why; the city is synonymous with fun, boasting a plethora of restaurants, bars and clubs, a fantastic retail offer, art galleries and cultural attractions.

5. Up in the Air *and* Further Up in the Air, *Liverpool*

Up in the Air (2000-2001) and Further Up in the Air (2001-2004) were two ambitious programmes of artists' residencies in Sheil Park, Liverpool. They were initiated and managed by artists Neville Gabie and Leo Fitzmaurice. The initiatives were an important part of the regeneration and redevelopment

²⁵ Thompson *et al.*, p. 244.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 239; for further details about the Blue Carpet project refer to Morlanj 2000.

²⁷ Cit. in BBC News (2002), "City Rolls Out Blue Carpet", available on-line at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/1781559.stm>, 10.12.2014.

programme of the whole Sheil Park area that included the demolition of existing 1960s tower blocks and the creation of high quality new homes (fig. 7).

Over a period of four years, these buildings became the creative backdrop for new works made on site by twenty-five artists. Now, the tower blocks have been demolished, and the goal of redeveloping the neighborhood in order to attract new investment and create a more thriving real estate market has been achieved.

The first residency programme, *Up in the Air*, consisted of month-long artist residencies based in Kenley Close, one of the tower blocks on the Sheil Park estate. All ten artists involved in the project were in residence at the same time, from August to September 2000. The ten artists resident on site for a month got a fee of £1,000, inclusive of expenses and materials. The value of the tower block opportunity to each participating artist was much more than the financial reward. Some chose to stay on beyond the initial month of the residency, using the flats as free studio space. Some came back later to work on additional projects.

The aim of the project was to select and invite some artists to live and work in buildings earmarked for demolition as part of a project of development and regeneration led by Liverpool Housing Action Trust (LHAT). No guidance or theme was imposed on the artists nor was any particular work of art or the use of a particular artistic medium requested.

The Liverpool Housing Action Trust was set up by the British Government to improve and redevelop the high-rise blocks across Liverpool. For this reason, in early 2000, the LHAT adopted an art policy made up of three strands of cultural activity: community art, arts education and involvement and Public Art.

Behind the project, there was a great opportunity to bring a group of artists and creative people working together into an environment traditionally outside the contemporary art circuit. It was a great opportunity for the artists to spend time with and engage with the residents.

The artists developed the project organically with the help and support of residents. The projects came at a traumatic time for residents who, although being relocated into improved new housing, were also facing the loss of places that had been family homes for many years. One effect of the artists' work was to promote a sense of confidence and optimism among the new residents at a point of uncertainty in their lives. Over 60 residents participated directly with many more visiting exhibitions and events.

The residents will be going through a major transition in their lives. They will literally be moving from having a vertical street to a horizontal one; moving from a high rise block, that has been their home for many years, to new bungalow accommodation on the same site. The objectives of this artist-led project are to get artists from a broad range of media to produce work about the transition²⁸.

²⁸ <<http://www.eightdaysaweek.org.uk/upintheair2000.htm>>, 10.12.2014.

The artists involved in the first phase of the project were: Leo Fitzmaurice, Neville Gabie, Grennan & Sperandio, Dirk Konigsfeld, Kelly Large and Becky Shaw, Philip Reilly, George Shaw, and Chloe Steele: all these artists had the merit of placing the emphasis on the process and the legacy rather than outcomes and outputs. The artworks produced by the artists belonged to them at the end of their residence period, nevertheless, many of the artists have chosen to leave the works to the residents in order for them to display them in the community centre which was to become part of the new housing estate. An exhibition of the works of art produced during the Up in the Air project was held at Kirbhy Gallery in Liverpool.

The success of Up in the Air has convinced the curators and the Liverpool Housing Action Trust to develop a second phase of residencies. Further Up in the Air was a long-term project that has evolved and developed from the experience of the earlier project. This second project involved eighteen artists and writers working in Linosa Close, another tower block on the Sheil Park estate.

The curators' intention was to create synergies between artists and locals. The idea was to invite artists that use a broad range of mediums and disciplines to discover what a video artist, a painter, a sculptor, a photographer or a writer would attempt to capture in what they found during their stay (fig. 8). 18 artists were commissioned over a 3 year period: Jordon Baseman, Vittorio Bergamaschi, Catherine Bertola, Marcus Coates, Bill Drummond, Leo Fitzmaurice, Anna Fox, Neville Gabie, Stefan Gec, Lothar Gotz, Gary Perkins, David Mabb, Paul Rooney, Will Self, Julian Stallabross, Greg Streak, Tom Woolford, Elizabeth Wright.

The first group of artists were in residence in Linosa Close during spring 2002, the second group during late summer/autumn 2002 and a third group during 2003. At the conclusion of each residency period, there was an "open weekend" for the public.

The artists developed the project organically with the help and support of residents. The response of residents to Further Up In The Air was incredibly positive and evaluations showed a real ownership and educational exchange happening during the project, with residents becoming tour guides during "open studios" when people were invited to visit the art works; the project honoured and valued the place²⁹. One effect of the artists' work was to promote a sense of confidence and optimism among the new residents at a point of uncertainty in their lives. Over 60 residents participated directly with many more visiting exhibitions and events.

²⁹ <<http://www.urbanwords.org.uk/aplaceforwords/case-study-furtherupintheair.php>>, 10.12.2014.

6. Conclusions

Traditionally, art has been placed in the public realm for reasons of aesthetic enhancement, to create a memorial or simply in order to introduce art into everyday life. However, since the early 1980s, Public Art has been advocated as contributing to the alleviation of a range of environmental, social and economic problems. Tim Hall and Chereen Smith say that:

Since the 1980s, Public Art has become closely associated with the regeneration of cities, the aesthetic enhancement of urban environments and promoting tangible improvements in people's lives. Public Art is becoming increasingly ubiquitous in the economic, social and cultural regeneration of these places³⁰.

Locating it within the process of urban regeneration, since the 1980s Public Art has been increasingly implicated in processes such as the rejuvenation of decaying urban spaces, the development of process of urban regeneration, the stimulation of central city economies and the enhancement of transformation of urban images³¹.

All the aforementioned study cases highlight the direct connection that can be established between Public Art and urban renewal. In these case studies, art is not only taken to the public, but is also used as a means to help residents relate to their environment.

Public Art is able to contribute to attractive, functional and flexible urban environment, streets, buildings and public spaces. Artworks and the role of the artists in this context enhance the fabric of the urban framework, involving the public through the creative process, adding economic value and creating a sense of ownership.

According to Miles, the success of culture-led regeneration is dependent upon the degree to which the reinvention of the urban landscape fits in with, rather than being foisted upon, the identity of the place concerned.

It is suggested that the success of investment in iconic cultural projects depends above all upon people's sense of belonging to a place and the degree to which culture-led regeneration can engage with that sense of belonging whilst balancing achievements of the past with the ambition for the future³².

The need for regeneration was as much economic as cultural and, according to Miles, this has to be the key for culture-led regeneration to succeed. Using Public Art in urban regeneration and gentrification, it is not only possible to improve cultural facilities, but it is also possible to improve the local identity

³⁰ Hall, Smith 2005, p. 175.

³¹ For further details refer to Goodey 1994, pp. 122-123.

³² Miles 2005, pp. 1019-1028.

and to attract new investments and finance able to revitalize the urban context where the work of art is located.

The experiences described above show that Public Art can be a valuable participatory tool for increasing the emotional ties of residents to an area, provided that the art connects to their local identity. This does not only strengthen local identity, but also increases the attractiveness of the area to external investors and visitors.

Public Art is acknowledged to be an important component of urban regeneration and gentrification. Closely related to that is the fact that the Public Art-led regeneration is connected to design-led regeneration, cultural regeneration and to the promoting and marketing of the place.

In recent decades, the construction of a creative economy has become an avowed policy goal of governments across the globe. In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida argued that it was no longer industrial production but creativity which was the source of new technologies, new industries, new wealth and all other good economic things³³.

Nowadays, Public Art, design and urban furniture contribute to the creation and strengthening of a city's brand that is considered essential in order to maximise the impact of cultural endeavours. According to Tibbot, who argues in favour of that idea,

If a cultural project is going to succeed in leading regeneration, it is crucial that it does so as part of a holistic destination brand. This means the promotion not just of separate elements of a destination but all of them, wrapping up individual attraction and buildings with the infrastructure around them, to create a unified destination brand and sense of place. The overall brand should guide the long-term planning and operation of the destination as a whole. It is only this sense of strong destination brand that is capable of connection with the heart and gut of the consumer. Once it has achieved this, it is able to position itself in the mind of visitors, and then to actually deliver market share and all the economic benefits that flow from this. Cultural projects give emotional fuel for successful destination brands. Cultural brands can also be adopted by commercial regeneration projects. Ultimately, correctly planned cultural projects can add significant value to regeneration³⁴.

It is possible to say that art and culture have a strong economic dimension and can be a key catalyst for urban regeneration and urban image renewal.

I think that the challenge is to consider art and culture not as a temporary instrument directed towards external ends, but as an end in itself that can develop its full potential in the long term³⁵.

³³ Florida 2002.

³⁴ Tibbot 2002, p. 73.

³⁵ For further details refer to García 2004, pp. 312-326.

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Appendix



Fig. 1. *Priory Cloister, Coventry*



Fig. 2. *Millenium Place*, Coventry.



Fig. 3. *Garden of International Friendship*, Coventry.

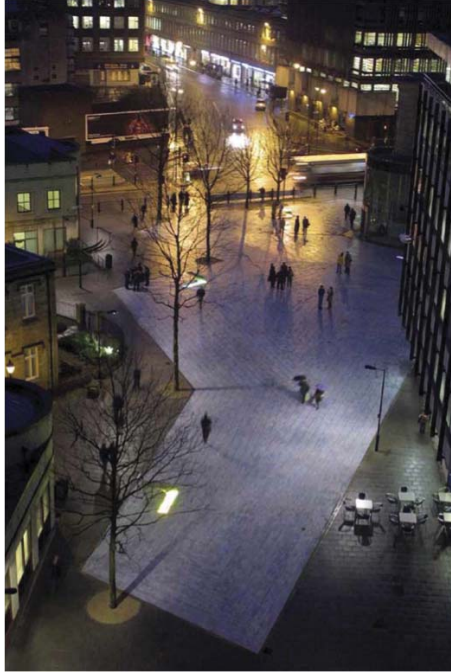


Fig. 4. *Blue Carpet*, Newcastle upon the Tyne.

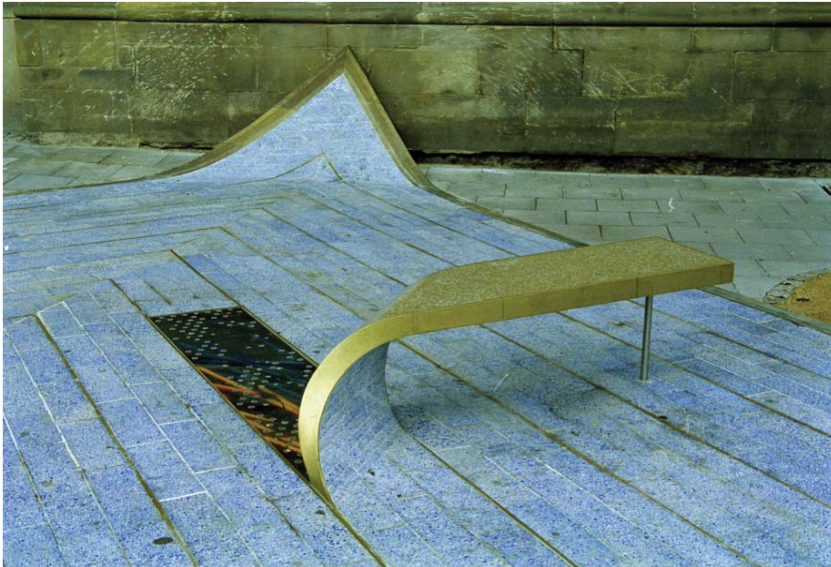


Fig. 5. *Blue Carpet*, Detail of a bench, Newcastle upon the Tyne.



Fig. 6. *Blue Carpet*, Details, Newcastle upon the Tyne.



Fig. 7. *Up in the Air* – Sheil Park, Liverpool 1999/2005



Fig. 8. The Artist Will Self, *Up in the Air* – Sheil Park, Liverpool 1999/2005

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