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# Showcasing Front- running Creative Practices for Sustainable Cities & Landscapes

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## Learning along the way: experiments and practices in cities and landscapes

As the title of this journal suggests, we are interested in creative practices, as something that is produced in “the embodied and creative uses of heritage generated by people.”<sup>1</sup> A central issue of this section is the relationship of creative practices with cultural and natural heritage in cities and landscapes and, more specifically, how we can understand their respective roles and interactions in the context of local sustainability processes. Considering these questions at the landscape scale, whether urban, peri-urban or rural, offers new interpretative opportunities. Indeed, landscapes, irrespective of their specific context, interweave natural and cultural elements beyond recognition, thereby helping us to think of them holistically.

Culture here, whether in relation to emerging creative practices or heritage—natural or cultural, tangible or intangible—plays a unifying conceptual

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1. David Crouch, “The perpetual performance and emergence of the heritage”, in Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (eds.), *Culture, Heritage and Representation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 57-71, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137293565\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137293565_11).

role. It also offers a bridge<sup>2</sup> to sustainable development. This linkage has become the subject of enduring interest for cities in and beyond Europe, if one requiring additional refinement. From the concept of urban regeneration and the idea that cultural and natural heritage plays a leading role in revitalising communities and their spaces, to Richard Florida’s concept of creative cities<sup>3</sup>, culture is central to efforts aimed at making cities and landscapes more sustainable.

The conventional narrative on arts-led gentrification has it backwards. Artists & arts establishments actually have little to do with gentrification. It is gentrification that draws the arts, not the other way around.

– Richard Florida (@Richard\_Florida) March 23, 2018 [Fig. 1]

Put simply, cultural and natural heritage fuels creative practices. It provides knowledge and ideas, which can be reinterpreted and generate societal spillover effects, for instance in the local economy. Potential solutions for urban areas and landscapes have been identified within the protection and use of heritage.

Conversely, creative practices are embedded in physical relationships with concrete things: sites, buildings, places, and people; they are hidden treasures in cities and landscapes; when brought to the surface, the rewards are manifold.

The main challenges addressed in this journal relate to abandoned or decayed urban landscapes, which suffer environmentally through degraded ecosystems, socially through social exclusion and identity crises, and economically through inequality and poverty. Creative practices have an integral role to play in positive and affordable solutions that contribute to climate change mitigation, resilience, urban regeneration, social justice, economic benefits, and relate to urban and rural areas - an insight that goes as far back as the fourteenth century, elucidated by the painter Ambrogio Lorenzetti in his Allegory of Good Government<sup>4</sup>.

To summarise, the importance of this section does not lie in presenting facts and experiences to a passive audience, but rather in stimulating readers by exposing them to creative practices that can address the challenges identified above.

In achieving this goal, we formulate three questions to guide this section: What constitutes success in creative heritage policy and practice? What are the factors and conditions that permit or obstruct success in creative



FIG. 1

2. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/culture-sustainable-development>  
 3. Richard Florida, "Cities and the Creative Class," *City and Community* 2, no. 1 (March 2003): 3-19, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6040.00034>  
 4. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Allegory\\_of\\_Good\\_and\\_Bad\\_Government#Historical\\_context](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Allegory_of_Good_and_Bad_Government#Historical_context)

heritage policy and practice? How can multilevel governance<sup>5</sup> contribute to sustainable development through creative practices and cultural and natural heritage?

## The multilevel governance of heritage: What is it and why is it needed?

The multilevel governance of heritage refers to cooperation, dialogue and interaction in which public as well as private actors participate, ranging from supra-national to national and sub-national levels.

“Only hand in hand can we do what we have to do as politicians and ensure that no-one is left behind”: Corina Cretu on the European Commission’s multi-level governance goals: World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments moderated by @ICLEI @MonZimmer at #WUF9 #Listen2Cities pic.twitter.com/aln8D-bZkdX

— Clara Grimes (@clara\_g\_ie) February 8, 2018 [Fig. 2]

Nowadays the density of actors and interests involved in cultural policy-making and governance represents a great challenge, due to the risks of fragmentation. National governments, through their different branches and organisations (e.g. culture ministries), need to interact with local governments, civil society actors, cultural associations and foundations, international organisations, professionals and experts, private companies and communities.

In many European countries, the definition of what counts as heritage<sup>6</sup> has traditionally been centralised and expert-based. In the last decades, experts have become less powerful and decentralisation is a widespread trend. This evolution has been supported by the adoption of new policy instruments, such as the Faro convention, which establishes the concept of bottom-up ‘heritage communities’.

Local governments face an additional layer of complexity, as they are increasingly being called to play a more central role in the protection and conservation of cultural heritage and have the responsibility to stimulate innovation and creativity in a changing urban context. Interrelation and integration with culture is not located solely in the cultural department, but also in education, business innovation, tourism, mobility, planning, inclusion, and housing among others. According to the specific needs, local governments through different departments can also contribute to the promotion of cultural heritage and apply for labels<sup>7</sup>, funds and pro-

5. <https://www.innovationpolicyplatform.org/content/multi-level-governance>

6. <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/rsa-blogs/2016/11/what-counts-as-heritage>

7. [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/heritage-label\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/heritage-label_en)



FIG. 2

grammes put in place at other levels. Recognition, such as the UNESCO World Heritage list, the European Heritage Label and the European Capital of Culture have been shown to increase the attractiveness of a landscape, whether urban or rural.

In reality, cultural national ministries, local governments and experts, more often than not, operate in isolation or at a disconnect, and communication between the groups is weak. State intervention<sup>8</sup> often takes longer to permeate and it is not always communicated in an accessible way (i.e. highly technical or discussion intensive); the feedback of the conservation-oriented experts and researchers does not answer the questions communities have (i.e. abstract theoretical questions), does not respect what communities feel is their shared heritage (in terms of promotion of citizenship), and does not consider a proper degree of autonomy and self-sustainability.

On the other side, local governments might not draw upon scientifically derived knowledge, expertise, methods or tools when identifying and solving certain challenges. They can also be heavily informed by pressing political or cultural trends.

As a further complication, when practical projects are forced to compete for resources<sup>9</sup> (both financial and human) and balance the priorities of various actors, both public and private, the additional interest and input of the heritage conservation experts/intellectuals<sup>10</sup> may not provide practical or realistic outcomes. [Fig. 3]

To advance and accelerate effective multilevel governance, the tensions and synergies across levels need to be further explored to identify mutually beneficial opportunities. While there does already exist some overlap between the different public and private actors, their continued dialogue and exchange is important and should be further strengthened. This is important because improved interaction between diverse objectives and priorities can lead to better results in both creative practices and strategies to implement them.

In this context, international and European organisations are becoming increasingly important and often local governments may cooperate directly with the international experts, bypassing<sup>11</sup> the national governments. Such organisations play a key role in triggering new ideas, practices and models of heritage policies, as well as providing resources.

Yet, it is more difficult nowadays for the heritage conservation sector to

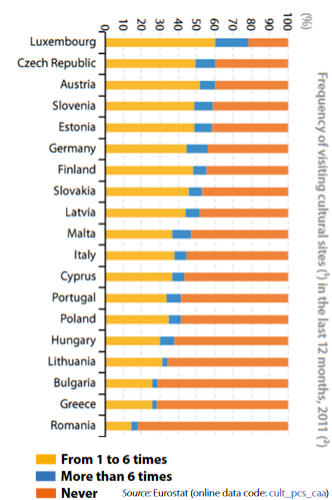


FIG. 3

8. <https://voxeu.org/article/which-level-government-should-regulate-air-pollution>

9. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/divergence-globalisation-and-digitisation-risk-increasing-disparity-between-arts-and-cultural-organisations>

10. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5306236/>

11. <https://euobserver.com/regions/121416>

influence communities in their behaviour related to cultural and environmental heritage. In addition, intellectuals/experts are losing control over the protection of heritage and feel they are unable to stop communities and administrators from partially degrading or misusing their sites<sup>12</sup> according to what they define as 'the lesser evil' working method. Ideally, to generate positive impacts for cities and landscapes, the academic sphere and the heritage conservation sector need to be in a productive dialogue with public and private actors at all levels with no top down approach. However, administrators at city level act at least partially in response to political stimuli and influences and need to mediate between conflicting interests without forcing projects upon people.

This, in turn, leads to our next question: what is the role of cities in this phase of greater recognition by European institutions and counselling bodies of the importance of cultural and natural heritage?

## Looking into the future of urban cultural policies

Cities are diverse and vibrant spaces with a rich social fabric, a multiplicity of identities and communities. Culture acts as a binder, reaching out well beyond museums, heritage sites or traditional cultural institutions. It can be found in technology hubs, in media clusters which nourish innovation, on city walls<sup>13</sup> (graffiti and murals), local community centres and street festivals which trigger social interactions within and across communities. It serves to create an aesthetic, an atmosphere and ultimately shapes the identity and attractiveness of places, as well as the wellbeing of those who inhabit them.

Culture is a resource for urban regeneration and social innovation in cities, one that transforms space into place, connecting people, generating opportunities for civic engagement, intercultural dialogue, and collaboration.

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12. <https://mauitime.com/news/politics/the-problem-with-cultural-heritage-tourism-and-why-the-continued-misuse-of-hawaiian-culture-is-wrong/>

13. <https://medium.com/@colewcrawford/the-invisible-fight-for-and-against-graffiti-art-abe976253be4>

## Challenges to face for European cities

Temple bar leads urban regeneration through culture @DubCity-Council #CultureforCitiesRegions <https://t.co/baEEO4ndxJ> pic.twitter.com/LIEtVTPH6L

– Creative Europe (@europe\_creative) July 11, 2017

Developing and implementing cultural policies that account for and balance the complex interrelations between social, environmental and economic dimensions, and make a real impact on the ground, remain a challenge for cities. Though this is no simple task, cities are well placed to tackle it—after all, change begins at the local level and cities must simultaneously adapt to and shape the circumstances that confront them.

In an era of climate change, mass migration and economic instability, cities will face their fair share of transformations. Across Europe, the populations of tomorrow's cities may bear little resemblance to today's, which will also affect cultural heritage and historical urban landscapes. In response, cities will need to develop new cultural policies, processes and offers that meet evolving needs, allowing for the co-creation of cultural programmes<sup>14</sup> and embracing the central role of heritage communities, as put forward by the Faro Convention. These more bottom-up approaches to governance should be partnerships-driven, while also striving to be inclusive and democratic.

In the end, the role of city administrations is changing in many aspects. To remain future-fit, cities have to adapt to the new urban landscape. Cities have a role to play in strengthening cultural capacity<sup>15</sup> and encouraging the creative world to come together and collaborate.

## Catalysing innovations in cultural policy

The cultural policy landscape is evolving rapidly, influenced by innovations both social and technological. These have catalysed culture-led investments for urban regeneration, but challenges remain. Cities are acutely aware of the importance, and fragility, of local cultural resources, and of the need to ensure that they remain relevant and attractive, and are used sustainably. To this end, a range of innovations—as listed below—are being mainstreamed into diverse policy areas, such as economic development, social cohesion, and external relations.

These innovative approaches and strategies include:

- developing long-term cultural visions<sup>16</sup> and programming at local

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14. <https://arestlessart.com/2017/03/09/co-creation/>

15. <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/content/about-us>

16. <https://www.planning.org/research/arts/briefingpapers/character.htm>

level;

- adaptively reusing cultural heritage by occupying<sup>17</sup> former industrial sites with new economic or social activities, including through temporary uses;
- making use of heritage buildings<sup>18</sup> that are difficult and costly to maintain and minimising the environmental impact through new financing and business models;
- attracting creative talents and artists and maximizing<sup>19</sup> the potential for local crafts by making workspaces available at lower costs;
- changing citizens' perceptions of an urban space through artistic interventions<sup>20</sup> to encourage ownership, civic pride, and urban regeneration;
- supporting cultural and creative entrepreneurship (incubators, living labs<sup>21</sup>, creative hubs, maker spaces) to support jobs;
- addressing social and environmental problems (artistic intervention with focus on enjoyment, combatting climate change<sup>22</sup>, self-expression, inter-community and inter-generational dialogue and skills development/training to prevent social exclusion, isolation, and marginalisation).

## Where do we go from here?

This section of the journal calls for interdisciplinary<sup>23</sup> and heterogeneous contributions covering a broad range of topics – sustainability, art, architecture, history, conservation, regeneration, cultural and political geography, tourism, sociology, citizenship, economics, business and governance—in the context of creative practices in cities and landscapes.

It will be reflexive of the diverse cultural outputs that it aims to support; it will employ mixed materials and techniques to transmit the importance of progressive cultural policies—among these articles, videos, comic strips, drawings, photo essays and more. In case of articles, those collected in this section should be 4000 words maximum and be written in a style which reflects the journal's readership among academic institutions

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17. <http://www.cultureforcitiesandregions.eu/culture/resources/Case-study-Madrid-Matadero-Madrid-WSWE-9Y6JR8>

18. [http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/media/good\\_practice\\_compilation\\_final.pdf](http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/media/good_practice_compilation_final.pdf)

19. <http://www.cultureforcitiesandregions.eu/culture/resources/Case-study-Bologna-IncrediBOL-WSWE-9ZCHBF>

20. <https://www.widewalls.ch/10-urban-interventions/la-tour-paris-13-2/>

21. <https://www.openlivinglabs.eu/node/1429>

22. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/15/environmental-art\\_n\\_5585288.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/15/environmental-art_n_5585288.html)

23. <https://blogs.uta.fi/leadershipforchange/2017/09/20/238/>

and cultural practitioners, while not shying away from creativity. Authors should bear in mind the need to explain the creative practices in sufficient detail focusing on cities and landscapes as the driving force behind policy in a European context.

Please join us in the months and years to come as we curate dynamic maps of creative cultural practices that will serve as a guide for policy makers and practitioners in achieving forward looking synergies and growing cultural value.

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