

Sowing culture. Public property and creative practices

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A workshop to reflect on the active role that citizens and culture can play in the planning of local areas

Public property and its role in urban regeneration processes appear with increasing frequency in the current economic debate. To explore this topic and its connections with the cultural planning of local areas, **Connecting Cultures**, a research and training agency in the field of visual arts, organized a seminar entitled “**Seminare Cultura**” (Sowing Culture) at the Milan Triennale International Exhibition. Relevant speakers followed one another in this two-day event with the support of Fondazione Cariplo, in partnership with **SIBEC** (cuola Italiana Beni Comuni, Italian School of Public Property Management) and under the patronage of the Municipality of Milan, the Milan Metro Area and the Italian Touring Club.

The general reflection started from the importance of culture in the planning of local areas. To date, in Italian cities there is a contrast between the “center” as a place of culture and the “suburbs” where the cultural events offered are almost non-existent. The lower opportunities for accessing culture negatively affect the lives of people living in the suburbs and do not facilitate integration and inclusion processes. Using the words of Gabriele Rabaiotti (Councilor for Public Works and House of the Municipality of Milan), in order to “sow culture” the suburbs can be seen as “fields of opportunity” where to introduce “crops” that take into account the context. Since the context is made up of individual **citizens who, in today’s society, want and can reclaim their communities by becoming co-creators and co-supervisors for its design.**

The tools that promote this leading role of communities respond to a need felt by citizens, find legitimacy in Article 118 of the Constitution and have their roots in the concept, already existing in the Roman law system of “public property”. So what is public property? Although there is not yet a univocal definition, we can refer to it as the property for which the community is responsible regardless of the formal its ownership. Overcoming the public-private dichotomy, the citizens’ autonomous initiative to administer public property in a collaborative way must be favored by the State, provided that the use made of that property is not exclusive and meets the general interest of the community.

These characteristics make the collaborative administration of public property a unique opportunity for the planning of local areas. On the one hand as it allows to identify the needs of urban

regeneration that citizens care about the most, on the other hand because those who live in a local area know its peculiarities better and pay more attention to its management, especially if called to be its administrators.

Furthermore, from the review of the real cases brought to the seminar, it was interesting to note the large number of initiatives involving art at various levels. Sometimes the figure of an artist representing the sensitivity of the community is important, as is in the case of Luigi Coppola who brought his testimony as Co-activator of the Casa delle Agricolture of Castiglione d'Otranto; sometimes, the citizens themselves choose art as a powerful tool to make their voices heard and to reclaim areas and property that are important to them, as in the experience of the kids of the Piccolo Cinema America in Rome; other times, it all starts with a mediator for cultural heritage, as was the case of Valeria Pica who wanted to mend the broken relationship between heritage and community in the small town of Fontecchio damaged by the 2009 earthquake.

In conclusion, at the end of these two days devoted to reflection, investigation and comparison of experiences, we feel we are one step closer to a future in which local areas reflect the needs of those who live there, with a stronger awareness that culture is increasingly affirming itself as an engine of development and integration.

Cover: "[We Are The Youth](#)" (Keith Haring's mural at 22nd and Ellsworth Streets in Philadelphia, USA).

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