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Cities' creative ambiance as a catalyst for city marketing procedures

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Abstract. *Cities have a strong, well-acknowledged urban ambiance that derives from distinctive characteristics, forming an assemblage of sensory qualities, difficult to describe yet easy to perceive. In this context, certain cities can be characterised by a creative ambiance, which is, more or less, the generator and the result of a so-called 'creative milieu'. The creative ambiance of a place can become an indisputable asset for the strategic planning of its image and this can be materialised through city marketing and city branding procedures. These practices were recently developed in many cities, trying to adopt the 'creative city' image. The article attempts to analyse issues such as the relationship between the aforementioned fields, the role of the creative ambiance of the city and the effect on relevant territories.*

Keywords: *place identity, creative city, city marketing, creative ambiance*

A 'sensorial' approach of urban ambiance

In contemporary cities, urban ambiances act as catalysts in the interaction between urban territories and the sensory experiences of their inhabitants. The definition of urban ambiance involves the sensory field that determines the lived experience of people in an urban environment along with the spatial expression that derives from it. Despite the vague definition of what urban ambiance is, it relates to the sensing and the feeling of a place, which is depicted on the built environment and is motivated by the human resources (Thibaud, 2011), namely the residents, the leadership and the visitors. In the formation of an urban ambiance, and more specifically of a sensorial urban space, different qualities, such as the expression and visualisation of the senses (e.g. sight, sound, fear) and the behavioral expressions of moods and everyday life, intermingle and produce various sensory scapes with unique characteristics. In this way, the new sensory spaces are generated from multisensory experiences, involving the whole gamut of senses, while social expressions of urban life structure their character.

In this context, latest research on alternative approaches to urbanism showcase sensorial qualities and urban atmospheres or ambiances as key factors in the definition of a place. More specifically, Zardini (2005) accentuates the importance of

the sensorial experiences to urban planning and presents a new 'sensorial urbanism'. As assumed from the multi-faceted analysis of how senses are introduced and how they affect urban space, Zardini's reflections move towards a more holistic approach of city planning and in general urban studies' consideration.

Nevertheless, the 'sensorial' approach that creates a specific urban ambiance leading to particular characteristics is not that recent in human and social sciences. During the 20th century, urban theorists and political and artistic movements took into consideration the role of senses in the way urban fabric develops. As far back as the 1950s, when the Letterist and Situationist International developed, new considerations over the negative consequences of urbanization have arisen, relating the human behavioral and sensorial patterns. In particular, the Situationists and their manifesto for Unitary Urbanism argued for the rejection of functional urbanism, the visualisation of art in real life and urban space, the interaction of the urban environment with the human senses and behavior, and eventually the allowance to the residents to decide on how urban territories, where they live, should be (Sadler, 1998). The whole idea aimed at the formation of a distinctive urban ambiance, where citizens hold an active role, while their creativity is genuinely promoted.

In the following years, urban studies altered their mode of observation and analysis, including such sensory dimensions, blending cultural geography, environmental psychology and trying foremost to consider and redound to the human factor (Jacobs, 1961/1993 Lynch, 1960 Norberg-Schulz, 1979/1991). The notions that came up for urban space included qualitative characteristics, and referred to the character, the image and the atmosphere of the city, thus rising awareness for the city's ambiance. If we accept that the physical environment is part of the human experience, in terms of urban ambiance, it can be alleged that the human capital expresses the city's ambiance and vice versa, that is that the urban ambiance is the sensorial human expression. Therefore, when it comes to cities, unique qualities are being developed in a form of ambiance that determines their image.

The creative ambiance of the city

In the urban sphere, every city has a different character, thus different urban ambiance, though they all derive from human creativity. If the city is perceived as an organic place that evolves constantly, creativity is strongly linked to this evolution, stemming from the human capital and engaging to social and cultural contexts. As Paz (2013) argues, the inhabitants of a city are not only the observants but also the creative activators of the urban environment. The residents of an urban space can contribute creatively to the development of a distinguishing creative ambiance, through various means. Consequently, they are not detached from their city, gaining the choice to formulate the space where they live and raising the collective memory. The creativity of a place, and the subsequent creative ambiance that develops, become benefits for the public realm and so, many cities looking for a distinctive identity adopt the whole practice of creativity.

Whereas creativity is somehow approachable through human activities, the creative ambiance of a place is difficult to define. Despite this, it is certain that (creative) people generate the creative ambiance. While creativity is at the core of human activity, it would be unfair to characterise a specific group of people as creative, that

is why we consider so the whole community of a city. The public and human activities are the resources of the ambiance generated in the urban environment. Thus, the creative ambiance of the city can be defined as the sensorial expressions of cultural and creative activities that its inhabitants produce and the city supports, along with the culture, tradition and collective memory of the place. This is reflected clearly through public art expressions, favouring the community, the social synergies and the citizens' participation while abrogating the borders and strictures that demarcate the urban fabric.

In this point of view, the creative city is a space for reflection, artistic action, critique, community, sharing and experimenting (Poch, 2013). Definitely, this approach renders the city an attractive environment for new residents or visitors because of its creative ambiance. Besides, if the city embeds additional characteristics that support the 'creative city' concept, as it has been developed during the past decades from Landry (2000/2008) and Florida (2002/2012), a more comprehensive creative atmosphere arises in place. This atmosphere, which is considered to be a precondition of the formation of a creative urban environment, can foster local development. The catching idea in the concept of the creative city, according to Florida's work, is the return to the human capital, entitled as the driving force of the new economy. On the other hand, Charles Landry defines the creative city in relation to the creative and imaginative thinking at all urban levels (Landry and Hyams, 2012), therefore configuring a holistic approach of the city as a complex and multi-faceted entity.

City marketing/branding as generators of urban ambiance

In the context of an economy based on knowledge, innovation and symbolism, creativity has recently been the new 'buzz' in urban studies, leading to the paradigm of the 'creative city'. During the past decades, the 'creative city' label became one of the most popular brands for cities, in a new rising creative economy. Several cities around the world, in their quest to obtain distinctive characteristics in an economically globalised environment and designate in the state of urban competitiveness adopt relevant strategies that can give them a certain image with particular characteristics and in this case, the image of the creative city.

The strategies involved move towards the scope of city marketing and city branding procedures, forms of strategic planning of the image of the city, widely acknowledged and implemented during the previous decades. The outcome of these procedures is the generation of a strong place identity, appreciated by the target groups, either local community or external environment. More specifically, city branding is considered to be a strategic approach through which the place's image is improved, involving materiality, institutions, practices and representations (Kalandides, 2012). This offers an integrated version of city branding, taking under consideration all parts of the social context, trying to enhance the city's image.

The procedure of city branding refers mostly to the creation and management of sensory and psychological associations of the public with the city through urban interventions, planning, promotion, visualisation and focusing mostly on the communicative aspect of marketing strategies (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). In particular, it is about a combination of local characteristics of the place and constructed added value, that remains in peoples' recollection as a distinct

atmosphere. At the same time, city branding tries to discover or create the distinctiveness of a place that could differentiate it from another. Thus, city marketing and branding can be associated with the public's sensorial interaction with the city image, building up urban ambiance.

Berlin's recreated ambiance through city marketing

In recent years, many cities turned to strategies of city marketing and city branding to create a strong image with distinctive characteristics and climb up the global hierarchy of cities. A representative case is Berlin, a world-city that shows a peculiarity as regards to its development during the 20th century. Berlin was a global urban centre that depicted world changes in different periods, from the Industrial City in late 1890s to the bonanza of the cosmopolitan Weimar Republic in the 1920s and the dark times as the capital of the Third Reich in the 1940s to the absolute representation of the Cold War tension until late 1980s. As understood, the city evolved to an amalgam of different identities, derived from the distinct political processes that affected everyday life, the aesthetics and the ambiance of the city.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the city had to encounter a new reality in a recently emerged economy and reconstruct its image along with the fragmented urban space, while retaining or purging certain memories. City marketing procedure came as the solution to handle with the new situation. The marketing of Berlin can be divided into two discernible eras (Colomb, 2012). The first one deals with the reconstruction of a former divided city into a world-city and the union of its citizens, through the strengthening of the civic pride. This phase of marketing included public exposure of the reconstruction sites, in combination with cultural events. The marketing that was developed focused strongly on urban experiences, involving human senses. For example, the red Info-Box, installed in the construction site of the Potsdamer Platz using virtual reality, can be characterised as a tool of sensorial marketing, leading to a temporal virtual ambiance.

The second era of Berlin's marketing turned towards the concept of the creative city, comprehending the appeal of the new creative economy and the creative capital of the city as well (Kalandides & Lange, 2007). The human-centered marketing of this period concentrated on the authentic cultural sector and the prominent sub-culture of the city that gave ground to the attraction of the intended public. The urban voids were once again at the centre of an art-led regeneration, through new uses that involved leisure, culture, collectives, inclusive communities and temporary recreational artistic uses. The target groups of the new atmosphere of Berlin were artists, creative professionals, and young travellers that could support and enhance the creative ambiance of the city.

The new campaign ('Be Berlin'), contrary to the old one ('Das Neue Berlin'), aimed at the human capital, praising multiculturalism, diversity and creativity. The creative ambiance of the city already existed, but a unique added creative ambiance was also attempted to be built, through the development of new sensorial spaces. Such cases are spaces – monuments, which focus on the sense of terror of the Nazi past (Jewish Museum, Topography of Terror, Berlin-Grunewald, Gleis 17 Memorial). The rise of the collective memory of Berlin is obvious during this period when the city becomes art scenery (e.g. the traces of the Berlin Wall) and artistic interventions appear in the city.

Conclusions

Apparently, certain urban environments have the credits to develop creative ambiance. Through marketing and branding strategies, it is possible to enhance the referent ambiance and magnify its appeal in order to attract certain target groups. Berlin's case displays this idea, since the city managed to retain a renowned creative atmosphere, involving Berlin's subculture in music, arts, public art etc. and at the same time accomplished to bear the 'creative city' brand in terms of creative industries and professionals.

Nowadays, Berlin is considered as the creative capital of Germany and one of the most influential in Europe. Facts and figures show that a steady percentage of growth from the creative sector is traced annually, bringing significant income in the city. The venture of covering effectively needs of creative professionals through networking, funding, etc. creates the appropriate climate for their attraction. Surely, the size, influence and the history of the city played an important role in the configuration of the creative ambiance but the following policymaking towards the creative city did as well. In conclusion, it seems to be futile to establish arbitrarily a creative city with no preceding influence. Creative environments need to be associated with existing creative ambiances and be led to formation through imaginative strategies.

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