

## CULTURAL DISTRICTS AND CULTURAL POLICIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WELLBEING

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Baksi museum can be taken as good example of economic model similar to a certain extent to the one of the **cultural districts** [CHART 1]. In Italy, this concept has been developed at the beginning of the years 2000 springing out from the example of the industrial districts that has many and multifaceted applications around the world<sup>1</sup>.

If we want to trace the roots for the cultural districts we can track it down to the realization, in the Seventies, of the **Greater London Council** and has developed with the **concept of the creative cities** by the urbanist Charles Landry in the 90s<sup>2</sup>. From this idea, the development of the concept of **creative industries** was only one step ahead considering that it was present in the artistic and critic literature since the 30s in the

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<sup>1</sup> The term was used by ALFRED MARSHALL in his *The Principles of Economics* (London, 1890, 1922)

<sup>2</sup> LANDRY C. (1995) *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* Routledge. The “creative cities concept” influenced the movement called *Partners for livable places* and their concept of cultural planning and cultural resources as defined by Franco Bianchini in the 90s and also the theories of WOLF VON ECKHARDT in his *the Arts and City planning*. The concept of “creative cities” gave birth in 2004 to the UNESCO creative cities network which comprises, besides London, Glasgow, York or in Germany Hannover, Berlin, Heidelberg, for instance, in Spain especially Barcelona, but also Bilbao, in Finland Helsinki).

works of T. Adorno and W. Benjamin.<sup>3</sup> Thus, creative industries began to be matter of analysis for UNESCO and the Council of Europe<sup>4</sup> and more recently for the European Parliament with the green book on creative industries<sup>5</sup> dating 2011 which was the basis for some of the lines of the new Horizon2020 programme.

Consequently, it was natural that economists started out update the implications of creativity in the economic sector and the “**Rise of the creative class**”<sup>6</sup> was the milestone that Richard Florida put at the basis of any further analysis on the matter.

Regarding Baksi museum, as we can see, this beautiful architecture not only defines a **physical space** but also, to me, it defines an **idea of cultural advancement** in the territory in which it is located and more broadly at the medium distance, since the impact of the Museum reaches up to the main city of Bayburt. Therefore, for its area – which is rural and not urban, accordingly to the fact that it is not a creative city but a creative space - **Baksi Museum can be seen as a cultural industry generating a creative economy on which the surrounding communities can benefit.** In facts, in the “Baksi museum model”, two important key-points can be recognised: the **territory and the advancement.** By the term “**territory**” actually I intend the spaces on which the Museum exerts its influence and I comprise the **geographical space** in which the museum is located; **the cultural and the economic ones** which are expressions of the local community. Usually referring to the literature on the subject, it is called the

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<sup>3</sup> ADORNO, T. (1980) ‘*Letters to Walter Benjamin*’ in *Aesthetics and Politics*, eds T. Adorno et al., Verso, London, pp. 110–133; ADORNO, T. & HORKHEIMER, M. (1979) *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Verso, London.

<sup>4</sup> D'ANGELO, M. - VESPÉRINI P. (1998) “*Cultural policies in Europe: a comparative approach*”

<sup>5</sup> “*Green Paper on the potential of cultural and creative industries*” - <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=URISERV:cu0006&from=EN>

<sup>6</sup> FLORIDA R. (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class. And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure and Everyday Life*, Basic Books

**“territorial heritage”**<sup>7</sup>. By **“advancement”** I intend the willingness of the community, or of a leading part of it, to improve their assets, be they tangible or intangible ones. This aspect can be led top-down (politically driven) or bottom-up (community driven), as we will see.

Starting from this point, the evolution into a **cultural district** can be somehow facilitated. In fact, in the Baksi Museum model three of the four actors<sup>8</sup> are included:

- **the territory** as physical space,
- **the community** as group of people with homogeneous needs and bearer of shared interests, socially consistent<sup>9</sup>,
- **the culture** as the mix of intangible and tangible assets expression of the first two actors.

The accurate work of cultural mediation that the museum carries on among the community, the visitors and the international artists invited to the centre represents in itself an advancement both on the cultural and the touristic and economic side for the territory. Nevertheless, in order to turn into a cultural district, a fourth actor must be integrated in the latter ones and it is **the economy** as a productive activity or a group of them, be they devoted to the traditional activities of the territory and consistent with the community's culture or completely different activities connected with the community by the fact they are run by someone very attached to it, willing to invest capitals in the sustainability of the model. Very rarely the cultural sector alone has proved capable to

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<sup>7</sup> MAGNAGHI, A. *“Territorial Heritage: A Genetic Code for Sustainable Development”*, in INURA (ed.), Possible Urban Worlds: Urban Strategies at the End of the 20th Century, Birkhäuser, Basel/Boston/Berlin, 1998FERIA, J. M. (2012) *Territorial Heritage and Development* – London;

<sup>8</sup> In this case, I prefer to speak about actors instead of stakeholders since I refer to a bigger and more heterogeneous level of stakeholders.

<sup>9</sup> Often referred to as “human capital”

provoke the start to transversal general benefits and revenues without the support of relevant financial investments from the public administrations or from the private sector. Within the cultural district model, the intervention of a profit-oriented institution is structural part of the “construction” and must be entwined in a reciprocal trustful relationship with the other actors (or pillars. See chart 1). The integration among these four actors, in facts, is based on the willingness of reaching a shared goal, of aiming at a common achievement that is **the advancement for the community in terms of well-being**. And **at this stage, specific policies** are necessary to maintain the mechanism and to achieve the goal. In order to do so, policies must be related to all the four actors and must aim at promoting the well-being both of the physical space, by protecting the landscape<sup>10</sup>; and of the community by improving the cultural offer and the economic production. Namely, **a cultural district is expected to promote its economic improvement by the increase of cultural industries run by the community in its territory, financed by the economic actors** which might find an economic interest in sustaining and promoting other activities that can help in creating a supply-chain from which they can partake the benefits. [CHART 2]

Of course, it is important to take into consideration also **who is going to be the promoter of the cultural district**, as we hinted previously. In facts, from a survey among the Italian examples,<sup>11</sup> it can be stated that if the project was promoted mainly top-down (**politically driven**), the main benefits pursued were specifically “tangible” (meaning especially economic) while, if the project was lead by the aspirations of the

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<sup>10</sup> See, for reference the “*European Landscape Convention and reference documents*” by the Council of Europe <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016802f80c6>

<sup>11</sup> BARBETTA G. P. – CAMMELLI M. - DELLA TORRE S.”*Distretti culturali. Dalla teoria alla pratica*” Milano, 2013

community (**community driven**) the first achievements were mainly intangible and thus created a real improvement in the overall feeling of well-being of the community itself.

In the case of the Baksi Museum, at the moment, the project is partially top-down, having been born by the brilliant and generous project of Prof. Hüsametdin Koçan. It cannot be defined politically driven, since it meets many of the community's expectations and springs out from the willingness of a fortunate member of the community, who maintains with this project a very strong connection with the territory and the community itself.. This situation has been the reason of the success of the Baksi Museum as winner of the CoE Prize, having mixed both tangible and intangible benefits for the community in terms of advancement of its overall well-being. Nevertheless, in this case, the process to integrate all the four actors necessary to the creation of a cultural district might prove somehow slow: only a profit oriented organization equally connected to the territory and equally sharing the aims of the community could be entrusted as investing partner.

The cultural district model, as we saw, can be applied to any similar situations in which a territory and its community, rich of culture and museums, want to promote an advancement. This model, in facts, has proved to be very adaptable as long as all the four actors are present. Nevertheless, this is not a guarantee of “perfect recipe”, this one depending specifically on **the inner quality or “atmosphere” of the initial “territorial heritage”**. It's mainly the willingness of the four actors, their coherence

and consistence to create a network among themselves, politically or community driven, that can head to the creation of a cultural supply-chain supporting the :

- making of more effective and incisive **cultural production**
- promoting the development or the **creation of new enterprises especially cultural industries**
- **enlarging the system of the cultural offer**
- improving the **sustainability of the cultural sector** by self-sustainability or sponsorships and donations → **revenues can be reinvested** in the conservation and restoration of the present Cultural Heritage or in new cultural production, in education etc.
- increasing the **attractiveness of the territory** due to the boost of qualitative and quantitative indicators either as tourism and for financial operations, emphasizing the local cultural identity (and the interaction with the globalisation ).

It is clear that all this cannot be carried on without a planned organization and a medium/long term programme coordinated by a **representative consortium** and in this case it is important that the political institutions activate policies facilitating the creation of the network.

What makes this model relevant is the fact that it is very **adaptable** (the necessary items to achieve it must be the one mentioned but their specific composition can vary from case to case) and that it necessarily implies the **public/private interaction** as a fundamental stimulus of advancement: the economic benefit or economic wellbeing of the community is pursued as one of the priority multifaceted benefits both in the

creation of new economic values and as improvement of the quality of life on a cultural and societal basis. In fact, too often culture, in Italy above all, has been considered as ancillary to the economic or industrial development – as a surplus or a “decoration” – while it is clear that industrial innovation cannot be made without the integration of **creative and cultural approaches at the beginning of any supply-chain in terms of research, development and increase of intellectual property (and trademarks) and the end of it in terms of improvement of the communication, of marketing strategies etc.** [CHART 3]

The presence of the private or for profit sector guarantees the creation of revenues that can be invested programmatically either in the conservation and preservation of the cultural heritage and for its maintenance and promotion and/or on the production of new cultural offer.

In the case-histories that have been considered (the cultural districts in the Lombardy region promoted by a big bank foundation<sup>12</sup>; some examples in the central regions as Tuscany and Marche and to a certain extent in Lazio and in the city of Matera the Capital of Culture 2019 in Basilicata) it is ascertained that all the qualitative indicators of cultural and societal life has improved along with the economic revenues of the territories (as I said as for tourism and for the development of new enterprises or the estate economic values). Interesting indicators that we must learn to consider and report more often consist in the evaluation of the welfare and health impact of a better cultural

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life on the inhabitants of an area in which cultural offer and life are advanced, as research demonstrated since 1998.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR RESEARCH WORKING PAPER HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS IN THE EU A COMPARATIVE STUDY [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/workingpapers/saco/pdf/101\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/workingpapers/saco/pdf/101_en.pdf)