

Special Issue

City, Creativity, and Cultural Practices



Presentation of the first monograph, 'City, Creativity, and Cultural Practices'

Coordinated by

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This special issue of the journal *Debats. Journal of Culture, Power, and Society*, titled “City, Creativity, and Cultural Practices” stresses the city as a unit of analysis both as a category in its own right, and in relation to creativity and cultural practices as ways of transforming public spaces.

This current issue is timely, coming as it does at a moment when the city and culture have forged a great alliance to achieve real urban change. The boundaries, unforeseen impacts, and resistance to these dynamics pose challenges for 21st Century artistic and cultural practices. This new centrality of culture in cities has spurred: the creation and expansion of artistic districts; the revaluation of the architectural heritage; public design: participation by the cultural ecosystem; local cultural services. This city project sets a public, political agenda to make culture the main plank of an urban model whose goal is renewal of the built environment and redefinition of the role played by cultural institutions and facilities. The provision of large cultural infrastructures is a strategy used by some cities to enhance their image (urban branding) and boost participation, foster city revitalization and rebirth (Rius-Ulldemolins, Klein, 2022).

This management methodology consolidates models of public cultural policy that see culture as a structuring element in new city morphologies, yet it does not always

deliver fair governance for all stakeholders (Delfín, 2022). The process is gathering steam, having many impacts on public spaces and communities — some of which run counter to the interests of the local citizenry. These new scenarios make cities complex frameworks for improving public spaces. Here, activist militancy and/or community participation are responses to the (often contradictory) framework of public culture agendas (Klein, Rius-Ulldemolins, 2021). Associative networks are embodied in cultural citizenship actions in a quest to bolster city-dwellers' cultural rights—vital if the goal of more humane, shared cities is to be achieved (Gehl, 2006; Durán, 2008).

In addition, these activation mechanisms seek to highlight cities as cultural places and to forge synergies between public spaces and the configuration of new artistic and cultural practices. For example, the emergence of a cultural phenomenon such as Street Art, consolidates a city's image as a tourist attraction and enhances its aesthetic value (Klein, 2020). Yet one outcome of institutionalized Street Art may be to speed up the gentrification of districts and neighborhoods. Gentrification is another big issue bearing on culture's local impact in cities (Rosler, 2017). On the one hand, creative resistance arises to both highlight and curb these processes, seeking to strengthen local identities and habitat, neighborhood groups, and to fight for decent, affordable housing despite rampant property speculation. On the other hand, certain cultural practices and forms are instrumentalized to create value in cities and their public spaces. For example, tourism policies help drive gentrification as touristification deepens (Sequera, 2020).

Likewise, the urban realities of cities strongly shape both cultural activation and advancement of citizens' cultural rights. Here, one can see divergences and diversity in the make-up and realization of such rights around the world. When it comes to public spaces as places of local culture, public cultural policies and urban planning tend to drive greater uniformity over the medium-term. Often, these territories and the great cultural wealth they enshrine are at the mercy of local political agendas, in which culture usually comes second or last on the priority list.

The Special Issue also presents theoretical and empirical studies, and research into cities' culture and cultural policy, urban creativity, and artistic-cultural practices. It reveals the ground-breaking research being done on these subjects in diverse cities in Europe, Latin America, and The United States: Barcelona; Berlin; Porto; Valencia; Buenos Aires; León; Rio de Janeiro; Pittsburgh.

There are two papers analyzing the problematization of culture and its *milieu*. One of them covers Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), the other Porto (Portugal). The paper on Rio is by Claudia Seldin, Caio César de Azevedo Barros, Pedro Vitor Costa, and Victória Michelini and is titled "Understanding Bottom-Up Territories of Culture in Unequal Cities". It discusses the idea of "contested territories of culture" as a response to different kinds of conflict in urban spaces and to the informal construction of

cities. It also highlights the role played by cultural activities in striving for greater equity in Latin America's socially-riven cities, of which Rio de Janeiro is a prime example. The other paper—"Artists against tourism gentrification: analyzing creative practices of resistance in Porto"—is by Inês Barbosa, João Teixeira Lopes, and Lígia Ferro. It looks at creative practices and artistic production embodying diverse resistance strategies, such as the claim to the right to housing and to the city, and the battle fought against gentrification in Porto over the last five years.

There are two papers covering cultural practices and urban creativity. One of them is a case study on León (Mexico), the other on Buenos Aires (Argentina). Caitlin Frances Bruce's paper is titled "Mobility, Ephemerality and Tourist Economies: Graffiti Running Tours in León, Guanajuato". It explores the creation of a graffiti route covering aspects of León's urban transformation. Here, the city's economy and culture are shifting away from their agricultural and industrial roots. The author discusses how creative practices such as Urban Art help foster an attractive city image. The other paper, "Towards a new radar. Urban Art and neighborhood identities in the city of Buenos Aires", is by Mercedes González Bracco, and delves into how Urban Art intertwines with local identity, the reorganization of neighborhood spaces and their linked imaginaries in Buenos Aires.

In the field of city cultural facilities and institutions, this Special Issue features two papers, one focusing on Barcelona and the other on Valencia. The one on Barcelona is by David Márquez Martín de la Leona and is titled "The cultural sector in the face of cultural change at the local level in Europe". It shows how the local cultural sector sheds light on a moment of cultural change through both cultural policies and specific initiatives. It considers these changes on the local scale, where the territorial and administrative sphere play the leading role in implementing policy.

The other paper bears the title "From cultural facilities to the cultural city. The projective experience of *Faller Art City* [CAF] in Valencia". Its authors are Pau Rausell-Köster, Tony Ramos Murphy, and Chema Segovia Collado. They critically review the notion of cultural facilities as elements anchored in the cultural democratization approach. In so doing, they advance our understanding of the role played by culture in the contemporary city. The projective possibilities offered by the cultural city are exemplified through an analysis of the rebirth of Valencia's *Faller Art City* [CAF].

Last but not least, I would like to thank all the people who have worked on preparing this special issue, especially in the writing of the articles and their revisions.

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