CPCL SERIES

CULTURAL HERITAGE LEADING URBAN FUTURES
Actions and Innovations from
ROCK PROJECT

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PROJECT FULL TITLE
Regeneration and Optimization of Cultural heritage in creative and Knowledge cities

PROJECT ACRONYM
ROCK

GRANT AGREEMENT NO.
730280

COORDINATOR
Comune di Bologna

PROJECT START DATE AND DURATION
1st May 2017 – 44 Months

PROJECT WEBSITE
www.rockproject.eu

CONCLUSIONS

The ROCK project sees historic city centres as laboratories to demonstrate how Cultural Heritage can be an engine of regeneration, sustainable development and economic growth. ROCK approach foresees the systemic and flexible application of a series of role-model practices in the testing sites of three Replicator cities, to turn historic city centres afflicted by physical decay, social conflicts and poor life quality into Creative and Sustainable Districts.

This book provides an overview of the project, extracting themes, material and final remarks from the Open Knowledge Week "Cultural Heritage Leading Urban Futures", held on 27-30 October 2020. Over the past three years, ten ROCK cities – Athens, Bologna, Cluj-Napoca, Eindhoven, Lisbon, Liverpool, Lyon, Skopje, Turin, and Vilnius – together with service providers and knowledge brokers have tested and advanced numerous soft and hard tools, collaborative approaches aimed at shaping sustainable, heritage-led urban futures. This book shows their shared results, best practices and lessons learnt from interdisciplinary research, innovative action, dissemination of knowledge and creation of new synergies at European level.

Cultural Heritage as a Common

Giovanni Leoni, University of Bologna

In H2020 the topic of Cultural Heritage (CH) entered not as a protagonist but rather as an articulation of other subjects that in the vision of the programme seemed evidently more urgent and, one might say, dominant. The resulting tensions have been considerable and with both negative and positive implications, all the more evident in research programmes related to cities and landscapes.

The most obvious negative aspect has been CH's subordination to a financial logic during the H2020 programme's design phase, seeing heritage as a cost – in a logic of patronage or public investment – instead of as a possible trigger for beneficial economic processes, both for the financial economy and above all for the social economy.

The prevailing desire to make CH actions attractive to the business world has also, on the one hand, attributed to the development of CH-related technologies a predominantly non-instrumental role but rather of guiding cultural programmes, and on the other hand has too often converted cultural policies on the city and the territory to marketing. A return to the market that at the end of the programme does not seem to be winning and seems to have led the European Union to a reorientation of the topic, as we shall now discuss.

However, it cannot be denied that there has also been a process of redefinition of the CH field, not determined by a central direction but instead a result of the projects implemented and supported by the H2020 programme, and that, while there is inevitably still no articulated conclusion, has led to the spread of practices and experiments that are also highly innovative.

The ROCK Project has the ambition to have contributed all it could to this innovative action, and is presented at the end of its activities in this light.

The project has of course developed specific scientific and disciplinary results described in this volume, but we do not believe that its main value derives from a sole identity determined by scientific consistency.

The project was conceived as a research-action that subverts the consequential logic typical of the modern design process: development by specialists usually based on images; verbal discussions of several subjects, specialised or otherwise; the implementation phase – inevitably specialised – and finally (maybe) a public debate on what has been achieved.

The ROCK project had the ambition, dealing with small daily urban issues, to subvert this relationship between conception and implementation entrusted to specialists on the one hand and public debate on the other, with two methodological and operational purposes.

First of all, do not attribute principles of an assertive nature to the city but rather investigate the potential dimension of the existing by looking for innovation as much as conservation and enhancement in the density of the city, in its latent yet unexpressed energy that can still be unleashed. On a material level this means entrusting the transformation not to grand, extraordinary visions of what the city has never been, but rather to ordinary, daily strategies that assign new uses, meanings and shared values to the existing. On an immaterial level this means leveraging the constant interpretive and, consequently, transformative action that every citizen performs by living/building the city in the collective ritual of daily existence. An interpretation/transformation that, combining individual biography and collective processes, certainly does not exclude markedly creative and innovative outcomes.

The second purpose, therefore, is the experimentation of a project that incorporates processes of empowerment, of deliberate self-disempowerment of the institutional political actor and specialised knowledge. This empowerment is aimed at seeking a land of uncertainty and invisibility, a city of the excluded. Exclusion not necessarily due to weakness and sometimes as the result of a deliberate desire to exclude oneself from a topic or process that is not of interest or that is considered extraneous by certain actors. Any action of inclusion of those who move in this territory of uncertainty is in itself a relevant political objective but can also lead to an unexpected and qualifying transformation of the city. And this is because typically those who are excluded and invisible to planning and to specialised participation are not elsewhere or different from the city, but rather perhaps account for its majority.

This methodological and operational precondition is not easy to implement in the context of a project financed by the European Community, which, as such, cannot be an action that is freewheeling and with uncertain results but must rightly be subject to well-determined procedures and logics.

The risk was therefore one of seeing a regulatory culture prevail that, moreover, is perhaps the most solid and dominant among the cultures in force in the European Community.

However, if the field of research-action is the city, it is not possible to "normalise" Cultural Heritage for the simple reason that it is not possible to "normalise" places and life for how it takes place in different places. And this because every place is specific, as is the life that takes place there, generating or modifying it. And what makes a place with its life Cultural Heritage is exactly its specificity.

So the challenge of the ROCK Project, as a network of cities, was to establish a field of shared values that gave life to different sets of strategies, actions and policies, with the aim of finally finding a common methodology capable of not breaking the subtle balance between what places can share – values, tools, technologies – and what is and must remain specific and necessarily different place by place.

What the ROCK Project has clearly displayed as necessary is this uneasy balance between a sharable "European" methodology and the understanding, respect and ability to take advantage of what is site-specific in CH and in communities producing it. And this uncertain space between general legislation and local circumstances is a purely political space, not technical.

These are the reasons why, going back to the starting point of the project, we tried to structure it around a set of key concepts intended to guide the actions that were gradually planned, but also to let ourselves be gradually redefined by the actions themselves and their consequences.

First key concept: a specific adaptation of the circular city model to CH based on what we see as a possible actualisation of the role model represented by the historical European city intended as a powerful topical alternative to metropolitan transformation against what we should define as a forced metropolisation of every urban entity. To do this, we need to replace the idea of CH as a brake on city transformation with the idea that CH is an ongoing creative process extended to intangible values, an agent for the transformation of the cities. This can happen if we take remembrance and innovation not as conflicting actions but as a dual combined action of CH co-creation and co-production.

This connection between CH and creative economy leads to the second key concept: stop committing culture to financial or marketing logics, considering it simply as a cost to be sustained only if possible, as if it were a luxury item (to always be cut first) and place culture back in its proper place, at the centre of urban policies, as the template for any political action in a logic of social economy that means conceiving culture as every city stakeholder's sustained action to create value and common good out of the ordinary affairs of a city.

Transforming culture into an agent for social and economic development leads to the third key concept: first to ease the processes of cultural

exchange to understand the specific characteristics of a place and of a community and then use data and technology, of course, but always subjected or better commeasured to the specificity of the individual place and community. A site-specific use of technology and data according to which technologies are subjected to cities and communities and not vice versa.

This sense of measure about technologies combined with the right that every citizen has to access, share and use the best of what a city is able to produce leads to the fourth and last key concept: taking the task of translating the principles of universalism and local life forms from one to the other. Developing a bottom-up cosmopolitanism as the foundation of a new kind of citizenship interpreting internal and external migration in cities in a logic of transient citizenship, upholding the elements of positivity and enrichment of a city's identity.

Circular model for CH, culture as the core and the template of politics and policies in cities, site-specific technologies, cosmopolitan citizenship: these were the four key concepts to start with. Then what happened happened and is still happening in Rock cities, and this book offers an overview, though certainly not exhaustive.

The Rock project has a programmatically uncertain outcome, but we hope it crossed or maybe triggered some favourable processes in the valorisation, innovation and transformation of cities. We learned so much from the cities involved and from their actions, practices and policies – and of course their people – that we must thank them for their decisive contribution.

Today we are on the threshold of the new Horizon 2021-2027 programme. In this programme, CH seems to be able to play a more important role if we judge from an evolution that started with the European Year of Cultural Heritage, taken up again with initiatives such as the Horizons for Heritage Research - Towards a Cluster on Cultural Heritage held in Brussels in March 2019, finally leading to the establishment of a cluster entitled Culture, creativity and inclusive society where CH seems able to play a lead role. And the inclusion of culture in a series focused equally on creativity and social inclusion is significant. The close connection between heritage-related actions and political actions shifts the topic of culture from a marginal accessory back to an essential component of the primary political action of local governments. What is remarkable is that this didn't happen before.

After all, if we reverse its typical historical perspective, Cultural Heritage is nothing more than the physical and testimonial persistence of policies implemented over time. In the processes that drive and govern their constant transformation, cities, regions and landscapes are, in a circular way, producers and products of cultures, actions of confirmation or

contrast of consolidated, recognised, institutionalised values, but also of unexpected, random, disturbing materialisations. Cultural Heritage is generated in the non-unique process of a multiform appearance of cultures and is consolidated by subjecting itself to subsequent acts of recognition or disregard, conservation or cancellation.

Culture, if seen as a constant action of production of common values and assets in the modification of the human-made space by each of its actors, is not just a policy among others, much less a set of ancillary actions to be supported according to budget availability, but rather a primary political act connected with the generative process of organised space.

It is pivotal to monitor cultural transformations as they happen, be it the restoration of a valuable building or the construction of a peripheral road. It is necessary to shift the focus of actions onto Cultural Heritage, away from the mere economic restoration of excellence – which is always and, in any case, deserving of unmatched support – and work for the construction of a widespread Cultural Heritage, conceived as the result of public and constantly updated private actions that may offer more solid foundations of sustainability, greater potential for the common well-being and opportunities for new creative entrepreneurship.

H2020 has given us many good, technical answers and excellent, powerful tools. Let's hope that Horizon Europe 2021-2027 will be able to bring us some new, well-thought questions, a new capability to subordinate our technical skills to the specificity of places and communities.

FIND OUT MORE

The ROCK circle (ROCK Circle - credits for the artwork: Margherita Ascari, Zhai Dewei) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rh4l53CAERI

Graphic recording and live scribing video at Open Knowledge Week "Cultural Heritage Leading Urban Futures", the ROCK final virtual conference for city officers, policy-makers, urban researchers, cultural actors and civic changemakers. By Nowhere.

Day one: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_g6hjCwI_U
Day two: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tn0rOj7p82s
Day three: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06NW2xYiUqI
Day four: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cAFBqx21is&t=163s