

The diffuse museum: art, territorial identity, social practices and the narration of places. The MUDIAC Project.

Descrizione

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to provide a contribution on cultural projects aiming at territorial identity and narration, tools capable of generating sustainable social flows. The use of space and territory as a diffuse museum allows for barrier-free, free-access and sustainable neighbourhood art. The subject of this work is the MUDIAC diffuse museum of contemporary art realised in the city of Catanzaro. The project consists of the systemisation of pre-existing works in the city, the result of a process of urban regeneration that began with the Altrove Festival. The project envisaged the creation of physical and virtual itineraries, by means of computer and information supports, which make it possible to get to know and map all the works spread throughout the urban space of the city. The goal of MUDIAC is to raise awareness and re-appropriation of spaces through the realisation of a territorial valorisation and promotion project in a sustainable way. This in order to find a new connection with inhabitants, visitors, tourists and the curious, enhancing the stories and uniqueness of the territories.

Introduction

Public space, as Augè analysed as early as 2007 in his book *“Tra i confini: città, luoghi, integrazioni”*, continues to be framed in its physical aspect, although no longer as poor as in the past, because it is considered in relation to consumption. In short, it is marked by the advent of globalisation, which gives way to the spread of the free market and the development of technologies. All this has repercussions in the

urbanisation of cities. While globalisation produces factors pushing towards uniformity, it also generates phenomena of identity and cultural claims. According to the ethnologist Marc Augé, with urbanisation thus understood, “non-places” are born.

Augé, 2007, defines “non-places”: “Airports, shopping malls, motorways and supermarkets are non-places: in fact, their main vocation is not territorial, it is not to create individual identities, symbolic relations and common heritages, but rather to facilitate circulation (and thus consumption) in a world of planetary dimensions. And so in the globalised spaces of passage and transit (those in which the signs of the present are most insistently displayed) the system of images, communication and consumption (which is a parallel system) constitutes an inevitable homogenising factor”¹.

So, while anthropological places are concrete and symbolic constructions characterised by identity, relationality and historicity, “non-places”, on the other hand, are centred on the present and representative of our age characterised by precariousness, temporariness, transit and continuous passage. Public space includes these new places of exchange and sharing (shopping centres, airports, petrol stations, etc.) and it is precisely here that creativity, the generation of content and knowledge, future prospects and the exchange of ideas is born ².

However, the last few centuries have shown a progressive implosion of such dynamics absorbed by the economic and financial sphere, forgetting the essentiality of the powerful language of which art is capable. Putting art at the centre of strategic urban planning provides a useful and effective tool for bringing these dynamics to the surface³.

Pier Luigi Sacco⁴ argues that the beauty of art alone is not enough to create an economy, what is needed are approaches capable of breaking down the barriers created in the past that place works inside a museum. Physical barriers that do not make them accessible to all, or rather very often isolated from an urban route and enclosed in majestic historical residences. No signal is left to induce the citizen/visitor/tourist, to curiosity and the desire to discover art.

Starting therefore from the urban map, it is fundamental to stimulate discovery, interpretation, and the sense of belonging that art is capable of generating in relation to the territory ⁵.

Art should present itself without barriers to access, not only in the physical sense but also as an “opportunity” for all, in its configuration as a common good. This does not

mean denigrating or forgetting the past, but rather treasuring it and building from it a vision that makes the most of the sense of social well-being that public art promotes ⁶.

Like companies involved in the production of goods and services, cultural industries also have to adapt their competences to new business models and new technologies in order to keep pace with change. In cultural industries, however, cost structures and business models are not common but differ depending on the meaning that public or private or non-profit institutions decide to attribute to them. Cultural industries include libraries, cultural centres, film production companies, festivals, museums, global streaming services, theatres, design and architecture companies and artists. The diversity and distinctiveness of this sector therefore require targeted and ad hoc policies ⁷.

However, one of the greatest difficulties lies in identifying specific and proven methodologies on measurement, as there are no unambiguously adopted strategies or techniques to support cultural policy ⁸.

According to Campbell (2018) the evaluation of culture and public support for the arts have always been instrumentalised in favour of policies focused only on the development of individual or economic well-being ⁹.

Instead, to fully reap the benefits of the cultural sector, understood in its various manifestations, national and local governments should:

- think of culture as an economic and social investment and not as a cost;
- make employment, social protection, innovation and support measures for those working in this sector accessible;
- embed culture within broad policy agendas of social cohesion, innovation, welfare, sustainable local development;
- continuously update and integrate data from the cultural sector as support for strategic policies to be adopted¹⁰.
- instrumental and methodological digital innovation, to support and as access to works;
- the possibility of adopting new programming tools capable of generating new revenues;

- new and different conventions, from a financial point of view, to ensure continuity of effectiveness of action also in the long term ¹².

According to Paolo Venturi (2015) policy makers must not ignore the context in which they find themselves today, characterised by uncertainty and the rapidity of continuous change, triggered also by the advent of the pandemic ¹¹.

The potential of this sector in generating social and economic value is to be found in the direction it is taking to:

The Diffused Museum

A museum model devised in the 1970s is what is known as the 'diffuse museum'. This term was coined by the Milanese architect Fredi Drugman, who argued the need to recover, conserve and bring into dialogue through objects, places that had not been interpreters of historical events or indirectly linked to the territory. By this, Drugman intended to express the close relationship that exists between territory, cultural heritage and the inhabitants of that territory ¹³.

In today's dynamic and changing society, the diffuse museum offers the possibility to respond to many of the institutional challenges and to be able to use a highly flexible museum model ¹⁴.

Diffuse museums network thematic, territorial and material routes linking time and space ¹⁵. Exhibitions as well as related events are included in a defined geographical area that is free and free of charge because it is public, accessible and usable at all times. Urban spaces suffer from a growing condition of neglect and abandonment, which leads to increasing urban crime, resident disaffection and declining property values. Thematically organising and narratively making usable the heritage of memories, stories, legends and tales can emphasise both the historical and prospective identity of the city in its varied territorial articulations and social practices ¹⁶.

The diffuse museum, precisely because of its unconventional nature as a museum, and because it does not provide for staggered payments or payment of entrance fees,

the diffuse museum would make it possible to enhance the cultural heritage without necessarily expecting short-term economic returns (payment of entrance fees) but, in the long term, would generate social practices aimed at creating a sense of belonging for citizens and attraction for tourists in the naturalness of the places, thus having positive repercussions on both the economic and commercial sides.

The methodology used in this paper is the case-study, a qualitative analysis valuable for scientific research as it allows the development of theories, programmes and interventions.

The case-study was chosen because it allows us to move from simple to complex situations, enabling the researcher to answer questions such as “*how*” and “*why*”, taking into account how a phenomenon is affected by its environment. Allowing data to be collected from a variety of sources and converging the data to illuminate the case, it has the potential to address simple transitions to complex situations ¹⁷.

A case is defined as “*a phenomenon of some kind occurring in a delimited context*”, based on time and place ¹⁸ to time and activity ¹⁹. The descriptive type case study is used to describe a type of intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred ²⁰. The case-study analysed in this work is MUDIAC-Museum of Contemporary Art in Catanzaro. The objective of this project was to draw the lines to bring out, organise thematically and make narratively usable Catanzaro’s heritage of memories, stories, legends and tales capable of emphasising the city’s identity, both historical and prospective.

The Contemporary Art Museum Project-MUDIAC

The core concept of the diffuse museum of contemporary art created in the Catanzaro area is to mix territory, architecture, design and urban planning. To network and thus allow an easier and more informed enjoyment of the works present and created by internationally renowned artists.

The project was conceived by the non-profit organisation Wake up: *“Spazio Altrove– Museo Diffuso d’Arte Contemporanea”* and awarded by the Ministry of Culture as part of the Creative Living Lab III Edition, for being inclusive, multidisciplinary and innovative. The programme focused on the process of urban regeneration through the use of existing and new works and through both physical and virtual paths²¹.

Wake up has been involved in the development of the *“Altrove”* project since 2014²². The project envisages the activation of two tools:

- *Urban observatory*, where citizens, associations and businesses are co-creators of content, through information, proposals and ideas. The public space is rethought as a meeting place where content, opinions and the resources of the area can be
- *Open Museum*, named MUDIAC, in the streets of the city. Routes enriched with information that allow full enjoyment with the help of physical supports (guides, information materials, infographics) and digital supports (web platform). It also fits into the increasingly widespread debate on public art as a tool for the rehabilitation of places by connecting to the network of national Diffuse Museums. *“MUDIAC has no doors or fences, it lives in the streets and grows thanks to the actions of people, carrying out the mission (or value) that sees art as a resource that rehabilitates places, empowers those who live in them and attracts those who pass through them”*²³.

The aim of the project was to strengthen the territorial identity of its citizens by systematising, enhancing, promoting and communicating the value that the City of Catanzaro possesses. All this then has a positive resonance on visitors/tourists: creating a sense of belonging through routes that connect the past and the present, history and the contemporary, tradition and innovation.

Both physical and virtual itineraries have been created, through computer and information supports, which make it possible to get to know and map all the works spread throughout the urban space of the city.

The project involves different professionals such as: technicians, urban planners, artists, storytellers, researchers, because MUDIAC as a widespread museum, allows you to connect the care of places to creative freedom, creating an inclusive process capable of generating urban, social and cultural impact. Their official website reads *“MUDIAC is unique in its kind, it is a center and hub for contemporary creativity, a laboratory of experimentation, study and research, linked to the promotion of Italian artists”*²⁴.

The artists who have contributed works to the Catanzaro area in the past range from: Alejandro Garcia with the work “Gatto Fantasma” to Tellas with “Profondo Sud”, to Andreco with his installation “Melancolia” to Alexey Luka with “Esercito collettivo” and “Experiment in silece” and many others. Each work has been marked with captions and technological aids (QR Code, Image 1) that make it possible to make the work, the artist and the point on the route where one is located known, so as to break down barriers and distances between human, virtual and real interaction.



QR Code placed near the artwork in Catanzaro.
Source: created by the author.

Starting from the area of reference and the existing works, the project was structured according to several phases. The planning of the phases was fundamental for the development of the project itself as it allowed constant monitoring and a possible review of the actions and contents implemented.

The phases developed and planned for the implementation of the project are:

- Territorial analysis aimed at identifying the territory and development potential;
- Mapping of works (through geolocation) and content creation;
- Territorial narration, to enrich the evocative and identity paths of the space according to its historical roots

- Creation of guided tours with the involvement of commercial operators that will become information points;
- Urban micro design, through the creation of information totems;
- User experience design, guaranteeing participants the use of territorial content both physically and virtually
- Evaluation of the project's impact on the community.

Territorial storytelling workshop

Among the phases envisaged by the MUDIAC project is that of territorial storytelling workshop, which aims to trace the lines of heritage between present memory and future places that make up its urban network.

Highlight the places that hold social flows, in order to establish a clear and effective connection between territorial identity and narrative. The key words were: Survey, Territorial identity. Narrative.

The workshop aims to collecting, comparing and mutually fertilising the narrative and evocative components of the urban fabric.

The investigation was oriented towards the capacity of stories to influence the way people relate to their territory, proposing to emphasise their involvement in order to strengthen the sense of belonging, for residents with respect to the neighbourhood in which they live and for visitors with respect to the urban spaces they pass through and in which they indulge, absorbing their infrastructural and aesthetic form, while sharing their practices.

Several factors come together in the **identity** of places, combining the territorial palimpsest and the physical infrastructure of urban spaces with the memory they have generated over time.

With regard to narrative, the rationale was to question and interpret the description that emerges clearly from the combination of infrastructure and the shared memory

of the place. In this way, *urbs* and *civitas* are brought together: the place, the physical structure, the community that inhabits it and the travellers who explore its identity.

The territorial narrative focuses on two profiles: the palimpsest of the City of Catanzaro on the one hand, its polarising dynamics on the other.

The identity of the place is thus manifested in its stratification and above all through the narratives of the people who have lived there and still live there²⁵.

Conclusions

The city of Catanzaro, through MUDIAC Project tackled the problem of renewing its identity with two contrasting examples: the structure of the Monumental Complex of San Giovanni ²⁶ (Image 2), an ecclesiastical public good and creative hub, where exhibitions and higher education take place and widespread and shared practices of sociability are encouraged; the Politeama Theatre (Image 3) ²⁷, which is unnaturally parachuted into a place without respecting its context; a cramped and somewhat alien proximity area displaces the natural sociability associated with theatrical rituals and does not encourage indulging in a soft combination of space and time.



San Giovanni Monumental Complex , Catanzaro, Calabria, Italy. Source: created by the author.



Politeama Theatre “Mario Foglietti”, Catanzaro, Calabria, Italy. Source: created by the author.

Those who frequent Catanzaro today find themselves confronted with ‘natural’ places such as the San Giovanni Complex and “unnatural” ones such as the Politeama Theatre, as well as polarising places between the sea and the mountains, as if to emphasise spatial contradictions and identity fragilities in many of the areas of daily frequentation.

MUDIAC has contributed to creating an urban route that is not necessarily polarising but that restores the resident community’s sense of belonging, of identity of the place, making it no longer anonymous.

From this it emerges that there is a need to focus on redevelopment through social practices, leading to the relocation of commercial, productive activities or craft workshops. This creates an additional flow that gives a different scale of enjoyment to external visitors.

Not mass tourists, but visitors who for some reason pass through the city and who if caught stop and generate an impact that is not only relational but also financial and commercial.

Already in the perception of those who live in the Catanzaro area, there is an awareness of a common direction that leads to experiencing places in a different, more participative way. It will be interesting, in the near future, to continue measuring the impact on the community in order to enrich the debate on the themes of urban regeneration, art and public space, and new forms of enjoyment of culture.

Footnotes

¹ Augé, M. (2007). *Tra i confini: città, luoghi, integrazioni*. Pearson Italia Spa.

² Augé, M. (1992). *Non-lieux: Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Coll. La Librairie du XXème siècle, Paris: Le Seuil (trad. it.: *Non Luoghi. Introduzione a una antropologia della surmodernità*. Milano: Elèuthera, 1993).

³ Benincasa, C., Neri, G., & Trimarchi, M. (2019). *Art and economics in the city: New cultural maps*. transcript Verlag.

⁴ Sacco, P. L. (2006). *Arte pubblica e sviluppo locale: utopia o realtà possibile?* *Economia della cultura*, 16(3), 285-294.

⁵ Benincasa, C., Neri, G., & Trimarchi, M. (2019). *Art and economics in the city: New cultural maps*. transcript Verlag.

⁶ Campbell, P. (2018). *Persistent Creativity: Making the case for art, culture and the creative industries*. Springer.

⁷ Economic, O. L. (2022). *The culture fix: creative people, places and industries*. OECD Publishing.

⁸ Economic, O. L. (2022). *The culture fix: creative people, places and industries*. OECD Publishing.

⁹ Campbell, P. (2018). *Persistent Creativity: Making the case for art, culture and the creative industries*. Springer.

¹⁰ Campbell, P. (2018). *Persistent Creativity: Making the case for art, culture and the creative industries*. Springer.

¹¹ Zamagni, S., Venturi, P., & Rago, S. (2015). *Valutare l'impatto sociale. La questione della misurazione nelle imprese sociali*. *Impresa sociale*, 6(2015), 77-97.

- ¹² Venturi, P. (2019). *La valutazione d'impatto sociale come pratica "trasformativa"*. Aiccon, short paper, 19, 2019.
- ¹³ Pettine, A. (2018). *Il museo diffuso di Artena (RM): esame di museografia AA 2008-2009. Il museo diffuso di Artena (RM): esame di museografia AA 2008-2009*, 87-90.
- ¹⁴ Montanari, E. (2022). *Museo diffuso: propagazioni, applicazioni e articolazioni nei territori contemporanei. TERRITORIO*, 99, 116-121.
- ¹⁵ Bertagnin, M., & Frangipane, A. (2005). *Un Museo diffuso dei materiali lapidei da costruzione in Friuli. An open Museum of stone Building materials in Friuli region (Italy)*.
- ¹⁶ Benincasa, C., Neri, G., & Trimarchi, M. (2019). *Art and economics in the city: New cultural maps*. transcript Verlag.
- ¹⁷ Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). *Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. The qualitative report*, 13(4), 544-559.
- ¹⁸ Creswell, J. W. (2003). *A framework for design. Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, 2003, 9-11.
- ¹⁹ Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage.
- ²⁰ Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods (Vol. 5)*. Sage.
- ²¹ <https://www.mudiac.it/percorsi>
- ²² *Altrove* has experimented processes of urban experience through contemporary art starting from muralism and then networking various artists works and installations on the fabric of the city of Catanzaro.
- ²³ <https://www.mudiac.it>
- ²⁴ <https://www.mudiac.it>
- ²⁵ De Luca, M., & Da Milano, C. (2006). *Il patrimonio e le attività culturali nei processi di rigenerazione urbana. Economia della Cultura*, 16(3), 371-382.
- ²⁶ The San Giovanni Monumental Complex was inaugurated in 1998 and stands on the site of the 11th century Norman Castle. <https://www.beniculturali.it/luogo/complesso-monumentale-san-giovanni-di-catanzaro>
- ²⁷ The Politeama Theatre in postmodern architecture, opened on 29 November 2002. <https://www.politeamacatanzaro.net/>
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Campi meta

Ppma Authors Name : Gessica Fulciniti