Towards a “Creative Ravenna”. Capitalising on the European Capital of Culture process to build a Culture and Creative Industries’ strategy

Descrizione

1. Introduction (1)

Ravenna, a municipality of 160.000 inhabitants in the north of Italy connected to the Adriatic Sea by the Candiano Canal, is a renowned city of art and culture (8 UNESCO sites, qualified music and theatre players – Ravenna Festival, Ravenna Teatro – worldwide renowned mosaics..), featuring a diversified economic system (cultural and seaside tourism, port, chemical/offshore industry) and a great quality of life.

Nevertheless, the city faces the typical challenges of medium-sized cities in Europe. Ravenna needs to develop new economic activities, reverse the trend of rising unemployment and attract/retain (young) talents with a view to position itself more strongly in the emerging new economy (digital and creative). Its abandoned ex-industrial area in Darsena (the old port – once the economic heart of the city) is a place where new social and commercial activities can potentially be experimented, so to make the port area again attractive both to people and businesses and re-connect it to the city’s life.

Ravenna has a long history of cultural investment. The bid to become European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2019 was initiated as part of a regeneration plan aimed at avoiding decline and developing the city internationally through culture. The challenge is to go beyond traditional cultural investment (mainly linked to well-being and tourism) and become a “creative city” able to attract creative companies and talents and contribute to the development of the new economy.

Whilst innovation has been traditionally led by the industry, cities now are increasingly experimenting with new ways to attract creative talents and unleash the Culture and Creative Industries’ (CCIs) capacity to innovate. Today ambitious cities want to

become “creative” to make sure they attract creators participating in the success of the new economy. Creative cities are those able to set up an ecosystem of cultural amenities, high-tech services, good living and working conditions as well as an atmosphere of freedom and tolerance that attracts talents and enables the flow of knowledge.

Ravenna, with its rich cultural and artistic heritage, its economic and social fabric as well as the political will to invest in culture, has the potential to design its future with the support of art and culture and contribute to the development of a model of creative territory for medium-size cities. Ravenna has commissioned a policy paper to KEA with a view to reflect on how to capitalise on the ECoC bid for the future of the city. This is in line with the European Capital of Culture’s bidding process which requires cities to show the sustainability of the cultural investment in term of economic and social development. For the European Commission, the year’s cultural investment should bring long term benefits to the city and the surrounding region, including the development of a vibrant culture and creative sector.

The following sections will illustrate how CCIs can concretely contribute to local development in Ravenna, what are Ravenna’s strengths and challenges to become a creative city and finally propose some recommendations for Ravenna to unleash CCIs’ potential to set a dynamic and attractive environment.

2. Towards a “Creative Ravenna”

2.1. Why investing in culture and the creative industries

CCIs are unquestionably a source of economic wealth. They contribute to nearly 3% of the European GDP and about 6 million jobs(2), to more than 5% of the Italian GDP and 5.8% of national employment(3) and to 8% of companies and 4.5% of employment in the Emilia-Romagna region(4).

However, beyond their direct impact on the economy, they contribute to economic and social innovation. Through the culture-based creativity(5) that they embed, cultural and creative professionals and companies have a great impact on a city's socioeconomic fabric.

• A source of economic activities participating to the development of the new economy

Many cities are suffering from de-industrialisation and as a consequence job losses and increasing social discomfort. These socioeconomic changes bring new challenges to local authorities. Cities need to find their way to make cities attractive again to businesses and talents with a view to face the declining role of the manufacturing sector, create new economic activities and jobs and reinvigorate citizens' self-esteem and hope into the future.

Today's post-industrial economy is led by innovation. Whilst technological innovation leads to incredible productivity gains, non-technological innovation is of paramount importance to help companies acquire a competitive advantage, face sustainability requirements and respond to new consumption patterns driven by customisation and prevalence of intangible values (aesthetic, brands, design, meanings and experience(6)) on product functionality.

Culture-based creativity is an essential feature of this new economy. Creative people are often brokers across disciplines whose skills and attitudes are conducive to creativity because of their ability to think laterally, to express symbolism and emotions and to manage risk. These skills can help companies introduce innovation in their products and services (by combining new ideas or designs), in human resource management (through Artistic Interventions in companies, for instance) or in communication and branding strategies (by helping communicate in a more appealing way, either to investors or end users).

Just to make an example, creative professionals and companies have importantly helped the city of Berlin to move out of its deep social and economic crisis of the 90s(7). Today, CCIs are a main driver of Berlin's economy representing € 12 billion of the city's GDP and more than 175.000 jobs.

Whilst counting on a diversified economic system, Ravenna is faced with the challenge of developing new economic activities to position itself more strongly in the new economy (digital and creative) and provide sustainable jobs. The mobilisation of Ravenna's creative talents could help the city experiment with cross-sectoral linkages and bring innovation into the port, traditional industries (chemical, agricultural) or tourism to improve the competitiveness of these sectors and create new job opportunities.

Excellent art education institutes also need to open up to other disciplines (from management to tourism) to help CCIs become more entrepreneurial and facilitate cross disciplinary projects – to the benefit of both CCIs' sustainability and spill-over effects to other sectors.

- **A key contributor to the city's quality of life and attractiveness**

Ambitious cities are competing to ensure a high quality of life to attract talents, businesses, investors and tourists. Numerous elements contribute to life quality among which efficient communication links, the presence of educational, health and sport facilities, the availability of green spaces or the air quality(8).

Culture is another essential element to cities' quality of life and attractiveness. Nightlife, exhibitions and festivals, art display in public spaces, the provision of artistic activities or high quality food are soft location factors contributing to setting up good living conditions, a positive urban atmosphere and networking opportunities that help retain and attract talented people. Rather than following cities with high performing

industries, the “creative class” is more likely to settle down in areas also offering a thrilling urban atmosphere(9). Creative talents (artists, designers, architects..) need to evolve in a place that stimulates their imagination and favours creative social interactions and where risk taking and creative boldness is promoted.

Ravenna features a rich calendar of cultural events, especially during the spring and the summer periods – with many events and concerts taking place close to the seaside. A better exploitation of this cultural offer thorough the year together with the development of exhibitions, networking events, bars, clubs or other settings favouring new encounters could help the city to retain young people and creative professionals and companies. In medium size cities such as Saint-Etienne (with its Biennale Internationale Design, the design cluster, etc.) or Antwerp (with its Antwerp Six, a group of influential avant-garde fashion dress designers who graduated from Antwerp’s Royal Academy of Fine Arts), CCIs have contributed to move the cities away from their past as industrial centres (although industry remains important) and position them as attractive locations at the heart of the new economy.

- **A resource for urban development**

Culture is an important tool in urban planning as it participates in social inclusion, self-esteem as well as pride of belonging to a community. Integrating culture in urban development to reconquer abandoned areas also brings economic benefits: bringing life back to these areas contribute to attract people, visitors as well as new commercial aactivities. After a while such occupation of the space often increases real estate value.

Many cities in Europe have called on creative industries, artists or cultural operators to regenerate parts of their cities. The Ile de Nantes is an example where artistic interventions (from exhibitions, to architects such as Dominique Perrault, François Grether and Jean Nouvel called upon to re-develop the waterfront) were cleverly orchestrated to get the local population to reconquer an abandoned territory (once dedicated to shipbuilding) under the coordination of the artistic director Jean Blaise.

Amsterdam, Hamburg, Essen, Berlin, Leipzig, Bilbao, Helsinki, Ljubljana or Rotterdam, to name just a few, also offer examples of policies calling on creative people and industries to generate new social and creative activities (e.g. by encouraging squatting, such as in the Netherlands).
In Ravenna, there is a strong call for reconquering Darsena. For the city's authorities, this is a key place to create new social spaces, economic activities and jobs thus contributing to the development of the new economy and improving citizens' social cohesion and well-being.

• Contributing to innovative policy governance

The administration of the 20th century is characterised by a top-down approach to problems usually relying on one department at a time (culture, economy, urban development, etc.). Today's complex challenges (from ageing to brain drain to sustainable development to the shift to a new economy) require multidisciplinary skills and creativity to be effectively addressed. Creativity stemming from artists, creative talents and cultural and creative companies can help public administrators to set up the right ecosystem to stimulate innovation, and make the territory attractive to talents. The administration can also act as a catalyser of cross-sectoral initiatives by showing the industry how to integrate creativity in daily work.

Ravenna needs to support capacity building for creative professionals to influence the decision making process. The capacity of creative professionals to think "out of the box" proves invaluable if the aim is to stand out and be different. In this respect, the city could truly innovate in breaking silos between policy departments and introducing creative techniques in the design and implementation of policies across different fields (i.e. economic development, urban planning, education, etc.).

2.2. Ravenna's strengths and challenges

The city has several major assets to develop as a leading medium-size creative city in Europe. First of all, Ravenna features a strong political willingness to invest in culture as well as a high and widespread social consensus built around the candidacy to

become ECoC 2019. Its excellent cultural landmarks (mosaics, architecture..) and high class cultural offering were at the core of the city's ECoC bid. But there is more: the city has a great geographical location – close to Bologna, Venice, Florence and Milan (even if rather slow to access) and open to the sea and neighboring Adriatic regions, a (still) sound economic system, relatively minor social problems (despite increased unemployment), and an outstanding quality of life (Romagnolo food, nature, seaside/beach 'movida', bicycle routes, extended broadband connection covering more than 90% of the territory). Ravenna is also the seat of a specialised educational pole of the University of Bologna (heritage) and features a growing design school in Faenza.

As part of its future policy Ravenna needs to address a number of issues to make the most of its creative assets and develop as a territory that nurtures innovation, whether technical or non-technical. The challenges are to 1) *Design an appropriate policy governance model and assessment tools* in order to remedy a cultural too much focused on heritage preservation and tourism, to build local capacity of the CCI sector to influence policy making and to set up appropriate evaluation mechanisms to assess CCIs' development as a results of policy actions; 2) *Set up an environment conducive to attract and further develop* CCIs by facing the need of: appropriate tools and initiatives to support creative entrepreneurship, networking areas for creative talents, connections between CCIs and other sectors of the economy as well as links between excellent art education and other disciplines (management, digital economy/ICT, agriculture, health, tourism, etc.) to face sustainability concerns in CCIs whilst bringing innovation into traditional sectors; 3) *Address urban development issues in Darsena* so to further exploit unused spaces to the benefit of CCIs' development as well as re-connect Darsena to the socioeconomic fabric of the city through art, culture and creativity; and finally 4) *Improve the image and attractiveness of the city* so to attract and retain talents (not only creative ones), retain tourists and better spread them through the city, beyond the heritage sites, to let them discover more about crafts, jewellery and fashion production in Ravenna.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

Ravenna has enormous cultural and creative assets, an economically and socially rich and proud society, strong political willingness to invest in culture and a great

geographical position.

The question is how Ravenna can make the most of these assets in dealing with the economic, social and urban challenges of our time. The economic growth certainly remains a major concern but the shift towards a new economy as well as the economic crisis is also an opportunity to address the future of economic development taking into account also cultural and social aspects. Investment in culture focusing both on the cultural offer, social animation and support to the creative economy generates creative endeavours capable of producing economic and social benefits to cities.

Creativity is a key source to succeed in the new socioeconomic context. Creativity comes from a different combination of ability and environment – in other words, personal predisposition and environment. As a result, policy has a crucial role to play in setting the appropriate conditions for Ravenna to be a creative place, capable of attracting and retaining talents.

A number of recommendations are proposed to make Ravenna a place that empowers creative professionals and encourages creativity with a view to create jobs and make the territory attractive to talents and investors.

The policy recommendations relate to:
1. Developing tools to govern CCIs' policy and better grasp and monitor the development of the creative economy – from the development of a task force in charge of developing a CCIs policy to the development of a CCIs' policy evaluation system;
2. Stimulating the emergence of CCIs in the city and support the development of creativity and innovation by mainstreaming CCIs in policies on economic development (by setting up appropriate tools such as investment funds for CCIs), tourism (by setting up new routes in the city including local talents, for instance on fashion and design) and education (by opening the Fine Arts Academy to management courses, for instance);

3. Addressing urban regeneration issues in Darsena (by encouraging artistic interventions/performances in Darsena or by brining activities by local cultural institutions or the Fine Arts Academy there);
4. Contributing to the city's attractiveness and international image (for instance by improving international networking with cities sharing a mosaic tradition or by better promoting internationally existing festivals).

In order to further nurture this policy reflection, this paper was used as a discussion basis for on international public debate that took place in Ravenna on 19-20 September 2014 ("Switch on – European Creative Capacity Building"). National and international experts in the field of urban development, economic growth and innovation and internationalisation through culture animated three different panel discussions.

The city is now assessing the next steps to be undertaken to set up a strategy to become a "creative city". The result of the ECoC 2019 competition (which has finally awarded Matera as ECoC 2019 last 17 October) will certainly influence the city's decision about any possible future step. Considered the substantial amount of resources of all kinds (human, financial..) invested in the bid, it would be reasonable to keep the "ECoC momentum" alive and develop a CCIs' strategy. Thanks to their creativity and innovation potential, CCIs can help the city to better position in the new economy. Such positioning is a necessary step for Ravenna to create new businesses and jobs as well as to keep ensuring its high quality of life and great living standard.

Notes

(1) This paper has been drafted based on the KEA policy paper "Ravenna: towards a Culture and Creative Industries' (CCIs) Strategy – A Discussion Document" authored by Philippe Kern (KEA founder and Managing Director), Valentina Montalto (KE A Project Manager and EU advisor) and Giorgia Boldrini (local expert supporting the KEA team). The full policy paper will soon be available on www.keanet.eu.
(2) KEA (2006). *The Economy of Culture in Europe. Study prepared for the European Commission* – DG EAC. Brussels.
(3) Unioncamere e Fondazione Symbola (2014). *Io Sono Cultura – L'Italia della qualità*

e della bellezza sfida la crisi – Rapporto 2014.
(4) ERVET (2012). *Cultura e creatività – risorsa per l'Emilia-Romagna*. Bologna.
(5) "Culture-based creativity stems from art and cultural productions or activities which nurture innovation. This culture-based creativity is linked to the ability of people, notably artists, to think imaginatively or metaphorically, to challenge the conventional, and to call on the symbolic and affective to communicate. Culture-based creativity has the capacity to break conventions, the usual way of thinking, to allow the development of a new vision, an idea or a product. The nature of culture-based creativity is closely linked to the nature of artistic contribution as expressed in art or cultural productions". See p. 3 of KEA (2009). T*he Impact of Culture on Creativity. Study prepared for the European Commission* – DG EAC: http://www.keanet.eu/docs/impactculturecreativityfull.pdf
(6) As explained by economists Pine and Gilmore (1999); Lash and Urry (1994); Rifkin (2000) or Bomsel (2010).
(7) The project Zukunft was launched by the Berlin Senate in 1997 at a time of deep economic and social crisis in the Land which had lost 300.000 jobs in industry after the fall of the Wall. The project focused on the involvement of all economic and social actors across disciplines with the objective of working on the strength of the region to move out from the crisis. See: http://www.berlin.de/projektzukunft/en/
(8) See, for instance, the "Quality of life in cities – Perception survey in 79 European cities" conducted by Eurobarometer in 2012: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/urban/survey2013_en.pdf
(9) Florida, R. (2002). *The Rise of the Creative Class. And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure and Everyday Life*. Basic Book.

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