

L'ARTE INQUETA - RESTLESS ART. A CULTURAL WELFARE PROJECT TO RECONSIDER URBAN IDENTITY.

*Position paper edited by
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Abstract

This paper encompasses reflections and proposals aimed at making understand cultural organizations' roles whom, by working in favour of the vulnerable and the disadvantaged, contributes to restore the welfare system and even to reconsider urban identity.

The paper has encouraged the planning and realization of the art exhibition *L'arte inquieta / Restless Art* (Palazzo Magnani, 18.10.2022-12.03.2023), experience where all cultural and urban policies knowledge derived from the various initiatives that have been put into action since 2015 by the framework project 'Reggio Emilia Città Senza Barriere', are treasured and stored for future use. The paper tried to re-establish vision, process, planning and evaluation elements by pulling them out of a multitude of experiences that relate to an ever-changing local ecosystem consolidating itself around various projects and productions. A group of activities that, in a more and more deliberate way, wants to carry out a transformational role in the cultural and health policies by putting them at the centre of the urban development.

Therefore, the *Arte Inquieta* constitutes a precious opportunity to fuel and put into practice an overall conception of Reggio Emilia as a city that embraces diversity, in the belief that it represents a cultural and ethical resource, especially towards the vulnerable.

A city that doesn't neglect people in need; on the contrary, it respects them and it puts them at the centre of its innovation policy. To the one hand, the path toward the art exhibition led to the co-building of the program of initiatives "Identità inquieta" that involves several cultural organizations in an original and complex reflection on personal and collective identity. To the other hand, it built the fertile soil in which Fondazione Palazzo Magnani and Farmacie Comunalì Riunite reached a higher level of in-depth understanding and awareness of their methodological proposal "L'arte mi appartiene", through which they have involved citizens, users and other social, cultural, health, educational institutions' professionals over the years.

The paper topics are edited by the project team who contributed to the realization and management of many of these initiatives and to the progressive organization of a context which is favourable to the cultural welfare.

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The analysis and reflections suggested below are attributed to the authors of the paper and they do not involve their organizations.

These very same topics have been enriched by some revisors who relate to the principal analysis areas taken into account, especially to those concerning the eventual modelling and replicability of the ideas proposed.

The paper is addressed to various subjects- professionals and social, cultural planners, policy makers and urban policies experts, social nets spokespeople, third sector organizations, active citizens etc...- who want to question not only their role as 'professionals' but also that of the organizations and nets in which they operate.

After all, what's the point of building social nets and setting up new meanings together if not to reshape the society starting from the incentives resulting from the work with people and communities?

Key words: cultural welfare; urban identity; work and social planning.

Aren't men's thoughts a reality? Are we already so far from reality and from human understanding to define men's thoughts and gestures an 'unreality'? [...] is it not more likely they are the motive behind the world's evolutionary progress? [...] We should take account of the inner forms of thought as if they were the prerequisites for another representation. That is why I say man's thought is, in itself, a sculpture, and that the possibility to reproduce a shape in the physical world depends on the fact that this thought is meant to gradually take form.

Joseph Beuys

1.The cultural co-production focus and impacts.

An art exhibition planning and setting up usually tends to be conceived as an 'event' characterized by a large number of leisure activities that contribute, even unknowingly, to define its core essence not only in terms of its topics and meanings, but also of its organizational and managerial nature.

The activity that strikes out immediately is the 'finite one' which, as much as it can be expanded, especially in the 'production phase (preparation, exposition, secondary initiatives, follow-up, etc...) it tends to be carried out in accordance to a linear process that follows the most traditional space-time coordinates.

Nevertheless, recently an increasingly large part of the cultural production has tried to get out of the negative outcomes deriving from the economic crisis, serving as a tool to restore process social innovations, which aim to bring forth positive and everlasting outcomes with respect to different public organizations and communities by considering individual and collective behaviours, organizations and institutions' organizational and administrative models and, last but not least, regulative assets and the promotional nature of the policies.

A creativity effort in terms of organization, management and governance whose purpose is to go beyond sectoral approaches with the pursue of transformative missions.

To that respect, the project-based and evaluative focus shifts from the type of event to the challenge to face with respect to which the cultural production tends to present itself as the catalyst and creator of many other actions and resources that don't just represent a dependent and peripheral component, but an integral one too.

In the case of 'L'arte inquieta', there are at least two transformative focus that contribute to restore the cultural productions traditional modes of planning, management and assessment.

The first one consists on the reinforcement of the cultural welfare offering not just as a list of initiatives with a supplementary function with respect to the traditional social and cultural policies, but also as a sheer public interest policy.

This improvement is also the result of some organizational innovation elements specially made to enable various people and organizations to make their contribution.

In particular, the Fondazione Palazzo Magnani stands as a flexible platform, being able to customize the exhibition.

At the same time, Farmacie Comunal Riunite involves its social actors by rejecting the socio-educational practice' focus between the exhibition rooms.

In this way, all the modalities through which it is possible to realize the meanings connotating key social skills such as inclusion, cohesion and education, can be redefined.

Skills being the basis of all those social infrastructure processes and that are seemingly becoming more and more important to recreate the community and corporate foundations of the common life.

The second focus consists on trying to re-considerate urban identity role, mainly by promoting social innovations arising from marginalized and vulnerable backgrounds that cannot be reconciled with the traditional nature of the city branding, the latter being already unable to acknowledge the importance and value of the contexts aforementioned and its impact on urban life quality.

On the other hand, the conception and idea of the vulnerable, as well as of our own inner weaknesses, are greatly taken into account.

Therefore, the focus is not on the innovation deriving from certainties fixed on new ideas and on service and business models, but on the uncertainty, on the probability to make mistakes and to be consciously exposed to some risks.

This reality affects not only our social dimension, but even our community and society in a broad sense, along with each individual's life.

Moreover, it helps us conceive ourselves as being part of a community that, by acknowledging its individuals' weaknesses, validates itself with respect to its own communal fragility, making it an element of unity and reflection that doesn't bring a disparagement, rather an element of value and dignity for everyone.

As a consequence, the possibility for the cultural-based welfare to shift to the core of the peculiar elements that make the city recognizable to both its inhabitants and the various users, poses itself as an inevitable and demanding challenge, even for the mere fact of putting into question the cultural policies, since, in the last decades, these have been set up and managed as if they were the main driver of development and urban marketing.

The aim of the position paper is to depict 'L'arte inquieta' not just as an 'exhibition event', but also as a communal learning opportunity from and on favour of different entities (organizers, institutions, professionals, users, citizens, etc ...), so as to thoroughly develop and share approaching elements that act on people's mindsets, and methodological ones (in a more applicative and structured sense) that help plan, pursue and estimate deliberately defined social impacts.

The starting up of collective learning programs doesn't represent a secondary consequence of the explanatory one, but another impact that "physically" coincides with the setting up and the management of the 'transformational practices communities' processes which, by operating transversely to public institutions, organizations and third sector companies, bring together planners who are getting more and more encouraged to exercise their profession in participatory and inclusive contexts.

The same could be said for all the professionals who are usually not only asked to provide specialized services, but also to elicit contributions and resources supplies in accordance with the co-production and co-government modalities.

2. Cultural welfare's role in the setting up of a new social infrastructure

The proliferation of cultural initiatives in the care, education, health and inclusion fields is likely to be caused not only by an evidence-based support with respect to theoretical-scientific models attesting its relevance, but also, and perhaps especially, by the need to avoid certain traditional models imposed by the social welfare and that, for this reason, are proving to be inapplicable.

On the one hand, we are in presence of the appearance of social innovations in various areas of social policies and of their bidding system with the aim to enforce the respect of guidelines that are overly modelled on performance standards and that "nullify" welfare services relational and communal aspects, thus undermining its role as a social change tool.

To the other hand, there's still some difficulty in leading these initiatives in a proper paradigm that recognizes culture as a leading cause to salutogenesis, thus enabling to grasp its strengths, especially those deriving from all those contradictory and ambivalent elements that characterize its approach and modus operandi as well.

This partial recognition of culture as the welfare foundation sometimes tends to offer a softened version of it due to 'social' generic aims that risk to neglect important innovation resources, with the result of not being able to answer for that need of radical change that characterizes a welfare based on its citizens and, especially, on the marginalized potentialities.

Hence the need to adopt a different approach so as to get out of this 'period of change resistance' which, despite being full of opportunities, lacks in terms of strategies and policies, thus detecting two design and intervention areas that seek to strengthen cultural welfare paradigmatic aspect.

The first one consists on the setting up of the leading principles (planning and governance) and on the modes of action connotating the planning and management of real cultural welfare policies, thus enabling various initiatives to create a level of organization that proves to be able to settle itself in different urban development contexts by acting as a catalyst of change.

The second one regards the role played by certain actors, such as planners and social operators, who are asked to restore the social infrastructure by carrying out an authentic educative approach addressed to multiple people.

Their main aim is to get feelings of awareness and skills out of situations of vulnerability, incompleteness and absence.

Feelings that contribute to re-establish the current welfare systems in an empowering way, overcoming, in particular, all the production, use, government systems that tend to separate services from the local and communal dimension generativity.

It's about a supportive and enabling role carried out by these entities, by someone who 'roots for you' and 'empowers you', acting as a support and not as a replacement, both with regards to each individual and all the communities to wider and more articulated socio-cultural contexts.

At the basis there's a biased mirroring mechanism that manages to restore ideas, options of value and skills that emerge, even only partially and contradictorily, in the belief that social infrastructure is an emerging and constantly co-constructed fact, on condition that it reports the problems emerged (through clear and well-defined questions) to their source, with the certainty that's where all the means designed to handle them are.

3. Organizational and methodological elements

The re-interpretation of the initiatives set up in Reggio Emilia in recent years, particularly of those unequivocally oriented to assess the convergences between welfare and culture, with systemic transformation purposes like 'L'arte mi appartiene', enabled to spot and outline in the following points some elements of peculiarity and value that contribute to densify and unite the contexts and cultural welfare action models.

3.1. The piece of work and its display as a meaningful device

The use of manufacts and of not merely reproduced original artistic performances fastened social processes and 'warmed up' the relationships between the various subjects involved (artists, operators, institutions, vulnerable people, citizens, etc...) thus limiting the presence of aesthetic solutions that lead to only temporary changes.

The sense of incitement and inspiration, as well as of creation of meaning, is elicited by the original work multisensorial stimulation and, especially, by its modes of organization, fruition and access.

In the latter case, many people are given the possibility to join, especially all those who, at first, are only benefiting from this project and eventually end up taking the roles of co-producers and co-administrators.

In fact, the piece of work is used for the sense it brings and for its research, as well as meaning, component.

Taking ownership of the work of art and of its setting up process for the sense and meaning it brings and/or it brought and making its questions relevant and easily approachable for the here and now, enables to put the work and/or the artist at the centre of the debate and to effectively make it (or him) part of the community at issue.

By legitimately taking the artists' works ownership, the community is enriched with beauty, new meanings and tools.

With the cooperation of contemporary (and approachable) artists, this communal sense-making process is strengthened by a face-to-face meeting with the artist, whom can personally share his story, thus adding up new value to the meeting, to the individuals and to the community itself.

3.2. Measures to get back 'making experience'

The cultural and artistic production approaches in contexts of welfare enable to renovate experiential aspects that the mainstream cultural production has gradually lost due to a chase of production and consumption models entirely similar to the goods and services of the capitalist economy.

Instead, the adoption of strategies and values typical of an 'authentic' cultural experience such as the mirroring, the role reversal, the acceptance of different people and environments, creates contexts characterized by that viscosity and risk-taking ability that, nowadays, seem to be pivotal in order to be up to the social and environmental challenges of these times, thus eschewing the focus put on the organizational and content principles that aim to recreate the status quo.

The involvement in these new co-production and cultural joint curatorship norms, also asks for an improvement concerning the individual itself, that is to say all those motivational aspects that allow everyone to be an active part of the process, with a view to authentic inclusion.

In this sense, the method option plans a real 'hands-on experience', since handling social processes linked to any artistic experiences allows to shift the experience beyond the cognitive level, unveiling emotional aspects that are being revealed primarily to the protagonist of the action himself.

3.3 The communal learning as a common resource

The individual and collective contributions that this cultural welfare method asks to put into action, particularly from a learning point of view, can be represented as a true 'common asset', similar to a work of art in a broad sense, exactly in the sense of what Joseph Beuys calls the 'social sculpture' whose completion can only count on the collaboration of all the subjects involved who, in turn, can benefit from this experience to re-establish their individual and collective growth paths.

In this sense, the 'concretisation' of the learning elements in a visual sense and their storage so that they can be constantly bolstered and put into use, represents another value from a methodological point of view, since it embodies not so much the final result of the process, but rather a real heritage than can or should be reinvested to carry out the required social impacts.

All these guidelines help delineate a third innovation path that is invisible to the eyes of the dichotomies, which have a big influence in directing the dynamics of change, in particular those between endogenous (internal forces) and exogenous (external flows) and between top down (from the top) and bottom down (from the bottom).

The now reconfigured cultural welfare serves as an agent of change, since it's the result of actions centred on limited, yet systemic, elements of needs and opportunities, which consciously act as a 'bridge' between the actors and their backgrounds.

The result is thus a mechanism of mutual recognition based on the appeal and on the combination of other people's thoughts and opinions belonging to different systems/backgrounds/types, and that is eligible to create new entities operating between man, nature and technology and directing themselves toward an innovative view that is not to be overlapped with who contributed to cause it, thus making their respective cultures change and grow.

This involves knowing how to activate inner reflections, interpersonal conversations and varied institutional dialogues and how to expand or redefine one's own self, daily interlocutors, the stakeholders and the institutional partners with whom the innovation and the 'social work' are produced.

4. Foreground elements

The starting up of the processes through the approach and methodological processes aforementioned requires a reshaping of all the foreground elements placed along a continuum of skills between planning and social, cultural work.

From this point of view, the operator and planner figures represent a sort of 'giano bifronte', that is to say an element of overlook to the future projects characterized by peculiar aspects that need to be rearranged in a context of complementarity, which has to be put at the basis of a cultural welfare capable of permanent changes.

To that end, it's important to activate mechanisms through which all the planners can acknowledge the importance of the social and cultural matter, in a phase in which this field, characterized by the search of a high relational density, tends to expand itself and to embed to other contexts, thus getting out of the limits of the service models and of the specialisms that have characterized the evolution, especially in the last decades.

The social worker, instead, is expected to be more aware of the influence the allocation of planning skills has, both when dealing with project management and policy making specialists, and when interacting with people, especially with those in need, who contribute to make up the history of humanity and who had, at times, the opportunity to acquire specific knowledge in the context of empowerment paths.

Therefore, the promotion of the differences, both in the organization of the activities and in the pursuit of specific objectives, enables to reinforce the impact caused by their complementarities, heightening the leverage effects.

Planning and working not only 'for' but especially 'with' the social and the cultural organizations is increasingly about setting up environments that activate social processes relying upon conversational contexts that enable to put into action that socio-educational intermediation function previously explained.

This requires a particular stabilisation in the entire design process of innovation elements not only based on the intentionality of the objectives, but also on the concretization of actions that can bring positive and identifiable outcomes.

These have to be valued so that they don't 'fade' in the experimentalism itself or, conversely, in an autoreferential proceduralism.

In order for the action to go beyond the traditional production and fruition schemes, it is necessary to make a conscious and thoughtful deviation at a design and planning level in such a way that the social welfare can take on different shapes, as considered necessary, that is, required and authorized.

Thanks to these pre-conditions, the resulting actions are likely to convey all the elements of change that define them.

In this sense, the planning should be reshaped not only when it comes to facilitating spontaneous social processes, but also to adopting a methodological scheme that builds the conditions leading to a different concept of 'doing social, particularly for what concerns the involvement of all those identified as stakeholders and partners.

In fact, the aim is that the socio-environmental challenges characterizing this period of time become again the central focus of the communities, by giving back to those who live and reproduce those backgrounds, the trust and competence to discuss, even in a projectual, cultural and political vein, matters that are clearly of public interest.

Paradoxically, the rigorous ways through which people are called to collaborate to this process with the aim of reporting social issues not as individual cases but as collective challenges represent a violation to planners and social operators, due to the fact that innovation is made possible only whenever we consciously take the risk to go beyond pre-arranged schemes. In that sense, this condition requires the ability to unlearn.

5. An urban identity recognizing itself in the fragility and care

The effort in terms of re-learn and re-signification that results from rethinking cultural welfare as a transformative policy can and, in some ways, should scale on an identity level by defying an element that is becoming more and more central in this phase, which is the city branding criterion, in all its cultural-based aspects.

Usually, this aspect tends to reproduce a standardized version of culture, in the service of traditional developmental factors.

Whenever these factors need to be reconsidered (let's think, for example, at the tourism sector or at the product design, up to the criteria that define the 'quality of life' rankings), a renovation of the culture lead role appears to be of vital importance.

A role not just for the sake of it, but aimed at detecting opportunities lying within marginal, precarious and excluded backgrounds, which have acquired a central position in the social and political cultural representations of this period.

Thanks to the co-planning and cultural welfare governance regulations, the sense of fragility that is ever more frequently characterizing individual and social life experiences, can be recognized as a resource capable of inciting an overall urban identity rethink.

A resource where the efforts and investments in terms of 'care', 'urban repair', 'accessibility' are not an end in themselves, but they pave the way to more profound changing paths from which emerge varied, totally reshaped and essential development resources, like the social mobility through youth protagonism, the rebuilding of urban areas centred on social and communal infrastructures, the reconsideration of all the aspects that make job and proactivity culture concrete etc...

Even in this case, the experiences gained on the field in the last years have enabled to organize paths leading to the urban identity reestablishment by reconsidering, on the one side, the modalities through which cultural policies core business is managed, that is to say the curatorship of the various initiatives and events programming; on the other side the representation, in material and intangible terms, of the urban infrastructure as a whole, thus challenging the most well-known conceptions, the same being no longer able to 'embody' the experiences and aspirations of those who, for various reasons, are living in the city.

5.1 A well spread and connected cultural programming

The cultural welfare activities (art exhibitions, seminars, workshops, etc ...) enable to replan the modes of creation and management of the 'panels' and 'schedules', not limiting themselves to

schedule the events within institutional contexts dedicated to culture production, but rather to place the activities nearby various urban life spaces.

The aim is to not impoverish the culture as regards to its areas of interest but to show its transformative potential.

This asked for a reassessment of the programming and planning work with the aid of testing techniques that served as a 'preface' to the elaboration of common working practices, thus leading, thanks to a targeted nudging work, to the planning of all the social institutions making up the Reggio Emilia territory.

From this view, the cultural welfare represents a privileged field to further strengthen the shared management paths that historically characterize the territory, especially with regards to relationships between public entities and third sector organizations.

These processes, which are often the result of meetings between cultural professionals and social workers, and between their organizations as well, led to the increase of anything but obvious tendencies and specific competences regarding the facility and running of groups and of wider community gatherings in accordance with shared methodologies and approaches, pinpointing a mutual interest and a willingness to experiment some elements of change in one's own work.

5.2. The welfare at the centre of a new urban and social representation

The pluriverse of planning ability between welfare and culture gradually stratified on an urban scale formed, and still forms, a collaborative space evolving in an ecosystemic sense around a more rooted and consistent cultural welfare in which each person/organization/institution operates with its own positions, perceptions, plans and resources.

The combination of these contributions not only affects the afore mentioned co-programming and co-planning, but it also fosters a common knowledge and awareness base and wide-ranging approaches that represent the 'core group' of a new social depiction of the city where all the elements of fragility and care play a central role in redefining its identity.

A widespread conception of 'care' as a cultural and political practice that bolsters wide-ranging change processes.

Thanks to this communicative skill, it has gradually emerged an institutional learning which not only is useful to organize short term plans, but even to build policies able to hold new developmental models that contribute to re-establish urban identity.

In a nutshell, when we talk about 'welfare as urban identity', we shouldn't conceive it just as a preestablished protection system where the different needs are being combined to the bidding one, but rather as the ability of operators and social planners to reintroduce the concepts lying behind welfare (fragility and potential, services and advocacy, professionalism and informality, redistribution and investment) into other contexts, services, plans and policies.

This meta-skill is an integral part of the mission and of the social cultural institutions modus operandi that adopt this approach and therefore it needs to be adequately explained and reported. In fact, the aim is to put the emphasis not only on the urban policies priorities but also on the factors lying underneath them and through which the city is lived and visited not just for the event itself but for the care context where is situated and that, at the same time, contributes to keep it alive.

6. Reorganizing and spreading service and programming models

These reflections contribute to recognize the presence of a service, economic and policy model that can be run in the Reggio Emilia context, aside from being transferred to another ones.

In fact, in this phase, it is possible to recognize some of the elements that make it flexible in an adaptive sense.

- **The first one** consists on the additional aspect of this initiative, considering that several subjects, especially those working in the public and third sector, were already operating through cultural welfare activities where urban identity was put into focus, though not always in a conscious manner but with the aid of strategic and clear directions.
From this perspective, exhibition initiatives like 'L'arte inquieta' help revitalize a wide-ranging mode of action.
- **The second factor** that enables to reorganize and spread service and policy models linked to this field consists on the drafting of manuals elaborated by operators and social planners and encompassing rules on the organization of settings where the elements of fragility and care are more likely to become a collective identification element on an urban scale too.
- **The third factor** regards the methodological elements and all the individual directions required to 'stay within' complex and ambivalent social processes.
In this way, the access to collective learning tools represents an opportunity that enables to make an experience as authentic as possible.
- **Lastly**, along with an approach in terms of a mindset open to the uncertain developed by learning how to grasp insight and unforeseen elements, the 'technology transfer' is of peculiar importance. Workers and social planners in particular, are called to redesign the services and to redraft the welfare 'code' by acting, for example, on the licensing, crediting and programming requirements, since it would be difficult to make systems changes without operating on the 'game rules'.

It's about challenges involving multiple people and organizations, such as the professionals and all those running projects and setting policies, the researchers and experts in the monitoring and assessment field, and all those in charge of bringing resources not only in the Public Administration but also inside philanthropic and financial private entities.

An ecosystem invited to nurture its own uniqueness to the extent that it proves to be able to purposefully unite it to all those who are pursuing the same aim through different means that are meant to be gradually integrated with each other.

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