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CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUMS AND TERRITORY. THE CASE STUDY OF ROME¹

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ABSTRACT

Big cities like Rome represent a subject for the creation of a new social project system in which the groups set new relational networks based on creativity, information, commerce and work. Museums dedicated to contemporary arts and located in big cities represent one of the possible contact points of the variety of these circuits. The case study that this paper intends to analyze, in terms of local development and internalizations, concerns the museum network of contemporary art of Rome.

1) INTRODUCTION

The relationship between art and the city has been, since the Renaissance and onwards, one of the main features of urban living, a real urban institution. In a geographical perspective, this relationship can be described adopting two separate but converging views. The first one is what we might call the art in the city, i.e. the ensemble of places, institutional and non-institutional, in which art, in all its various forms, finds a location and a formalized utility. The second view is what we could define as the art for the city, which represents those sites that are conceived in the contemporary city as spaces for publicly sharing artistic forms, not necessarily in an institutionalized way (Fig. 1). The aim of this work is to investigate the first type of relationship in which the connection between art and the urban component is expressed in the dimension of the network of museums of contemporary art conceived as a cultural good and a public property.

With the birth of the modern city and the advent of urbanism as a "way of life" the museums follow the vicissitudes of the city and become a symbol of its modernity, its refinement and its social regulation. Museums not only direct the constructive weight of the modern city, its social and economic geography, but also influence the location in a widest "hierarchization" of those areas with a higher touristic appeal. [1].

Today the museums, both as simple physical container and as imaginative places of the city, seem to have become the basic condition of the best planning and urban renewal processes [2].

At the same time, over the past decades a growing number of studies, which refer to a variety of scientific approaches [3, 4, 5, 6, 7], seem to converge on one issue: the fact that the changes led by globalization processes not only reshape urban networks, reorganizing the distribution of opportunities and incomes in the cities aside from their level of participation in the global economy, but they also concern the organization of space within each city [8; 9].

In this direction, and in view of the fact that the fruition of culture is increasingly becoming a driving factor in the processes of urban renewal in the frame of a post-Fordist city [10], museums of contemporary art are increasingly gaining a strategic role in the overall redesign of the city and in determining its status in the global tourism network. In this context, recent years have witnessed the spread of policies of development and urban regeneration focused on artistic and cultural initiatives, that can be ascribed to two main territorial situations.

¹This work was conceived as a unit, the drafting of paragraphs 2, 3, 4 can be attributed to Marco Maggioli, the paragraphs 5 and 6 can be attributed to Simone Bozzato. The introduction and the last paragraph can be attributed to both authors.

The first one concerns small urban areas characterized by poor and generic quality of territory and environment. In these locations the initiatives related to the presence of a museum can trigger economically and environmentally virtuous processes on a small scale.

The second situation is related, more frequently, to broader mechanisms in which entire districts or large areas in densely populated cities are planned starting from the localization of facilities for the fruition of contemporary art. In this latter case it is possible to find further specific situations concerning: a) places that have a high symbolic value for the entire city, b) sites with buildings that need a new urban revival in which the museum becomes a strong driving force, c) urban "gaps" that need a new function.

The increasing spread of policies of urban development and regeneration focused on artistic and cultural initiatives that, from the mid-80's, have characterized different European cities, has been joined by enhancement processes (city marketing, cultural tourism) that have gradually redefined the models of cultural district in the frame of endogenous development theories [11].

In this perspective, the present work (which critically analyzes the first results of a research project on cultural heritage and sites of public culture developed by the Italian Geographic Society and coordinated by Prof. Fiorella Dallari), will try to analyze and understand from a geographical and territorial perspective some of the strategies of urban redevelopment related to the network of museums of modern and contemporary art that have concerned the city of Rome in the recent years.

2) CULTURAL TOURISM, CREATIVITY AND CITIES

Cultural tourism and the creative sector now represent some of the most effective tools in the global urban competition. The large metropolitan areas, in particular, are involved in a general trend to participate in the realization of projects or events behind which is hidden one of the new ways of competition between cities in the era of globalization. As noted by Richards "not only do cultural attractions such as museums and monuments constitute the larger sector of the European market attraction, but they are also increasingly being placed at the centre of the urban and rural development strategies and image enhancement program" [12].

At the base of this renewed relationship with the city's cultural segment of tourism there is, in the first instance, the ensemble of transformations it has undergone over the time. Compared to the traditional view of cultural tourism, meant almost exclusively as visits to museums and cities of art, Smith [13] observes that two major evolutionary processes have occurred and these are mainly related to two aspects. The first one is a result of the expansion of the size of demand and supply, so that the cultural tourism has stopped to be a niche to become a mass product consisting of many different and specific segments. The second aspect is related to a diversification of the components of culture and cultural tourism, so that the tourism product untied itself from traditional resources.

The dominant element of cultural tourism is bound to the experience of culture and the desire to experience different lifestyles. It is a sort of "culturization" of society that would bring "more and more areas of consumption viewed as 'cultural'. This has shifted the focus of cultural tourism away from 'shining prizes' of the European Grand Tour toward a broader range of heritage, popular culture and living cultural attractions" [14].

3) PLACE-BRANDING

In the era of neo-liberalism, urban governments are often in search for rapid economic strategies that often involve some form of partnership with private players, with the consequence of a change in the nature of urban governance, increasingly oriented to lighten the State apparatus as a guide in the renewal processes [15, 16].

The basic hypothesis of this project is to consider the city as a place of production, even intangible, which responds to the not too hidden goal of a massive attraction (and retention) of private investment. These procedures of governance have embraced a vision of the city as a place for consumers and creativity, and have set as objective a competitive strategy between

cities based on the marketing of local specificities, “local quality of life” and on the possibility of spending free time [17]. While in the first phase these partnership strategies have focused mainly on infrastructural aspects, in a second phase they were generally characterized by more shallow investments such as, for example, road signs, street lighting, building front restoration, or promotional strategies focused on the research and development of a specific brand or the marketing of a peculiar aspect of the city [18].

Finally, more recent initiatives include actual brand of the sites - from commercial businesses (shops, restaurants, bars) to cultural institutions (museums, theatres) – which somehow trigger a real change in the physical and symbolic aspects of a place in order to create a unique experience from the touristic point of view [19]. The brand introduces a certain order, a certainty and a consistency across an undisciplined urban landscape; the brand makes somehow easier to “read” the complexity of the city [20]. It is in this direction that governments often commission renowned architects, designers or men of letters to build a 'brand', and so Barcelona, for example, becomes "the city of Gaudi" or Bilbao is rebuilt as "Guggenheim Bilbao" [21].

In this process, the designer and his project are “fetishized” (the architect becomes definitively a “starchitect”), and the building is seen more as an architectonic monument and not as a functional site. As Ryan says “what is being branded in these cities is not just the immediate institution [...] but the city itself. The museum becomes an icon and magnet for post-industrial urbanity” [22].

4) THE MUSEUMS OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN EUROPE. SOME SIGNIFICANT CASES.

Within the wide and elaborate studies on the role and urban location of museums of contemporary art, in this work only three particular types of integration of the museum of contemporary art in the urban setting have been taken in consideration. The first case may regard small and medium-sized cities in fully developed European countries. In the industrial city of Metz (just little more than 100,000 inhabitants), the location of the new museum of contemporary art, opened in May 2010, is a direct branch of the Centre Pompidou in Paris. It is therefore the decentralization of a public facility, but it is interesting to understand the reasons of the choice of this city for the location of the museum. The availability of a large unused area just few minutes away from the Central Station and nearby the city centre, the global plan for the construction of a new district, called the Amphithéâtre (whose finalization is expected for 2018) fully integrated in the Centre Pompidou-Metz, the strategic geographical position of the city itself in the heart of Europe, a city served by the TGV high-speed rail line, a political will to invest in the cultural sector to ensure the reputation and the economic development of the city, a financial capacity to invest in the project.

The city of Rovereto (less than 40,000 inhabitants) hosts, instead, as is well known, the MART (Museum of Contemporary Art of Trento and Rovereto), a non-economic public corporation (Regional Law No.32, November 23th, 1987) whose board consists of five members appointed directly by the Provincial Government, including one in agreement with the Municipality of Rovereto. Beyond the administrative dimension, it is interesting the role played by the Museum as a touristic driving force for the whole region.

The second case concerns the location of museums of contemporary art in large cities in countries with transitional economies. In this sense, a first reference can be found in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb funded by the City of Zagreb and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia. This museum is located in the suburb of Novi Zagreb, it is one of the main component of the complete refurbishing of that urban district. A second example, different from a localization point of view, concerns the design of the new Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw by the Swiss architect Christian Kerez. The realization of this new museum in the city centre, whose opening is scheduled for 2016, near the Palace of Culture and

Science, is part of a larger intervention aimed to revitalize the entire centre of the Polish capital and to spread Polish culture in the world.

The last case, the most commonly found in European cities, finally, concerns the role played by museums of contemporary art in the process of renovation and gentrification in large urban areas. An example of this phenomenon is to be probably found in Barcelona, where the construction of the MACBA - Museu d'art contemporani de Barcelona- (with a public administration and designed by one of the most famous architects, Richard Meier), has started a process of urban development and social replacement of the Raval neighborhood [23].

5) MAXXI AND MACRO IN ROME

Compared to the cases mentioned above, the Museum of Arts of the XXIst Century (MAXXI) (Fig. 2) and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome (MACRO) represent a significant example, especially with regards to their different approaches to the process of urban regeneration. A first difference concerns the location. The MAXXI is located, in fact, in the Flaminio district, centre of a continuous process of remodelling and renovation of its settlements both in the past and more recently (Fig. 3). Not far from the Aurelian Walls and close to the districts of Della Vittoria, Parioli, Pinciano and Campo Marzio, the Flaminio area and, to a lesser extent, its adjacent districts, have become the subject of an urban phenomenon that has focused on culture as a key for renovation and requalification.

It often happens in big cities that the spark of change comes from the planning of major sport and cultural events that reshape the districts to the needs of the time [24, 25]. In this case, in the early twentieth century, after the choice to create an industrial district in this area, the first urban interventions related to cultural events started with the International Exposition of 1911. On that occasion, and with the celebrations of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Italian Unification, culture and sport start to be the leitmotif of large scale interventions and constructions.

This was perhaps the last significant intervention of urban enrichment whose signs are still indelibly marked and have undoubtedly contributed to enrich the city and, at the same time, helped Rome to approach the needs of the great European Capitals. Building interventions with targeted structures that gave the connotation of a cultural and sport district. Some of the works accomplished during this time include the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Valle Giulia, the current locations of Academies and Embassies (originally created and used for the great exhibition of the Italian Regions during the celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Italian Unification) and sports facilities such as the National Stadium and the Hippodrome of Parioli.

A further phase referring to a big event, in this case a sport event, came with the 1960 Olympic Games, where everything that was done previously was enriched with a series of structures in order to give the city a consistency and complete its vocation for sport: the construction of sports federations, of several private clubs along the Tiber, but especially the Olympic Stadium, the "Palazzetto dello Sport" and the adjacent Olympic Village. In recent years, more precisely in 1995, began the construction of the Auditorium Parco della Musica, which leads to important new results. The work of Renzo Piano goes into a path of urban growth that sees a gradual approach to cultural needs, but that still does not close the gap with some European Capitals.

Today the MAXXI is fully embedded in the path just outlined, meeting another need, and becoming a multipurpose place that contributes, through the work of architect Zaha Hadid, to broaden the interests of citizens and tourists in contemporary art. The MAXXI is administered by a foundation established in July 2009 by the Ministry of Culture and hosts two museums: MAXXI Art and MAXXI Architecture. In this two different souls and through this management model the MAXXI represents "a museum of contemporary art inside an unconventional architecture" and continues a tradition of planning that continues to fill and re-interpret the needs of a district that is constantly under functional renovation.

The MACRO, instead, is located in two separate sites (the former Peroni brewery in Via Reggio Emilia, in the Nomentano district, and the former slaughterhouse in the Testaccio area) which refer to two very different portions of the city for their social features and type of settlement (Fig 4 and 5).

The Nomentano area is characterized by the presence of beautiful and noble neo-classical Roman villas, many of which have adopted different functions over the years. The Testaccio district is, instead, a twentieth-century area that was created with an industrial vocation and as a working class district but that in recent years was increasingly characterized by the presence of cultural initiatives.

The architectural feature that mostly distinguishes the MACRO is, in both cases, the shape of the entire complex, with industrial buildings preceding the twentieth century that highlight the gradual transition from classicism to modernity (Fig. 6). The route inside the museum can host spaces that are able to receive innovative and technological art installations. Because of its ability to become a "treasure-chest", the MACRO is a museum element itself. It also keeps the charm of the context of industrial archaeology that has been refurbished and modelled with a new function of active container for experiments and various art forms.

6) A PROJECT OF COMPLETION AND URBAN REGENERATION

The visitors of these two museums are pervaded with different feelings: not only the pleasure of visiting the museums and their content, but also the considerations related to the process of redefinition of urban functions (Fig. 7). From the point of view of urban planners, these facilities fulfil the need to provide the city with spaces devoted not only to the culture tout court, but also to complete the huge information coming from the explosive force of archaeological tourism and to redefine more advanced tourism forms and routes. The new dynamics of tourism development in Europe and outside Europe attest the compelling need to create routes of knowledge of the city summarized in different experiences. The dimension of the cultural heritage, the "natural" vocation of tourism in the capital, is reinterpreted in a multi-cultural key and in a new dimension of territory-oriented social settlements.

The answer to this need is therefore clearly visible in the redefinition of interventions that further improve areas that have already started this process: both the MAXXI and the MACRO trigger, through the common thread of contemporary art, different feelings and motivating forces that improve and qualify the districts where they are located. The data relating to this phenomenon are encouraging and supported by the well-known habit, also due to low-cost tourism, to take in consideration especially the destinations that are able to deliver messages immediately recognizable. A first demonstration of this is to be found in the current tour-operators strategies, highly oriented to involve visitors in activities that will convince them to extend the days of stay, tempting them not to focus only in the most known places and proposing them diverse tourist packages, where contemporary art, and the new urban structure that hosts it, are able to stimulate different feelings. This is a feature already present in the great capitals of Europe which, although distinguish themselves by their variety, are characterized by cultural spaces that tend to strengthen the message of tourism and to create districts in which contemporary art is a well distinguishable key to the reading of the city [26].

It is therefore expected that Rome will have several tourism routes, where contemporary art routes will have a prominent position. In this context, the urban phenomenon of functional reorganization is not only related to the construction of new structures for the culture or to the reorganization of disused sites, but it is also in need of well defined infrastructural interventions. As for the urban reorganization of the district Flaminio it is interesting to note how also the realization of the "Bridge of music Tiber" fits this project. The construction of this bridge over the Tiber, whose realization was possible thank to Italian and English expertise, began in 2008 and gave birth to a new link between the Lungotevere Flaminio and the Lungotevere Maresciallo Cadorna (Fig. 8).

In addition to the architectural shape, which is particularly modern and flexible and which offers two opposing arcs and the prevalence of materials as steel and wood, the main feature of the bridge is the presence of a driveway and two pedestrian lanes. As a result, the two banks of the river where the culture and sport facilities above mentioned are located are connected through a system of mobility that aims to become pedestrian or at least to reduce the use of cars. The MAXXI gets obvious benefits from the proximity to this bridge, because it can represent a

further destination among the other cultural buildings and lead multiple touristic routes. The presence of such significant cultural functions and the current gradual process of functional enrichment gives the image of a city which, although still under development, is based on a project. The MAXXI and the MACRO are the face of a city able to redefine itself, in which contemporary art and, more generally, the contamination of languages can be a resource that is accompanied by a phenomenon of urban development.

7) CONCLUSIONS

In Rome, and elsewhere, the role of museums of contemporary art is therefore an integral part of an overall spatial strategy in which the public use of the cultural dimension plays an essential role in the definition of urban renovation policies. This process, political and territorial at the same time, beyond the competitive advantages that theoretically triggers, also contributes to highlight the limitations which, in our opinion, are mainly due to two factors.

The first of these factors evidently refers to the often emulating content of the projects, the over-dramatization of the building over to the contents, the creation of bigness [27] which could in fact nullify the expected inclusive effect. In this sense, it should be stressed the risk that such mechanism of construction of large containers for art could trigger gentrification processes, intended as the gradual replacement of pre-existing social components with different people in the renovated districts. From this perspective, the cultural regeneration strategies can also produce effects of urban segregation [28, 29] or even the actual expulsion of the residents [30], that could lead to a model of dualistic development of the city and not to the aim of social promotion and inclusion. It is also clear, however, how the planner's attention to the territorial context of the contemporary art museums can play a significant role. This attention may be able to activate tourist circuits not limited only to the museum as a building, but also to reorganize the whole tourist offer, in which the museum becomes one of the possible stages in a multi-functional district [31] that not only involves the entire city, avoiding the "temporary creativity" effect mentioned by Peter Hall [32], but that also contains a sufficient level of diversification.

The second factor of weakness of the role of museums in the process of renovation of urban area concerns the risk that many of these urban policies can activate processes of speculation.

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