THE CITY FOR THE OTHERS: ICONIC CULTURAL FACILITIES IN THE PRODUCTION OF THE CITY

JOANA RAMALHO

Joana Ramalho is an Associate researcher at the Center for the Study of Communication and Culture of Universidade Católica Portuguesa. Degree in Communication Sciences from Universidade Nova de Lisboa; graduate affiliate student at Bartlett School of Architecture, London. In recent years Joana Ramalho has investigated cultural issues, having completed a PhD in Social Sciences at the University of Lisbon in 2012, with a thesis on "The Role of Culture in the Production of the City: Casa da Música, Porto".

Abstract

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, strategies for the production of the city have secured a prominent place in urban policies. More specifically, there are numerous territorial marketing strategies to promote an outward image of the city. Territorial marketing per se is a way of looking at the city from outside and, above all, for "the others," i.e., not for those living or working in it every day, but for those who have a direct or indirect relationship with the city as (current or potential) visitors or investors. The purpose of this article is to pose some basic questions that will allow us to reflect on how important culture has been in this kind of strategy, in particular through the construction of iconic cultural facilities.

Introduction

Strategies for the production of the city have secured a prominent place in urban policies since the last decades of the twentieth century, in which structural changes resulting from globalization and economic liberalization processes have pointed to the need for cities to develop differentiation strategies that grant them a place on the world map of territorial competitiveness.

The production of the city comprises a number of initiatives undertaken to bridge the gap between the existing city and the city to be achieved. For that reason, it is an eminently political and ideological process, rooted in a prospective, and often utopian, vision of the city. Not all of the initiatives that intervene in the city, even when carried out in order to achieve a specific purpose, can be considered within the broad scope of the production of the city. Production of the city comprises initiatives that are strategically implemented to contribute, to a greater or lesser degree, and even in a specific geographical or sectorial area, to an ideal city, structured and conceived as a whole. It is this vision of the future that lies at the origin of the production of the city.

Nowadays, the logic of finance capital is intrinsically linked to these concerted and coordinated strategies, but we have chosen not to explore it here. However, in this introduction we should stress that the market economy views the urban space as another resource whose profits are to be maximized. In this context, more than merely a stage for the capitalization and financialization of the economy, the city itself becomes a commodity that can be promoted and sold as such.

We'll discuss in this article the role that the production of the city has played in urban policies in recent decades. We'll talk specifically about territorial marketing strategies aimed at promoting the image of cities abroad, to "the others," i.e., not those individuals that reside and work in them daily. These "others" relate to the city in a different way, be it direct,

when visiting on business or for leisure, or indirect, albeit remotely, when collecting stories and pictures of it and attributing meanings to it.

We'll explore the importance that culture has had in territorial marketing strategies to the "others" qua a core element in the conception of urban policies and, more specifically, in the construction of iconic cultural facilities. Cultural facilities are places intended for institutional and social activities of culture and art production and consumption, mostly dedicated to cultural works and objects ranked at the top of existing social categories. We are specifically referring to those collective, semi-public, facilities that fit the definition of iconic architecture, whose unique features allow them to become known to the general public, i.e., not only to the limited milieu of culture and, more particularly, architecture.

Addressing how territorial marketing sees the city is particularly pertinent in an analytical context, such as the one in question, which aims to explore the plural shaping of the city as a locus to be learned, understood, and represented from distinct perspectives. Urban space is constantly physically and symbolically shaped, subject to processes of framing by individuals that relate to it, whether directly or indirectly. Territorial marketing is another way of (re-)looking at the city, (re-)building the city, (re-)imagining the city; and doing so, above all, for the benefit of "the others" who visit it or hear about it, and construct images of it and attribute meanings to it.

The "culture" of territorial competitiveness

Since the 1970s, many Western cities have witnessed a number of structural economic changes, influenced by two distinct, albeit partially interconnected, processes: a gradual and rapid deindustrialization of urban centers in conjunction with a significant growth of the services sector, the so-called creative sector, and the knowledge- and information-based sector; and the globalization of financial, cultural, manufacturing, and technology flows, under the auspices of economic liberalization policies and new information and communication technologies and new means of transportation (Harvey, 1989).

The internationalization and flexibilization of financial and labor markets, consumer segmentation, and restructuring of the welfare state have caused changes not only in the socio-economic fabric of cities but also in how urban policies are implemented and how cities are managed and governed.

Regardless of the definition of globalization one chooses to work with and the scope and impact assigned to this process, it is evident that western cities have become, in recent decades, the core components of a vast system of networks that drives today's global economy. Whether we speak of a "polarized" (Sassen, 2006 [1991]), "dual" (Mollenkopf & Castells, 1991), or "divided" (Fainstein et al., 1992) city, it is unquestionable that the compact city, with defined borders and precise functions, has made way for increasingly complex, discontinuous, fragmented, and polycentric territorial formations.

One of the obvious impacts of this new environment is the overall dissemination of the discourse of regional competitiveness. In the early twentieth century, and following the transformations resulting from massive industrialization and urbanization processes that occurred in the previous century, Georg Simmel argued that it was vital for the survival of the metropolis that it spread over a vast national or international territory (Simmel, 2004 [1903], p. 88). He added that this functional extension was its most significant feature and that, by overgrowing its physical boundaries, "it [would] produce a return effect and [would] impart weight, importance, and accountability to the big city life" (Id. Ibid., p. 88).

More than a century later, the need for cities to develop differentiation strategies capable of providing them with weight in the global context has become standard in political discourse. And, today, the implementation of strategic planning projects, with a vital political and economic function, has become imperative not only for Simmel's "metropolis" or Sassen's (2006 [2001]) "global city," but for all mid-sized and small towns to be able to fight, according to their means, for a place on the map of territorial competitiveness.

A perceived new process of intense competition among cities, which puts increasing pressure on their administrations, is linked to a gradual decline in state regulation of economic flows and a growing facility in communication

and movement of people and goods. Due to the increased interdependence of financial markets and a diminished over capital mobility, cities have become progressively more dependent on job- and tax-generating enterprises, which thus contribute to economic development (Le Galès, 2002, p. 202).

The discussion on whether or not this territorial competitiveness dynamics exists matters less to us than the fact that the idea that this competition exists has spread. In addition, although cities are often referred to as "actors," "subjects" or "units" in competition, it would be more correct to state that specific infrastructure elements of cities compete between them. Cities are not collective actors that drive these processes; on the contrary, it is a specific group of city—policy makers, albeit not only them, who promotes competitiveness strategies (Marcuse, 2005, p. 249).

Key local advantages are associated with the city, or with some of its areas or functions, in this new context in which companies become less dependent on their geographical location, and thus more mobile. For instance, some of its central concerns are the existence of efficient transport infrastructure, the proximity to suppliers, the existence of a large and skilled labor pool, or the presence of a dynamic cultural life in order to attract the potential workforce (Budd & Edwards, 1997). Authors such as Richard Florida (2002) and Terry Clark (2003) argue precisely that certain "lifestyle" — related infrastructures — in which culture and leisure play a prominent role—are critical to economic development due to the migration of "creative" and skilled individuals motivated by them. In this way, cities compete for business and financial capital, which in turn leads them to compete for the knowledge and creativity associated with the human capital that supports economic development. As aforementioned, it is less important whether or not, or to what extent, cities compete; what really matters is the fact that policy makers believe that cities compete and therefore conceive urban and economic strategies according to this belief.

In this context, city administrations progressively approach the notion of "governance," with its political networks and coalitions and public-private partnerships. One of the modes of urban governance whose application has been discussed the most is "urban entrepreneurism," a term coined by

David Harvey (1989) referring to political prioritization of initiatives that promote local economic development and territorial marketing, aiming at the exterior of the city, rather than focusing on the provision of public services.

Re (imagining) the city through territorial marketing

As shown before, the discourse of the competitive city has become a key element in urban policies in Europe. In this process of perceived competition, what matters is the ability to create "attractive" "images" and "symbols" and to project them "effectively" (Landry & Bianchini, 1995, p. 12).

The production of images of the city for specific urban actors and their dissemination to its exterior is not a new phenomenon. Contemporary territorial marketing echoes historical practices such as "prayer books" used in certain medieval towns to attract pilgrims (Beinart, 2001). However, territorial marketing as we know it today is more directly associated with a radical change in the design and appropriation of urban space due to massive industrial production, increasing urbanization, and subsequent growth of cities, and the lengthening of spatial distances and shortening of temporal distances via the means of communication and transport. Since the advent of urban America, urban marketing practices have been present, the advertising of railways being a case in point, with a view to settling people on the East Coast (Ward, 1998, p. 37).

From the 1970s onward, aforementioned as a period of structural transition in urban economy and politics, cities of all sizes around the world have started to deliberately adopt policies whose primary purpose is to enhance and show city attractions for the purpose of investment and consumption. Local authorities are committed to "selling" their cities as attractive places to tourists, potential investors, and even newcomers, but sometimes also to current residents. Alongside this process, places are commodified, i.e., regarded as goods and promoted as ready-for-consumption products. For this reason, territorial marketing is also associated with notions such as "selling" or "branding;" the former implying the search for potential

"consumers" of an idea or an image of a pre-existing city. On the other hand, the latter, which interests us here, concerns the creation of a brand and the association of the city with some attractive features, which can be promoted through physical interventions in urban space or simple communication measures.

"Imagining" or "re-imagining" practices play a central role in territorial marketing. "(Re-)imagining" implies the construction and promotion of images, both physical and mental, of the city. A (re-)imagining process involves "deliberate (re)presentation and (re)configuration of the image of a city to foster its economic, cultural, and political capital" (Smith, 2005, p. 399). For this reason, territorial marketing based on (re)imagining strategies is a process of constructing narratives visually grounded on the potential of places, a process of creating a metaphor as an intermediate form for the change or consolidation of public sensitivities and possible development of new types of connections to the city.

Urban images may derive from a series of different elements. In his seminal text on the image of the city, Kevin Lynch (1999 [1960]) analyzed processes of individual construction of "mental maps" and "images" through direct experiences of the city. However, apart from these, there are other ways to apprehend and learn about a place and particularly about places that are far from the individual, who thus cannot experience them directly. When the name of a city is evoked, even those individuals that have never visited it tend to associate it with an imagined and built stereotype based on what they have seen and heard from third parties and, particularly, the media. An image can therefore exist independently of the facts that constitute objective reality.

The image of the city can be defined as having two components: on the one hand, a physical image of the city as it is produced and experienced by those who live, work, and interact in it on a daily basis, represented as a set of visual symbols, physical places, and social features. On the other hand, there is a rhetoric image of the city, i.e., an ideal or conceptual image of the city as it is imagined and represented in the collective consciousness. In other words, the city is a reality both constructed and fictionalized, imagined. The practices of imagination or construction and promotion of an

image based on the assumption that the attitudes of potential tourists, investors, and residents regarding the city are conditioned by visual representations and descriptions imparted to them through different media, thus conditioned by a rhetoric image of the city.

The image of the city is a visual as well as mental construct, created by changes in buildings and streets, but also through discourse. Beyond physical construction of and in the urban territory lies its imagery production. Many current urban policies focus precisely on the production of the city, which, albeit sometimes anchored in interventions in the urban fabric, tend to rely on symbolic reconfiguration mechanisms of the image of the city. There are also many strategies that combine these two principles, urban regeneration or gentrification initiatives being particularly appealing, which can either be profound or more localized initiatives such as the construction of "spectacular" urban landscapes (Hubbard, 1996) or iconic buildings (Sklair, 2006).

Construction of icons: the prevalence of culture

We have referred earlier to structural transformations that Western society has undergone because of industrialization and consequent urbanization. Public space, in the sense of the literary public sphere of cafes and salons, gave way to pseudo-public places of cultural consumption and leisure, and of mass media (Habermas, 1964, p. 49). Art and culture, in their modern sense, emerged to produce a cultural sphere at the margins of social reproduction processes. The commodification of artwork — which then lost its unrepeatable character, its "aura," a term dear to Walter Benjamin (1992 [1936]) — has drawn a wider, more interested, albeit less critical, audience. In this period concert halls and theaters became cultural institutions beyond social representation.

However, changes in the field of cultural production and reception were tentative, still restricted to minor segments of the population. Then, in the last decades of the twentieth century, the changes intuited by Benjamin gathered speed, turning culture into one of the key elements of the consumption society. Notwithstanding, it is to Guy Debord that we owe the

theorization on the expansion of the capitalist mode of production from the economic sphere to all areas of life. In his book "Society of the Spectacle," the prevalence of the logic of consumption and leisure masks the modes of capitalist domination over the individual (Debord, 1991 [1967]). The dynamics of globalization discussed previously has had a dual implication with respect to the interpenetration between economy and culture. We witness, on the one hand, the progressive culturalization of the economy, i.e., the incorporation of symbolic and esthetic aspects at different stages of production and consumption (Lash & Urry, 1994), and on the other hand, the commodification of culture, i.e., the transformation of cultural products and activities into mere goods or services, with profit as their ultimate goal (Jameson, 1991). This is precisely what Benjamin intuited, inspired by the kind of commodity fetishism announced by Marx; he believed that culture was destined to achieve this condition as a commodity, which is manifested in cultural products as phantasmagoria (Tiedemann, 2002 [1982], p.21.).

These two trends, the culturalization of the economy and the commodification of culture, are clearly evident in the issues concerning the production of the city that we have been discussing here. By reckoning the political, economic, and symbolic role of strategies for the production of the city and, in them, the importance of processes of imagery production, of "imagining" the city, culture acquires a renewed emphasis on urban policies, particularly in the so-called "third generation" policies (Sting, Henriques, & Neves, 1994, pp. 1142-1143). The strategic value of cultural activities is attributed to their potential contribution to the economy through the creation of wealth and employment, but also to their symbolic content, viewed as a factor of differentiation in the creation of an image of the city. Thus, culture has increasingly become a key element in the conception and implementation of urban policies as well as a pretext for various interventions in the city. Today's culture is inextricably linked to the economy; the latter occupies a prominent place in urban policies. It is perceived by urban policy makers not only as a direct contribution to the city economy, but also as a potential catalyst for a change in its image. Acknowledgement of the economic importance of culture and its role in promoting territorial competitiveness leads to the progressive culturalization

of urban policies. Initiatives such as pronouncing neighborhoods as historical heritage, objectified qua landscapes, are examples of the culturalization of urban policies and the commodification of the city as a cultural object, largely fueled by the tourism industry.

One of the initiatives that have been carried out, which comprises physical intervention in the urban fabric and symbolic and imagistic reconfiguration of the city concerning the production of the city, is the construction of iconic cultural facilities. To begin with, this definition can be broken down into two: cultural facilities and iconic architecture.

Cultural facilities are places whose primary function is to house institutional and social activities related to cultural and artistic production and consumption, and so forth. Madureira Pinto distinguishes social spaces of cultural assertion, in which spaces for the so-called high culture hold a high degree of institutionalization and (over)legitimization (Pinto, 1994, pp. 768-769). It is precisely this over-legitimization of high or cultivated culture as compared to popular or mass culture — the remaining two vertices of the most common tripartite conceptualization of the term culture — that "requires that societies have institutions whose function is exactly not only to transmit culture, but also to give legitimacy to cultural forms and works" (Mónica et al., 1973, p. 828). While high culture becomes increasingly less valid as a category, since it is progressively more subject to desecration and democratization, it also encompasses works, activities, and events ranked at the top of current social classifications of cultural goods.

Iconic architecture corresponds to unusual and unique buildings, whose aesthetic and symbolic distinctiveness makes them not only readily recognizable by architecture professionals but also by the general public (Sklair, 2005, p. 485; & 2006, p. 28-29). The weight given to cultural facilities qua an institution of culture is increased, in the cases that concern us here, by the symbolic imagery of iconic architecture. As aforementioned, culture currently constitutes a core value of society, valued not only socially, but also economically and politically. For that reason, investment of time, financial and human resources in the construction of cultural facilities is an obvious consequence. In other words, the symbolic appraisal of architecture is done differentially, in accordance with its uses. This explains

the central role that the investment in major iconic cultural facilities has come to play in strategies for the production of the city. As we have noted, in order to attract new investments and opportunities, current territorial marketing has realized that the creation of cultural symbols whose uniqueness transcends borders allows the city to be effectively marketed all over the world. According to Michel Freitag, the market economy sees space and architectural construction as another resource whose profits are to be maximized (Freitag, 2004 [1992]: 43). It is in this sense that the construction of emblematic cultural facilities, designed by renowned architects, usually as a part of a larger territorial and urban redevelopment plan, is regarded as an additional means for the production of the city. And territorial marketing has taken advantage of these facilities as symbols, images or logos when promoting cities.

Conclusion

The dynamics involved in the production of cities explored in this text are indicative of a dual movement. The city, like culture, is commodified and marketed through territorial marketing strategies that promote a potentially attractive image, using culture as symbolic capital, while becoming themselves an example of the widespread culturalization of urban policies.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on the role assigned to iconic cultural facilities in the production of the city, and particularly on strategies to promote an image for "the others." In order to conduct this reflection, it is necessary, on the one hand, to deconstruct the relevance of strategies to promote an image of the city, and particularly those aimed at those who do not reside or work in it. On the other hand, the relationship between the production of the city and cultural facilities and between the latter and iconic architecture must be addressed. Due to the complexity of these issues, and because throughout the text we have chosen to provide the reader with some information and insights so as to enable him to reflect on these practices, some issues may, and should, be raised here.

Territorial marketing is part of a new symbolic economy driven by the promotion of the city — or of certain areas or features of the city — for

housing, consumption or production purposes. It is grounded on the production of stories, images, more or less based on the physical image of the city they want to promote.

The city is, first of all, as advocated by Françoise Choay (1965), a product and a social project structured by its essentially social condition. More than a construction, the city is a human construct. In other words, despite intervention in space being that which physically produces the city, only through mental synthesis does it constitute a unit. Without symbolic production, without the construct, the city would be just a collection of buildings and people. It is precisely this essential condition that urban marketeers draw on to format a particular image of the city. However, if the city is not merely streets and buildings, but a combination of social and cultural interactions, shouldn't initiatives aimed at producing the city first consider it as a place for interaction and sharing? Although territorial marketing strategies can attract tourists, investors, and residents — albeit it has not been fully demonstrated that they do — wouldn't it be more advantageous for the city to turn inwards, not to "the others," who populate its outside, and favor the transmission and strengthening of its cultural heritage and identity? Because, as Lewis Mumford stated, the city should be the "place where social heritage is concentrated, and where the possibility of continued relationships and social interactions takes human activities to their highest potential" (Mumford, 1940 [1938], p. 161).

The city is essentially social, but also fundamentally cultural, and, for this reason, cultural facilities should necessarily play a central role in urban space. Cultural facilities convey a given image of the city to outsiders as well as insiders. Due to economic, communication, and territorial globalization, new cultural facilities, when associated with unique monumentality, have come to be seen as another way of placing cities in the global market. As a result, temples of culture have become new icons of the city. However, above and beyond symbols, shouldn't they constitute public or even semi-public spaces for meeting, interaction, and dialogue? This proves to be crucial in contemporary Western cities, where new information and communication technologies, transport mobility,

consumption, and leisure in great commercial centers isolate its citizens from one another.

Yet, today's cities and culture seem to be just another commodity to be sold, as a result of which some characteristics are singled out and presented in a compressed and packaged format by urban marketeers. One of the most attractive features seems to be precisely that of a "city of culture," of which iconic cultural facilities are a paradigmatic symbol. But wouldn't it be more valuable if strategies for the production of the city were otherwise aimed at making it an actual city of culture, not just at promoting it as such? Earlier in this text we defined the production of the city in association with foresight and a utopian vision of the desired city. It is this vision of the future that should perhaps be reconsidered. And is there a better time to do so than now that the end of iconic architecture (MATEO, 2009) has been announced?

References

BEINART, J., 2001. Image construction in premodern cities. In: WARNER, S. B. e VALE, L. J. (eds.) *Imaging the city: continuing struggles and new directions*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, pp. 3-32.

BENJAMIN, W., 1992 [1936]. *A obra de arte na era da sua reprodutibilidade técnica*. In: *Sobre Arte, Técnica, Linguagem e Política*. Lisboa: Relógio d'Água, pp. 71-113.

BUDD, L. e EDWARDS, M., 1997. Confirming conforming conventions: the Four World Cities study. City (7), pp. 171-181.

CHOAY, F., 1965. *L'urbanisme, utopies et réalité*. Paris: Seuil.

CLARK, T. N. et al., 2003. The City as an Entertainment Machine. *Research in Urban Policy* (9), pp. 1-17.

DEBORD, G., 1991 [1967]. *A Sociedade do Espectáculo*. Lisboa: Edições Mobilis in mobile.

FAINSTEIN, S. S. et al., 1992. *Divided cities: New York and London in the Contemporary World*. Oxford: Blackwell.

FERRÃO, J., HENRIQUES, E. B. e NEVES, A. O., 1994. *Repensar as cidades de média dimensão*. *Análise Social*, 129, pp. 1142-1144.

FLORIDA, R., 2002. The rise of the creative class. New York: Basic Books/Perseus.

FREITAG, M., 2004 [1992]. *Arquitectura e Sociedade*. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote.

HABERMAS, J., 1964. The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article. *New German Critique* (3), pp. 49-55.

HARVEY, D., 1989. *The condition of postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

HUBBARD, P., 1996. Urban design and city regeneration: social representations of entrepreneurial landscape. *Urban Studies* 33 (8), pp. 1441-1461.

JAMESON, F., 1991. Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Durham, DC: Duke University Press.

LANDRY, C. e BIANCHINI, F., 1995. The Creative City. London: Demos.

LASH, S. e URRY, J., 1994. Economies of Signs and Space. Londres: Thousand Oaks, Sage.

LE GALÈS, P., 2002. European cities, social conflicts and governance. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

LYNCH, K., 1999 [1960]. *A Imagem da Cidade*. Lisboa: Edições 70.

MARCUSE, P., 2005. The city as perverse metaphor. *Cities* 9 (2), pp. 247-254.

MATEO, J.L., 2009. *Iconoclastia*. News from a post-iconic world. Zurique: ETH.

MOLLENKOPF, J. e CASTELLS, M., 1991. Dual city: restructuring New York. New York: Russell Sage.

MÓNICA, M. F. et al., 1973. *O consumo cultural e as classes sociais : um estudo exploratório. Análise Social* 10 (40), pp. 827-844.

MUMFORD, L., 1940 [1938]. The Culture of Cities. Londres: Secker & Warburg.

PINTO, J. M., 1994. *Uma reflexão sobre as políticas culturais*. In: AAVV. *Dinâmicas Culturais, Cidadania e Desenvolvimento Local*. Lisboa: APS, pp.770-778.

SASSEN, S., 2006 [1991]. The Global City. New York: Princeton University Press.

SIMMEL, G., 2004 [1903]. *As Metrópoles e a Vida Mental*. In: *Fidelidade e Gratidão e Outros Textos*. Lisboa: Relógio D' Água, pp. 75-93.

SKLAIR, L., 2005. The Transnational Capitalist Class and Contemporary Architecture. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29 (3), pp. 485-500.

SKLAIR, L., 2006. Iconic architecture and capitalist globalization. *City* 10 (1), pp.21-47.

SMITH, A., 2005. Conceptualizing city image change: the 'reimaging' of Barcelona. *Tourism Geographies* 7 (4), pp. 398-423.

TIEDEMANN, R., 2002 [1982]. Introduction. In: BENJAMIN, W. *Paris, Capitale du XIXe sècle. Le Livre des Passages*. Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf.

WARD, S. V., 1998. Place marketing: a historical comparison of Britain and North America. In: HALL, T. e HUBBARD, P. (eds) *The entrepreneurial city: geographies of politics, regime and representation*. Chichester: Wiley, pp. 31-54.