



Cultural management and policies in SEA-EU cities – an introduction

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Abstract: This text is an introduction to a special issue of the *Periférica* journal, devoted to the topic of cultural management and policies in the cities of the European University of the Seas (SEA-EU) alliance, formed by the University of Cadiz (Spain), the University of Western Brittany in Brest (France), the University of Kiel (Germany), the University of Gdansk (Poland), the University of Split (Croatia) and the University of Malta. Firstly, the SEA-EU alliance is presented. Secondly, the role of culture in city development is acknowledged, by reviewing some of the main policy documents that advocate for culture-led development at the city and regional level. Thirdly, we reflect on how universities impact the cultural life of cities. Finally, the contributions within this special issue are presented.



Introduction

This text is an introduction to a special issue of the *Periférica* journal, devoted to the topic of cultural management and policies in the cities of the European University of the Seas (SEA-EU) alliance, which is further described below.

The main aim of this issue is to provide a thoughtful and critical analysis on the cultural context of the SEA-EU cities, to observe cultural vibrancy in correlation with the academic field. Special attention is also paid to the presence and influence of the university in the cultural life of the mentioned cities.

This introductory text is structured as follows. Firstly, the SEA-EU alliance is presented, with reference to the universities that are part of the alliance and a brief description of its main objectives. Secondly, the role of culture in city development is acknowledged, by reviewing some of the main policy documents that advocate for culture-led development at the city and regional level. Thirdly, we reflect on how universities impact the cultural life of cities. Finally, the contributions within this special issue are presented.

The SEA-EU Alliance

Coordinated by the University of Cadiz (Spain), the SEA-EU alliance, European University of the Seas, is one of the 17 alliances, made up of 114 higher education institutions, selected by the European Commission to take the first steps towards a complete transformation of the European educational field by 2025-2030.

This is an alliance which aims to generate a new model of inclusive, multilingual and sustainable university. It is formed by the University of Cadiz (Spain), the University of Western Brittany in Brest (France), the University of Kiel (Germany), the University of Gdansk (Poland), the University of Split (Croatia) and the University of Malta.

This European University unites a total of 122.832 students, 16.909 staff members, 68 faculties and 117 research groups. It also has 32 other associates, including companies, city councils, non-profit associations and public entities.

The main objective of this alliance is to set up: a *joint, integrated, long-term strategy* for education with links to research and innovation and society at large; a *European inter-university campus* of Higher Education offering schemes where students and staff can participate in mobilities at all levels,

and *European knowledge creation teams* jointly addressing societal challenges with a multidisciplinary approach.

The universities in the alliance share programs, degrees, resources, research networks and databases, with the aim of completely transforming the current concept of university.

Culture-led development in cities and regions

Already in 2004, the Agenda 21 for Culture¹ urged cities and local governments to place culture at the core of their development strategies, and stated that “the affirmation of cultures, and the policies which support their recognition and viability, are an essential factor in the sustainable development of cities and territories and its human, economic, political and social dimension. The central nature of public cultural policies is a demand of societies in the contemporary world” (p. 8).

That same year, UNESCO launched the Creative Cities Network (UCCN), aimed “to strengthen cooperation with and among cities that have recognized creativity as a strategic factor of sustainable development as regards economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects”².

Along these lines, some years later, the New European Agenda for Culture published in 2018³ highlighted that “[c]ultural and creative sectors have huge capacity for experimentation, anticipating trends, and exploring models of social and economic innovation”, as well as that “[c]ulture and tourism are powerful drivers of economic activity”, and placed cities and regions “at the forefront of culture-led development thanks to greater local autonomy, the attraction they exert on high-talent individuals, and their proximity to their inhabitants’ needs and potential”.

While culture-led development seems to have become a buzzword in the last years (almost decades) – in this regard see, for instance, the article by Pierluigi Sacco, Guido Ferilli and Giorgio Tavano Blessi⁴ in which the authors dismount the “three typical fallacies characterising mono-causal culture-led development schemes” and claim for a more complex, ‘new territorial thinking’ –, the fact that the main agents and documents guiding policy development in the cultural field have put the focus on the relation between culture and development at the city level, has had an impact, if not more, in putting the issue on the international agenda, therefore drawing academic attention and policy efforts at the local and regional levels.

The influence of university on a city’s cultural life

Parallel to the affirmation of the role of culture in city development, many have argued that culture and university go hand in hand in creating an environment of knowledge, creativity and innovation for cities. But what is the basis of this relationship between culture and university presence, on the one hand, and the existence of such a creative and innovative environment, on the other?

A unique effort to set a framework to evaluate European cities’ culture and creativity, the Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor⁵ points out to indicators related to university presence and work among the ones used to assess how cultural and creative a city is. More specifically, within the “Enabling Environment” domain, the “Human Capital & Education Dimension” – one out of the 9 featured distributed in three different domains – “captures cities’ access to talent in the form of human capital available in the city as well as the appeal of local universities, measured in terms of four international rankings. The presence of highly regarded universities is considered crucial in attracting talent, while graduates in the arts, humanities and ICT are important to a city’s creative economy, its cultural dynamism and its capacity to support” (p. 21).

The role of universities for cultural development is also acknowledged in the above-mentioned Agenda 21 for Culture, one of whose undertakings of the is precisely “To promote relations between the cultural facilities and other entities working with knowledge, such as universities, research centers and research companies” (p. 11).

One of the aims of this special issue is to contribute to shed some further light on how universities are one factor developing cultural management and policies in the studied cities.

Cities and culture before the challenges ahead

Most references cited above are to be situated in a pre-COVID-19 context. In the post-pandemic scenario, voices have emerged reclaiming a central role for culture in the way to recovery. By way of example, in May 2020, the President of UN General Assembly, Mr. Volkan Bozkir, urged for support for the cultural sector: “As we deliberate on the role of the creative sectors in supporting and being supported by a recovery from COVID-19, let us ensure that we address

the bottlenecks limiting their potential – such as inadequate policy protections and rights for the creative sector workers and business”⁶.

Furthermore, culture and creative sectors will be essential in some of the most pressing challenges ahead, as it is the case for climate change. A recently published report by the Committee on Culture of United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) explores “The Role of Culture in Climate Resilient Development”⁷, showing once more the centrality as well as the potential of the binary city-culture before some specific issues.

Presentation of the articles in this special issue

The articles in this special issue are signed by some of the most knowledgeable experts in the cultural field of the respective cities, all of them belonging to the SEA-EU alliance. The different contributions are briefly presented here.

The article entitled “Cultural Policies in a Small University Metropolis: National Frameworks and Local Dynamics in the City of Brest” has been developed by Bénédicte Havard Duclos and Pierre-Edouard Weill, both assistant professors in Sociology and linked to the Université de Bretagne Occidentale. The article is devoted to the city Brest, which is not a usual student city and therefore, the status of cultural metropolis should be reinforced. The implementation of cultural policies, together with the gradual withdrawal of military activities from the city, has driven the urban transformation of the city. Since the early 2000’s, Brest has transitioned from a working-class city to a more academically and culturally oriented city. The cultural policies that have been implemented ever time, are mainly based on local initiatives, and are also highly influenced by national frameworks. Nowadays, Brest-based cultural institutions are achieving more and more national and European renown.

In the article “Cultural policy for what? Kiel’s cultural policy between city development, social cohesion and intrinsic values”, Dr. Johannes Crückeberg and Andrea Cederquist carried out this article based on the special case of the city of Kiel regarding its cultural policies. These have taken on a high profile and are linked to the idea of establishing Kiel as a “creative city”. This article provides a general insight and will attempt to identify the origin of Kiel’s distinctive status.

Today there is an intention to set up a strategic decision to make Kiel more creative-oriented city, with a focus on cultural and creative industries (CCIs) and fostering citizen-led approach. Several topics will be covered regarding the cultural policies in Kiel, such as: political involvement in a multi-level system, the socio-cultural environment of Kiel and the impact of higher education institutions among other concerning issues.

Titled “Cultural policy and management in SEA-EU cities: Malta”, the article by Dr. Karsten Xuereb, from the University of Malta will detail the cultural policies’ development in Malta regarding the University of Malta’s membership to the SEA-EU alliance. The introductory section explains the process of accession of Malta to the EU in 2004, which addressed the establishment of multiple governance and financing institutions, and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic within cultural and creative spheres. In the first section, the focus is on critical analysis of the sector and the second one will cover cultural policies in Malta, higher education programmes and several manifestations closely linked to the University of Malta and other cultural institutions. The article concludes with a reflection that despite the efforts made and initiatives taken in the field of culture, there is still a need to be more rigorous and to rely more on policies than on projects per se.

The following article, “Cultural policies in the cities with campuses in the province of Cadiz and the experience of the UCA’s university extension”, is written by J. Luis Ben, cultural manager and president of *La Comuna del Sur*. The article reviews the evolution of local cultural policies in Spain since the start of democracy, to then focus on the public cultural policies in the towns and cities of the province of Cadiz where the University of Cadiz (UCA) has its campuses, as well as on the role played by the university itself in the cultural life, particularly through its Extension service. Based on this analysis, the article concludes that the UCA plays a major role in the activation of cultural life in the region, as well as in the policy agenda of the towns and cities where its campuses are based.

Finally, titled “Institutions of cultural intelligence and urban cultural policy. The case of cultural observatory in the city of Gdańsk”, this article is co-authored by Dr. Marcin Poprawski, from the University of Poznan and Natalia Brylowska, cultural manager and researcher responsible

for Cultural Observatory led by City Culture Institute in Gdansk. The document deals with the cooperation of the cultural observatory of Gdańsk with the academia and the initiatives aimed at the university circles of Gdańsk. The observatory plays an intermediary role in the city's cultural environment, creating spaces for dialogue, and analyzes the data on cultural activities as well as the needs and deficits of the audiences linked to culture. Regarding the strategic initiatives to develop cultural and creative competences and activities in Gdansk, universities are not usually directly involved, but rely on cooperation with other knowledge institutions, such as cultural observatories, which have a strong capacity to integrate theory and practice when applied in the fields of cultural policy and cultural management.

It was not possible to include the contribution of the city of Split (Croatia), which is also part of the SEA-EU alliance, in this special issue. However, to learn more about cultural policies in the city, we would like to highly encourage the reader to check out the work of Prokultura - Observatory of Cultural Policies, a non-profit organisation based in Split (Croatia), which monitors the decentralization of cultural policies through research, organization of meetings, seminars and conferences and continuous exchange of information, focusing on the role of cities and regions and encouraging the cooperation between them.

We hope that this special issue will provide some insights on the topic of cultural policies at the city and regional level, through the case studies of the cities of the SEA-EU alliance, as well as contribute to the debates on the role of universities in our cities' cultural life.

Notes

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