



Cultural Diversity, Intercultural Practices and Community: the Challenge of Major European Cities

- *Struggles for Urban Space* -

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IDEAS TO RETAIN

The field of cultural practices is structured by classificatory (administrative) distinctions that do not reflect the reality of those practices; distinctions introduce hierarchy among cultural practices that has serious financial (permanent financing by the government vs. financing by projects; full coverage of costs vs. only partial subsidies) and social consequences (central position vs. marginalisation; legal position vs. various modes of illegality).

The process of commercialisation, masked by ideologies of good management, consumers' choice, self-sustaining operation, market orientation, "cultural industries" etc., is now invading also national institutions that have enjoyed a privileged position in the past. The drive towards marketisation is destroying the whole field of culture, including the alternative practices.

There is a fierce battle over the city space. Municipal authorities do not always represent the interests of city-dwellers; they often entertain non-transparent relations with investors and real-estate speculators. Creative potential of the city is mostly repressed by the profit-seeking interest.

Existing regulations often introduce unhealthy competition among cultural agents that complement each other contents-wise. Such arrangements impoverish cultural scenes. Administrative skills, jargonistic opportunism, following fashions often prevail at securing public support.

Practices of "not-institutionalised" cultural agents are very often "intercultural", i.e., hybrid, propelled by aesthetic, political and largely social concerns. They attract, or make emerge, audiences who produce new socialities. These cultural practices and their audiences are often able to open relevant social issues and to produce new social realities. They mostly supplement to the lack of interest in relevant social and cultural topics within the established cultural institutions.

Cultural agents seem unlikely competitors in the struggles for urban space. However, "non-institutional" cultural agents, for their protean character, may be able to squat urban *intermundia* abandoned in neglect for speculative reasons, during processes of privatisation-denationalisation, or by the inscrutable wisdom of city administration. As a consequence, places of cultural and intercultural practices are likely to coincide with temporary autonomous zones of potential social emancipation. However, social relations that emerge in these alternative spaces are deeply marked by contradictions, tensions and conflicts. In a specific way, they reproduce the tensions and contradictions of their larger contexts, and contain all the contradictions of cultural production in late capitalism.