Introduction

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If our time is labelled the "urban age," it is not simply because more than half of the world's population lives in cities but, more importantly, because "our world order comes to be built on cities and their economies rather than nations and their armies" (Khanna 2010). In the global constellation of cities, scale, positioning, vision, and ambition matter. Responding to critical aggravations in economy, ecology, and equity, cities today are acting as autonomous players seeking original solutions to local, national, supranational, and global problems. However, European small cities are facing diverse challenges besides global economic pressures and environmental threats, suffering from structural disproportions due to the demographic crises of quickly aging populations and workforces fleeing to the more promising job markets of metropolises (EEA 2009). During the recent economic crisis, European *small and medium-sized cities* (SMCs) have been challenged to demonstrate their strengths and capacities. It is precisely at this junction that they have displayed new levels of creative civic imagination in their search for specific innovative solutions within the competition for resources on both European and global stages and to find locally resonant sustainable development solutions.

This book was developed to energize and deepen the discussion about how SMCs are creatively addressing with the means of culture the challenges and risks of the contemporary neoliberal world (Lorentzen and van Heur 2012; Bell and Jayne 2006). Although SMCs represent over 60 percent of European urban settlements and give shelter to the majority of the European urban population, they receive disproportionally less attention in scientific analyses, which traditionally focus on global cities and metropolises. This volume addresses both a deficit of attention to the role of small and medium-sized cities in European sustainable development and an underestimation of the role of culture, artistic expression, and creativity for integrated development as a prerequisite for urban sustainability.

Characterized by interdisciplinary richness and geographical diversity, the book presents a broad collection of case studies and good practices from throughout Europe that illustrate how culture contributes to more sustainable models of city making focused on quality of life, local identities, and creating places where people like to live. The selected variety of regionally specific cultural approaches

underline also how local cultural sectors have to be sustainable themselves, in order to operate as engines of integral city development. All these research issues are aspects of the overarching question: what are the roles of culture in sustaining small and medium-sized cities?

On the other hand, although culture is based on traditions, providing continuity "precipitated" into both material and immaterial heritage, still it is not a book about heritage. When the cases in this volume address issues of heritage, it is from the perspective of its contemporary use, reuse, and/or adaptation as a "natural" part of the cultural assets of communities and their places (Fairclough et al. 2015). The book also investigates how participatory culture, community arts, and, more generally, the creativity of civic imagination can contribute to the goal of sustainable futures for SMCs. Ultimately, the book is about European citizens, making their lives through sustaining their cities. In a broader perspective, the cases reveal the intricate and fragile relationships between cultural strategies, economic policies, sustainable development goals, and the national and regional contexts in which cities are embedded. As both Matarasso and Tomaz (in this volume) keenly observe, policy discourses often advocate an economic rationale for cultural strategies, while a community development focus depends largely on actors' power relations and their operating/national frameworks.

From a theoretical point of view, the book represents a conceptual node fusing three dimensions – insights from urban studies concerning small and medium-sized cities, the pressing agenda of sustainability, and cultural policy solutions and recommendations. Within this thematic intersection, the book addresses key issues such as:

- how to move beyond the dominating understanding of sustainability as an ecology-economy-equity balance to a more holistic sociocultural and human-needs-led development conception;
- how to address the contradiction between the profit-driven economic processes of regeneration, gentrification, and commercialization of cities and the emergence of more participatory bottom-up urban cultural movements (i.e. the right to the city);
- how to reconcile the potential contradiction between organizational fields of culture, sustainability, and innovation, which sometimes develops into open tension; and
- how to understand the various ways cities have been "Europeanized" in different national contexts, from simple copy-paste practices to the creative adaptation of European methodologies and innovative applied approaches.

Key concepts and cross-linking themes

The idea of Europolis

Despite the widely spread opinion that many European SMCs have become no more than suburban commuter satellites to the large cities and conurbation

urban regions, the examples in this book reveal another reality: places *sensitive* to their environments, which contribute to a high quality of life, aim to be "safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run," and offer "equality of opportunity and good services for all" (EU 2007). *Europolis* is conceptualized as the emergence of a European model – or mode*l*s, since it incorporates a variety of local approaches – for urban sustainability involving processes of reimaging and cocreating new city futures explicitly using culture. The term *Europolis* is also used to emphasize that these emerging models may possibly be European-specific approaches to sustainable urban development, in contrast to the development of metropolises and large urban agglomerations as a worldwide practice. *Europolis* is not a utopian concept, but it suggests a need to discern the counterbalancing processes enabled by new urban policies to meet economic, social, and ecological challenges, with sensitivity to the agency of participative culture.

Sustainable urban development – the sustainable city

In this book, the concept of *sustainable city* crystallizes as a consolidation of different coextensive lines in existing interpretations of *urban sustainability*. Understood as an issue of new urban culture with social, economic, institutional, technological, and ecological aspects, the book critically analyses the concept of *sustainable cities* from a sociocultural point of view, pleading for an integral holistic approach. This multidimensionality of urban sustainability bears implicit controversies. One of these is set around the concepts of *sustainability* and *the sustainable development of cities*. The concept of *sustainable city* incorporates the idea of smart space organization, taking account of land use, sanitation, and efficient transport – a kind of technologically perfect, car-free, carbon-neutral, no waste, solar-powered paradise, "full of architectural marvels to house new Guggenheim and Louvre collections in stunning new buildings by Frank Gehry and Jean Nouvel" (Khanna 2010). Cities of this type, newly designed in the non-Western world, may pretend to be sustainable, but they remain artificial assemblages, isolated from the calamities of reality and missing the true social glue: "For these emerging global hubs, modernization does not equal Westernization. . . . Western values like freedom of speech and religion are not part of the bargain" (Khanna 2010). This is certainly not the European model of continuous sustainable growth that aims to attentively manage local natural resources and to provide opportunities for inhabitants to develop their own abilities and collective local potentialities.

   In exploring sustainable cities from a cultural point of view, the book suggests at least three interconnected and largely complementary possibilities for consideration: culture-based sustainably developing places, livable places, and ecologically sensitive culturized places (cf. Young 2008). The concept of *culture-based sustainably developing places* serves to introduce the necessity for creatively inclusive neighbourhoods or other types of territorial units with a potential for an evolving *sense of place*, which create their own developmental logic within the city itself but often go beyond city "walls" by expanding their regional, national,

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and international networks, thus offering more opportunities and cultural services for both citizens and visitors (Kangas and Sokka; Matarasso; Johannisson; Plebańczyk; van der Geest). *Livable places* emphasize as their primary "task" ensuring a high quality of life "no longer defined by high material consumption . . . [but] when people can live a healthy, pleasant and safe life" (EEA 2009, 43). In other words, they can enjoy life on two interlinked levels: the satisfaction of everyday life needs and the fulfillment of life-long goals, which collectively create their sense of meaning (Georgievska-Jakovleva and Pavlovski; Dragićević Šešić, Brkić, and Matejić). *Ecologically sensitive culturized places* put greater emphasis on the revitalization of social fabrics in place-based contexts through renewed relationships with the local natural environment and new commitments to places of cohabitation as reimagined aesthetized places of restored cultural traditions and collective memory (Lapka and Cudlínová; Milohnić).

Civic culture and civic urbanity

While urban regeneration research typically focuses on economic dimensions and impacts, the book offers three important layers of debate that are investigating the potential creativity of community in contexts of participatory openness:

- *Civic imagination,* fostered through participatory creative processes, is a necessary prerequisite for the creation of diversified models of sustainable SMCs, which are tightly linked to promoting a specific local identity on global competitive stages, where metropolitan cities are dominating with institutionalized and financially supported "imagination" through numerous cultural and entertainment organizations. When a city or its civil society offers ongoing, context-specific platforms for expression, *civic imagination* can be an inexhaustible source of continuous innovation and experimentation, contributing to the further valorization of SMCs on a global scale.
- *Civic urbanity* refers to processes of creating connection and purpose (Landry) through being a full citizen, meaningfully engaged with his/her city. Culture is an important part of civic engagement as the authors of this book argue: culture is a public good, and a city's public space with its various cultural functions is a crucial element of sustainable city making. Thus, cultural initiatives are regarded as an essential part of civic urbanity, especially taking into account their social relevancy, capacity to contribute to social inclusion, and ability to regenerate a sense of civic pride.
- *Civic–public partnerships* involve civic actors and movements in dialogue with local governments. Through these partnerships, public values of culture are rearticulated and reemphasized. Partnering with civil society in reconceptualizing and creating broader cultural offers is the most important approach for cities wishing to innovate the scope of activities and assure the wellbeing of their citizens. Cooperation with different partners from civil society (artists, activists, NGOs, experts, and concerned citizens) allows for more prosperous, just, and inclusive societies, creating a city that is more vibrant

and confident in its own developmental capacity. Through partnerships, both sides are empowered and strengthened, so that civil society does not hesitate to offer its help to local government, and local government becomes closer to its citizens and their needs.

Public sphere: culture in the public interest as a public good

As contemporary society has shifted towards neoliberal market regulation, many people have suffered the throes of, first, the industrial/postindustrial crises and, then, the financial/banking crisis. Some authors claim that what we observe today is a cyclic structural crisis of a profit-driven neoliberal economy. As noted in the Brundtland Report, "economic development is unsustainable if it increases vulnerability to crises" (WCED 1987, 38). Although a new socio-cultural paradigm is not yet fully formed, public actions are now set within a generalized but strong disbelief in neoliberal solutions, and this situation has led people to go back to something more "stable," generally characterized by solidarity, mutual support, and redistribution of profits and losses. This process of new urban activism, *urbactivism* (Hristova), has been embraced by bottom-up *artivism* (Dragićević Šešić, Brkić, and Matejić); energized by civic imagination (e.g. *Aalborg Charter of European Cities and Towns Towards Sustainability* [*Aalborg Charter* 1994]; European Sustainable Cities Platform 2013); and reinforced by top-down European policies through a series of public documents (e.g., *Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities* [EU 2007]), supported by considerable financial funding (Duxbury). In this context, culture once again is being considered a public good and an activity in the public interest, with a strong focus on the local space where it is "born" and lives. However, this is not a one-way street: as Landry underlines, civic urbanity develops in the "risk landscape" of cities facing a visible decline in engagement.

As the public sphere has diminished, new movements of urban sustainability have tended to focus on the enhancement and growth of the (sometimes limited) remaining public realm. We observe a return of the importance of the public sphere expressed spatially (public space), virtually (public communication, social media), and with close attention to democracy and public dialogue, enhanced with the means of arts and cultural expression as a public good and cultural right. Cities – local authorities and citizens together – are co-responsible for recreating the public sphere, taking into account its need to develop and support platforms for sociability and debates; public spaces for people to meet and gather; and public media or institutions as spaces for social dialogue. As the public and private spheres become more tightly interlinked, both public and private entities are increasingly expected to play roles in enabling, through partnerships and other arrangements, the openness of the public sphere.

In the global context of cultural policies praising the creative economy and emphasizing its financial contributions to urban development (Vilenica and Kuda.org 2012), this book presents a plurality of approaches and celebrates perspectives where culture is offering different sets of values based on the idea of

the public good (necessary for creating conducive conditions for urban sustainability). Contemporary creativity and participatory practices contribute to social inclusion, urban vibrancy and renewal, and the incremental development of meaningful places. In contemporary times when business ideas about efficiency have been transferred into all domains of cultural and civic life, the practices, approaches, and perspectives highlighted in this book illustrate pathways to renegotiating the different values between sectors, accepting the importance of the noncommercial logic of the shared commons (Landry). In this negotiation of values, the importance of culture maintaining its own autonomy is recognized as contributing to public interests (Breznik 2004).

Participatory culture and arts, creative inclusion, and empowerment

Participatory projects are usually self-organized actions that sustain human relations and bonds of trust within a community – they are examples of civic urbanity in action, and they can lead to shared policies (Dragićević Šešić 2006). Acting collectively, these projects not only contribute to the sustainability of a place but also raise civic pride and create collective cultural memories (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995) that are indispensable for sustaining *livable places*. Thus, this book is about *people* making cities sustainable through participatory cultural civic activities. It is also about artistic contributions that inspire and lead many of these actions. As SMCs are usually not highly multicultural (i.e. much less than metropolitan cities), this issue was not often highlighted, but it was not avoided. This is also a book about specificities that shows why SMCs need different approaches and focused investigation, as many of the dominating themes in urban sociology and anthropology do not resonate with SMCs.

Dynamics and tensions

Contemporary cities are battlegrounds of controversial interactions and transversal *tensions* based on different development values and models, which Charles Landry (in this volume) calls *fault lines*: "so deep-seated, intractable and contentious that they shape our entire worldview, such as the conflict between environmental ethics and economic rationality in running countries or cities." This can take the shape of a conflict – for example, between the economic-based gentrification of a city versus the bottom-up "right to the city" movements aiming at community-focused sustainability processes. In many cases, high-level investment policies mean unsustainability for the indigenous inhabitants who cannot afford to continue to live in the upgraded locations. This leads to the disappearance of collective memories and sense of place, and, in the long term, to a new identity for the new inhabitants. The emergence of more participatory processes is the key way to reconcile these different tensions and conflicting interests. Public policies reconceived as developmental strategies *of the community* offer platforms where cultural economics and citizens' interests might go together.

The book structure

Section I – "Culture and sustainable development of European cities: what are the issues?" – is devoted to the main conceptual intricacies of the book. It offers general outlines for understanding the new role of culture in building more sustainable cities in Europe and the special role of small and medium-sized cities in the process of establishing new models of urban sustainability (Anheier and Hoelscher; Landry; Hristova; Milohnić) where culture is both promoter and pattern maker for new values and the engine of new *urbactivism* (Hristova). As mentioned previously, European SMCs have demonstrated strengths and capacities (although limited) in the face of the recent economic recession and have displayed a new level of creative civic imagination as they seek specific innovative solutions within the competition for resources on both European and global stages.

When it comes to urban creativity, it is worthwhile to notice the visions of one of the "fathers" of the *creative city* concept, Charles Landry, now reflecting on *sustainable city making* based on the normative idea of *civic urbanity* framed by the interlinked concepts of a holistic approach, the shared commons, eco-consciousness, healthy urban planning, cultural literacy, inclusivity, intergenerational equity, the aesthetic imperative, creative city making, and an invigorated democracy. Creativity – broadly understood as thinking, planning, and acting with imagination – when applied to (creative) city making, goes beyond the "urban engineering paradigm" and incorporates all aspects of the city: the hardware, the software (i.e. a creative mindset), and the "orgware" (Landry). All this gives rise to so-called *hands-on urbanism* (Milohnić).

In this respect, the four chapters in this section are unanimous: although creative city approaches view culture as an input, throughput, and output factor of urban economies – as part of value chains that include investments and development as well as production, services, distribution, and consumption – culture cannot be viewed only as an instrumental means to sustainability (Anheier and Hoelscher). As Aldo Milohnić put it, culture is not only the number of tickets sold; in essence, culture's impact resides in its ability to (re)produce and/or to challenge the norm as well as its ability to contribute to the well-being of national and local communities. The two case studies of urban gardening in Slovenia aptly reveal the intrinsic art of growing the city as "sharing the management of a space and various participatory processes" in which not only plants are cultivated, but also (or even more importantly) social relations.

This is also the point of departure to understanding the authentic spirit of *Europolis*, which from the very beginning – with its socio-spatial and cultural arrangements and with its tradition of openness and democracy – is essentially European (Hristova; Landry). In today's fluid world, urban society often suffers from a lack of commitment to the city and changing meanings of citizenship. Still, "citizens at their best are makers, shapers, and cocreators of their evolving city," and, as Landry notes, ultimately, with its universal claims, *Europolis is Cosmopolis*.

The authors in this section advocate for a holistic, integral understanding of urban sustainability, a field that earnestly requires better knowledge about how cultural strategies work in this context, so that cities do not waste resources in unsustainable projects. In this conceptual and operational setting, cultural policy has to incorporate sustainability as a key aim in its strategies (Anheier and Hoelscher).

Section II – "Europolis as a project: envisioning more sustainable cities" – illuminates how the integration of culture within sustainable urban development is influenced and mobilized by European policy frameworks and programmes, propelled through intercity relations, and entangled within local regeneration dynamics. The EU policy agenda and funds have spurred on a process of "Europeanization" characterized by policy transferability across political systems, transnational networking, and local-level adaptations. Cities are increasingly encouraged to think holistically and to take an "integrated approach to sustainable urban development," although operational guidance on this process of integration is only now emerging (Duxbury). While the place of culture in integrated and sustainable urban development is being worked out in policy and planning frameworks, within diverse national contexts culture has become embedded in local city imaginaries, urban policies, and the strategic development of many small and medium-sized cities (Tomaz).

Many local authorities looking to renew urban economies and to address social and environmental problems have assumed a proactive, entrepreneurial approach. Cities are increasingly acting as autonomous agents, taking on their own foreign policies and roles through various acts of urban diplomacy and cooperation. Although intercity competition is very high, they are reaching out, regionally and internationally, to learn from and collaborate with other cities, providing heightened visibility, recognition, and other "home advantages." In this context, the European Capitals of Culture programme forms a powerful frame and opportunity for investment, recognition, and promotion of a city and a "launching pad" for local action and change in cities of all sizes, with growing attention to SMCs (Hugoson). Among adjacent cities, we also observe a new stage of urban cooperation to be recognized globally, but one that is dependent on continued economic vitality to fuel, with diminished dynamism and momentum in the context of the crisis (Ponzini).

In the emerging Culture 3.0 context (Sacco 2011), many countries and cities are about to enter a new phase of culture prosumption, when potentially everybody becomes a cultural producer and gains access to new interactive technologies. While not all cities try to enhance their roles as cultural centres, if such engagement occurs, as Hugoson argues, we should expect it to be directed outwards, towards wider flows. This imperative to continually balance local and global dynamics within changing cultural, urban, and political flows is particularly pronounced for SMCs that have suffered processes of deindustrialization and need to reimagine their sustainable futures.

The cases presented in this section show that fully integrating culture in urban sustainable development remains challenging. While some SMCs have

developed strategies and forms of governance and coordination involving private, public, and nonprofit actors (Tomaz), economic rationales typically dominate urban development strategies. Faced with the ambiguities and uncertainty of new development tools and weighted down by "dramatic retrenching" of public administration and other limitations imposed by the economic crisis, culture-based economic-dominated renewal strategies and facility development initiatives that are not integrated into broader urban planning are beginning to show their weaknesses (Ponzini). Sustainable urban development requires multidimensional and holistic thinking, integrated planning approaches, and "embeddedness" in local capacities and aspirations. The integration of approaches stressing community engagement and development through cultural participation can determine local consensus, capacity, and the longer-term sustainability of these strategies. The more an initiative manages to engage different groups within and outside the city, the more opportunities there will be for people to be makers of its continuous transformation.

Section III – "Culture for sustainable development in urban policies and practices" – underlines the need for a new strategic option to reconsider the actual questions of urban and regional territorial planning. It advocates a necessity to link expert knowledge with civic engagement, recognizing SMCs as autonomous cultural spaces with their own sociopolitical complexities. In Europe, local governments' culture-led developmental policies use numerous strategies to make their communities sustainable, where economic does not dominate but harvests on the sense and meaning of the place. The key issues revolve around access, inclusion, and participation: from access to policy-making processes as new models of social encounters (Kangas and Sokka), through participation in both creating and implementing community-based social, economic, and cultural practices within urban regeneration planning (Johannisson), to developing sets of specific strategies in tune with local aspirations and capacities (Plebańczyk). The case study of the town of Huntly in Scotland is paradigmatic for its policy efforts reimagining the whole town as a venue, where cultural interventions are "closely connected to the lived realities of the populace and rooted in the *culture-as-way-of-life*," an approach that has incrementally transformed the town through imagination and an understanding of the potential of creativity (Stevenson and Blanche).

Examples from Polish, British, and Finnish cities, and deep case study analyses of the Swedish city district of Norrby and of the Scottish town of Huntly, provide a perfect overview of possibilities for policy makers and planners, private corporations and agencies, civil society movements, and other social agents of change to conceptualize and lead together endogenous processes that enable a variety of strategies for each local community. Such movements are providing a chance for residents from the societal margins to find their place through "creative inclusion" (Matarasso) and to link not only top-down forces of urbanization and bottom-up movements and networks but also enclaves of excellence and richness with their poorest counterparts. There is always a danger that "The consequence, whether intended or not, is to build a creative ghetto that parallels the

educational, housing, health, and employment ghettos already provided for the poorest" (Matarasso), but this is more likely to happen in metropolises. In SMCs, the convergence of social, cultural, economic, and environmental effects from systemic policies created in "radical proximity" (Cruz 2012) of all social agents can really enable a stronger, more resourceful, and confident city, both cohesive and open at the same time.

Section IV – "Making the city resilient: building communities through artivism" – is devoted to civic urbanity in action: analyzing different sociocultural movements, artists' initiatives, and even art-education platforms involving innovative projects with an *artivistic* approach, which are still rare in academic practices (van der Geest). The chapters in this section aim to illuminate the cultural "drives" that are energizing and moving citizens to become agents of change and responsible actors in raising their claims in the local agenda (Lapka and Cudlínová). They demonstrate how civic imagination becomes an important part in a city's "emotional geography" (Dragićević Šešić, Brkić, and Matejić) and how "sustainable places" become those locations where people want to live and "actively participate in political life through cultural practices" (Georgievska-Jakovleva and Pavlovski).

The studies explore how artists are inspired to become *artivists*, catalyzers of different social processes, and why cultural organizations go beyond their usual and expected roles (centred on representing arts) to stimulate living culture and different forms of social innovation processes, including claims for social justice, well-being, and happiness (Georgievska-Jakovleva and Pavlovski). Even when those actions that reclaim their "right to the city" fail, the process of widening and (re)conquering the lost or diminishing public sphere is continuously developing, making the city more resilient to pressures from both global and local political and economic neoliberal demands. The examples show how responsibility for meaningful development is taken up by civic initiatives, through experimental actions of local autonomous players, inspiring the emergence of *a new civic imagination as a public good* through newly created societal ties of citizens, experts, scientists, activists, and artists who collectively act as "interlocutors across this polarized territory, intervening in the debate itself and mediating new forms of acting and living" (Cruz 2012, 58).

This final section shows an alternative way to develop more open and inclusive cities at the same time, cities that keep neighbourhood traditions but enable reimaging and regenerating derelict spaces and constructing new ones, and that succeed in developing a new conception of *civic culture and civic urbanity*, where free-minded and creative citizens are ready to use their own ideas in the public sphere, launching community actions, programmes, and projects. Small and medium-sized cities become knowledge-creation and dissemination platforms linking the specialized know-how of institutions with the ethical and *in situ* knowledge of communities and creating new *innovative interfaces* between research, planning, artistic intervention, and civic imagination which altogether produce meaningful life for communities in a sustainable city.

Conclusion: how big are the chances of small cities to sustain?

The leading issue of the book, whether and how culture and artistic expression can contribute to sustainable development, gains added value when applied to European SMCs, a third of which are declining and most of which often lack both financial and human resources. The book is intended to invigorate the debate about SMCs and to highlight the emergence of specific European models of sustainable city, *Europolis*, based on creativity and cultural expression by mobilizing civic imagination. European SMCs as autonomous entities in their complex hierarchical spatial linkages, and citizens creating their own places through a thick web of social relations, enable inclusion through different forms of artistic expression, not necessarily highbrow art, but stemming from local traditions and community experience.

The emerging European model of urban development is dependent on human relations, a dimension often forgotten in the big visions of business-focused entrepreneurialism. Civic participation is exemplified in different creative and inclusive practices of artivism that are raising claims for more equality and social justice in urban life. In this context, civic urbanity becomes the leading principle for reinterpreting policies and practices and, especially, for envisioning new paths of human-led (vs. capital-led) sustainable urban development. In Europe, this marks the emergence of a new phenomenon – *urbactivism,* involving both top-down Europe-wide public decisions that lead to the institutionalization and place-embeddedness of the principle of sustainable development, encouraged by numerous financial instruments, and bottom-up social processes based on local artivism and associational mobilization.

This new form of civic urbanity is nourished by bottom-up civic imagination and embedded in the articulation of places, spaces, communities, towns, and cities. It is enabled by a high level of new public awareness and valorization of the symbolic importance of space, and realized through a variety of attachment processes – to place, to nature, to other people, and to heritage. It leads towards a new wave of *urbactivism,* including numerous artivist participatory practices.

Three important areas for future research stem from reoccurring topics in this volume. One is the triple node between *cultural sustainability, creativity, and innovation,* which can be productive but also full of tension. The selected cases offer *different possible answers* to this strategic question: *should culture be sustained or left by itself to be what it is – that is, the formula of vernacular authenticism?* There are smouldering tensions, revealed in the volume, between "global" trends and "European" policies, on one side, and local cultural expressions, on the other, sometimes externalized as conflicts between experts invited from outside and local artists and communities. Different visions coming from diverse local contexts range from full openness and readiness to embrace cultural hybridism, to an explicit rejection of innovations from "outside" and insistence on prioritizing local voices and local ways. Either of these extremes can lead to oversimplifying, missing opportunities of sustainable development: thus, cultural sustainability is reduced to cultural survival, and innovation is perceived as an intrusion from

outside. Broader, pluralistic perspectives offer visions of a *fluid* culture-led sustainable development involving processes based on networking and dialogue, contributing to overall developmental success. Such a human-led sustainable development is cast on a careful balance between innovation coming through creative processes and local traditions.

The second issue deserving more research attention is the recognized role of culture as provider of positive emotions and a *cultural atmosphere* that serves as a social glue for local communities. The notion of an *atlas of emotions* would encourage mapping and nurturing spaces that keep the spirit of the place through an interplay of experiences, "structures of feelings," memories, and cultural practices, thus contributing to the sustainability of neighbourhoods. This raises a question about *the new status of place-based emotions in contemporary culture* which remains open: does the cultural "emotivism" trend represent authentic longing for true bonding and belonging, as a response to fears of disorientation in the dissolving structures of the postmodern world, or is it just a more refined hypermodern consumerism where cultural symbolism is playing a central part (Lipovetsky 2006)? Rising cultural sustainability concerns suggest a new perspective to existing contemplations on this issue.

Finally, the volume provides evidence that within the range of the SMCs, there are considerable differences based on their sizes – only the bigger cities have enough financial resources, and this necessitates strategies for local specializations and/or networking. Where urban settlements are too small and weak, their potential lies in networking and joining of resources. There is also a potential for new promising relations between *SMCs and European regions* – based on competition and cooperation simultaneously, which enables new developmental solutions through joint planning and collaborative practices. Among these new democratic governance processes, these can be identified:

- local, regional, national, and international networking as a response to crisis and way of maneuvering into the future;
- intersectoral collaborations;
- public-private and public-civil partnerships; and
- broad civic participation as an important part of new governance processes.

In all cases, a closer look would allow us to elaborate further a more accurate picture about emerging new realities of sustainable European cities, *Europolis*.

The present collection aims to reveal in a pluralistic way emerging models of small and medium-sized European cities as generators of sustainable development and the special contribution of culture to these processes. Contemporary creativity and participatory practices contribute to social inclusion, urban vibrancy and renewal, and the incremental development of meaningful places. An array of case studies highlight how culture has become embedded in local imaginaries, urban policies, and the strategic development plans of SMCs, thus enabling European citizens to take responsibility, equally, for their cities, for their communities, and for their own lives.

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