

On Streets and Screens – Challenging the European Creative City

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ABSTRACT

Urban culture has changed insidiously. The change applies to urban planning and policy, urban infrastructures, talk about culture and finally urban cultural content itself. This paper examines this change and the socially produced urban cultural space it entails. The main concerns are: 1) How are culture and the city intertwined in the contemporary “urban” and where can gaps in that “cultural urban” be identified?; 2) What role does the interaction between growing event cultures, the use of public space and the emergence of new technologies play in this cultural urban?; and finally 3) What challenging typologies of European “cultural cities” do these developments imply and what kind of spatial scales do they operate on?

To this end, the paper examines the production of urban cultural space from the viewpoint of media. From artistic practices of “locative media” to site-specific penetration into public space, media in its various forms is seen as developing new ways of re-imagining and creating urban space. Here the focus is on street television as a locative process of such re-imagining. Italian “micro-televisions” will be analysed as a case. Since 2002, numerous Italian neighbourhood channels have been grouped under the spontaneous Telestreet movement.

The created locally rooted, globally networked, mobile and always contested channels formulate an audio-visual array of urban neighbourhood questions. In some cases, what has been produced manifests in changes in the built environment; in some cases what is under negotiation is the very idea of public space.

The paper argues that the urban media interventionists of street television engage in important forms of urban change, comparable to those of the so-called urban avant-garde. Their actions provide for tactical moves against or “interruptions” to the prevailing creativity city rhetoric that is shaping Italian and other cities. They may even be calling, as some researchers have argued, for the “real creative city to stand up” next to the “creative city” they are performing their tactics on.

Thus, the practice of street TV engages with the production of challenging typologies of European cultural and creative cities.

Key Words: creative city, public space, urban media