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# Alternative spaces and cultural policies for sustainability. The case of Brescia.

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## Abstract

Geography has always aimed to discuss interactions between culture and nature in order to represent the world and the role of humans in environmental transformations. Indeed, culture has been identified as one of the new ways to reach sustainability. Accordingly, today the adoption of strategies finalised to shape sustainable cultural practices is required in rethinking human spaces, like cities. In particular, scientists call for the integration between local and scientific knowledge with the aim to reach a more sustainable management of the cities and to co-produce alternative spaces of sustainability (Tononi, Pietta, Bonati, 2017) with the involvement of experts, decision-makers and local stakeholders. Into this scenario, the role of geography and geographers should be to involve communities in knowledge production, decision-making process, as well as in the co-shaping of urban spaces.

Performing this difficult task, the urban community is often involved in transition processes in which new and positive interactions emerge with the aim to improve the participation and the quality of life. These transition processes are usually developed in Local Councils, Urban Centers, such as informal groups. They constitute all together alternative labs in which reshape the future of the cities and a culture of sustainability. A common thread runs through these experiences: the co-production of changes based on the capability of sharing goods, services, knowledge, and spaces. All these experiences have local participation and public consultation as basic strategies.

This contribution will analyse the city of Brescia, one of the most industrialised areas in the North of Italy. In particular, it will introduce three cases of alternative spaces of cultural sustainability as labs of transition towards a sustainable city. The first case is the Altrevie Project, an initiative promoted in the Sanpolo and Sanpolino neighborhoods with the purpose to introduce the local citizenship to new models of consumption and lifestyles. In the project, alternative spaces of consumption and participation have been identified (Tononi, Pietta and Bonati, 2017). Moreover, once the project has been concluded the civic activism and environmental conflicts have had an important role in implementing a culture of sustainability in the neighbourhoods.

The second case analysed is the process of urban regeneration that involved the central

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district of "Il Carmine". At the beginning of the twentieth century and until recent years, it was known as to be a dangerous and degraded area. Thanks to the municipal regeneration process, the role of the district in the cultural dynamics of the city has been changing. The regeneration has also indirectly activated a bottom-up process of re-appropriation of the area. The analysis of this case will take in exam both the role of public policies and the bottom-up movements, as citizen initiatives, social and environmental associations, and unexpected processes, that are participating in promoting a cultural transformation of the district. Today Il Carmine can be considered as one of the most vital and creative areas in Brescia.

The last case is a cultural mapping process (in progress) via a participatory research developed in collaboration with the Urban Center Brescia (UCB). The final purpose of the project is to analyse the cultural dimension of sustainability (Soini, Birkeland, 2014) in the city of Brescia. Accordingly, we are involving associations and citizenship in the mapping of the cultural changing that is interesting the city. In particular, the project is following three steps. First of all, we are mapping the associations and institutions of the city according to the area on which they work: nature and science, cultural heritage, arts and literature, new works and industry, social problems, creativity. Afterward we will involve the citizenship with interviews about the spaces that are emerging as examples of the cultural transformations of the city. At the end we will organize some laboratories to systematise and complete together with the citizens the cultural mapping process.

The methodology adopted is the participatory action research and the approach follows the urban political ecology (Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw 2006). The results of the research will be presented.

**Keywords:** cultural sustainability, urban political ecology, cultural mapping, participation, Italy