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Industrial spaces for grassroots creative production: spatial, social and planning facets

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ABSTRACT

Former industrial premises provide material and symbolic resources for grassroots creative production, but planning is complex as these sites are transitory and excessive intervention may stifle creativity. This paper analyses the transformations of La Ribera (Bilbao), a mixed-use peninsula waiting to be redeveloped, where, in the meantime, creative-based grassroots projects have settled. Drawing upon relevant planning documents, documentary material and interviews with key actors, the paper explores (i) the spatial and built form advantages of these spaces, (ii) their impact on neighbourhood life and (iii) the contradictions faced in the planning process. The analysis suggests that spatiality plays a critical role, but it is threatened by market pressures, local governments' interest to encourage the city's reputation and neighbours' mistrust for the changes they may trigger. As a result, we contend that art spaces' institutionalization in the neighbourhood is decisive for their sustainability, but the conflicts that arise for the symbolic appropriation of space should be considered. Regarding policy, governance approaches that preserve users' autonomy and spaces' built form and atmospheric qualities are rather suitable responses if they are part of a comprehensive agenda that includes local socio-economic conditions and neighbours' aspirations.

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Introduction

Recent years have been witnessing a growing interest in grassroots cultural initiatives located in industrial sites, often on a temporary basis (Andres & Grésillon, 2013; Haydn & Temel, 2006; Lehtovuori & Havik, 2009). The successive waves of industrial crisis and the financial shortages of planning under austerity have increased the number of vacant places, encouraging several municipal governments to orchestrate temporary solutions (see Patti and Polyak (2015) for an inventory of the policies). Meanwhile, in many cities across Europe, artists have settled in disused spaces attracted by their low rent, spacious facilities and creative atmosphere. Although the presence of artists' communities in industrial premises is well known in Berlin (Colomb, 2012), Amsterdam (Groth & Corijn, 2005) or Barcelona (Martí-Costa & Pradel i Miquel, 2012), this phenomenon has also spread to smaller cities. Actually, Trans Europe Halles (TEH), a network of cultural

centres initiated by artists in industrial buildings, accounts for 90 members and associates from across Europe, including Innsbruck (Die Bäckerei), Aarhus (Institut for (X)), Marseille (La Friche la Belle de Mai), Lyle (L'hybride) and Maribor (Pekarna Magdalenske Mreze) (<http://teh.net>).

The literature has highlighted the benefits for artists and area regeneration (Hentilä & Lindborg, 2003), their role within contemporary urban policies (Andres, 2011), their capacity to influence the urban agenda as they represent a different notion of 'urbanity' (Groth & Corijn, 2005) or the tactics and strategies developed while they are inserted within formalized planning schemes (Andres, 2013). Yet, despite their growing importance in academic and policy terms, it is still unclear what is the role of spatial and social conditions shaping their trajectory and what planning practices would be able to sustain creative activities while dealing with the tensions these spaces may generate. This paper aims at bridging this gap by investigating the importance of industrial spatiality, but moving beyond creative agents' view and including the broader social and policy contexts. The concrete and representational characteristics that make these spaces attractive to entrepreneurs are dependent upon the particular physical, socio-economic and symbolic attributes of the area. Besides, the policy rationale and the planning approach influence their trajectory. Consequently, the hypothesis is that industrial spatiality plays a critical role for the grassroots creative economy, but its social and material conditions can be fragile and subject to a variety of economic and socio-political threats. Following this hypothesis, the guiding research questions are defined as follows: (i) What location-specific assets provide obsolete industrial spaces to grassroots cultural projects? (ii) How are creative workshops inserted within the urban fabric, not only at the neighbourhood but also at the city level? (iii) What planning actions and procedures (if any) would be able to sustain creative production, while allowing a smooth integration within the social space they are located in?

The paper analyses the changes that have taken place in La Ribera (Bilbao), a mixed-use peninsula, where, in the wake of the Great Recession, several entrepreneurs have settled. The area is going to be redeveloped following a master plan designed by the Anglo-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid and, thus, the cultural microcosm is ephemeral and will evolve as the plan is on its way. Interestingly, cultural agents have a strong sense of their interstitial nature but they induce material and symbolic interventions in the urban space 'in the meantime', challenging traditional planning practices. From the social perspective, local cultural life has been revitalized and no noticeable socio-demographic change has occurred. Nevertheless, subtle tensions over the symbolic representation of space have arisen. The empirical analysis relies on relevant planning documents, documentary material (i.e. photography, video interviews, neighbourhood association's records), and interviews with entrepreneurs, local planners and neighbours.

La Ribera echoes several European neighbourhoods, like NDSM Wharf in Amsterdam, the Spīķeri quarter in Riga and Poblenou in Barcelona. The resemblance with these and other former industrial neighbourhoods allows drawing valuable insights that contribute to the literature on cultural production and grassroots spaces, despite its socio-economic and planning specificities. First, our approach traces cultural sites' trajectory depending on the location advantages they provide, the policy rationale and their inclusion in the neighbourhood's social dynamic. Second, the research draws attention to the importance of industrial spatiality for the grassroots cultural economy as it yields material (large and affordable workspace), spatial (a 'peripheral' condition that prevents rents from rising),

relational (social proximity that encourages artistic collaborations and solidarity ties) and symbolic assets (the 'look and feel' of industrial aesthetics). Third, the paper takes into account the importance of institutionalization processes because it affects creative agents' role and neighbours' perceptions towards art spaces. Nevertheless, we contend that disputes over the symbolic appropriation of space may be latent, and these tensions should be considered as part of the dialectics involving their inclusion in the local community. Last, the contradictions for planning as a result of the transientness of post-industrial sites and the alternative governance solutions discussed may be inspirational in different spatial and institutional contexts.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we display a framework for the analysis of these cultural spaces. We consider the role of industrial spatiality encouraging grassroots cultural production, the different planning approaches and policy rationales identified in the academic literature, and their impact on the neighbourhood and the city. After the theoretical part, we outline the information sources and the research design. Next, La Ribera is characterized. The subsequent section presents the insights from the case analysis. The paper ends with several conclusions for this case in particular and for planning alternative cultural spaces in general.

Industrial spaces for grassroots creative production

Andres (2013, p. 42) has defined cultural production spaces located in industrial buildings as 'cultural brownfields', i.e. organic cultural spaces developed in brownfield sites and progressively included into cultural and urban policy across Europe. Two main features characterize these premises. On the one hand, we refer to grassroots initiatives self-managed by their users despite, if institutionalized, being supervised by local authorities. On the other, they are 'in-between' in spatial and temporal terms. Located in industrial areas that have suffered from disinvestment for long, they are liminal spaces of the post-industrial city in the margins of both, the built environment and the social imaginary. As such, Groth and Corijn (2005) use the term 'indeterminate spaces', Haydn and Temel (2006) refer to them as 'temporary urban spaces', whereas Finan (2014) calls them 'transient places' to emphasize their spatial and temporal dislocation. Their liminal condition, though, may be blurred as they are progressively included into contemporary urban and cultural policies. Spatially, they connect the area to the city as a whole by attracting visitors, altering the perception of a deindustrialized vacant land and becoming part of the contemporary post-industrial cityscape. The transitoriness of its use may also change since, as long as they gain policy prominence and social acceptance, it turns into permanent.

In the following, we conceptualize these premises in regards to: the benefits that industrial spatiality provides for grassroots cultural production, i.e. 'the production space'; the diverse approaches and rationales for their inclusion within contemporary cultural and urban policies, i.e. 'the policy space'; and the effects they may have upon the social area, i.e. 'the community space' (Figure 1).

The production space

Former industrial spaces transformed into cultural spots are variegated in terms of location (inner city, periphery, rural areas), building type (factories, transportation

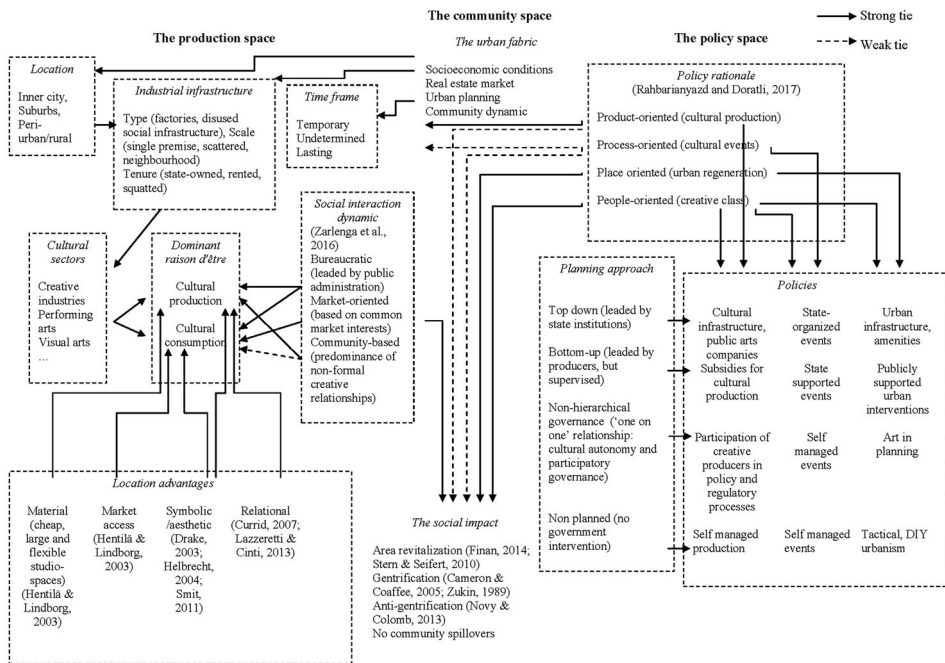


Figure 1. Industrial spaces for grassroots creative production. Source: Author.

infrastructure, disused social centres), time frame (temporary, permanent), tenure (lease, permission, squatted), institutional framework (self-organized, tolerated, supervised by local authorities), the profile of users and activities, the planning approach and their impact on the neighbourhood (see <http://teh.net> for experiences across Europe). Importantly, the socio-economic and real estate market conditions, the local planning contexts and the community ties in which these spaces are embedded influence their trajectory. Inner city locations, for instance, often lack large industrial premises and suffer from stronger socio-economic threats as land is scarcer, but the city centre offers market access, which may be a valuable asset for consumption-oriented activities, and a dense network of cafés, galleries, cultural centres and hang-outs, i.e. a ‘third space’ (Hutton, 2009; Lloyd, 2006). On the contrary, in the periphery and in rural areas, market pressure is usually softer and the stock of infrastructure is larger, thus providing adequate conditions for the less market-oriented activities.

Industrial infrastructure provides different location advantages. Artists find large, flexible and maintenance constraint-free studios at low rent (Hentilä & Lindborg, 2003). Other benefits are related to market access, such as proximity to other cultural producers, services and subcontractors, and closeness to clientele. Artists also get face-to-face contact with other members of the artistic community that enhance collaboration opportunities. These are favoured by informal environments in which unrelated sectors that share a cognitive proximity come across one another (Currid, 2007; Lazzeretti & Cinti, 2013). Apart from material, market and relational advantages, industrial spaces provide symbolic assets. The locality is a resource of visual raw materials and stimuli that inspire artistic creativity (Drake, 2003). Symbolic resources may also turn into an economic asset if cultural firms take advantage of the place’s creative reputation (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010; Smit, 2011).

Since cultural spaces give opportunities for networking, we can draw insights from the literature on spatial clustering to shed light on the type of social relations that arise (Malmberg & Maskell, 2002; Mommaas, 2004). Following this line of enquiry, Zarlenga, Ulldemolins, and Morató (2016) provide a typology of cultural clusters with regard to the social interaction dynamic, which can be translated into the analysis of cultural brownfields: the cultural cluster as a bureaucratic organization, as a market-oriented association and as a community dynamic. The bureaucratic organization is led by the public administration, although it is usually conceived as a public–private partnership that involves creative producers and private institutions. An example of a bureaucratic cluster in industrial buildings is Tabakalera in San Sebastian, a former Tobacco factory converted into a multidisciplinary art space as part of the European Capital of Culture 2016. Cultural clusters as market-oriented associations are characterized by a shared professional culture and common market interests. Former industrial premises devoted actually to creative consumption fall under this category (e.g. The Biscuit Factory in Newcastle, an independent art, craft and design gallery selling artworks from over 200 artists). Last, in cultural clusters as a community dynamic, non-formalized creative relationships and community ties based on a common sense of belonging prevail. This cluster type is predominant in cultural facilities organically built by citizens themselves in a bottom-up process.

The policy space

In several cities (e.g. Amsterdam, Berlin, Marseille, Lausanne), these spaces have been supported by local authorities to encourage cultural production and upgrade the city's creative image (Andres & Grésillon, 2013; Colomb, 2012; Shaw, 2005). City officials take advantage of obsolete industrial spaces to complement previous policies focused on large-scale interventions and the 'official' culture, as long as they represent 'alternative' cultural expressions.

However, there is no single motivation for supporting organic culture, and the policy rationale conditions its path. Rahbarianyazd and Doratli (2017) suggest four strategies that can be used to illustrate how alternative culture is being harnessed within contemporary urban policy (see also Grodach (2013)): product-oriented, process-oriented, people-oriented and place-oriented strategies. A product-oriented strategy establishes a supportive environment for creative production. Policy recommendations are led towards the characteristics and needs of artists (Markusen & Schrock, 2006), including remodelling industrial premises into artists' centres, encouraging social and business networks and directing financial support to creative activities. A process-oriented strategy refers to organizing events (art festivals, carnivals, open-air markets and similar small-scale spectacles) where producers and consumers get connected. For the industrial premise, such events are also important for enhancing its reputation as a cultural hotspot.

A place-oriented strategy is aimed at area regeneration. Art spaces contribute to neighbourhood revitalization by attracting tourists and other city residents, providing opportunities to those with limited access to cultural activities and spurring the local social capital (Grodach, 2011; Stern & Seifert, 2010). Actions within this strategy would be oriented to support the cultural brownfield as a catalyst for area development.

People-oriented strategies are based on Florida's (2002) ideas around cultural practices and environments being attractive to the 'creative class'. From this perspective, art is an

amenity that attracts creative professionals seeking an artistic milieu that offers cultural goods and an authentic ambience (Currid, 2009). Florida-inspired strategies adopt place-, process- and product-oriented policies, but these are not geared to support artists for the sake of art, but to appeal to the consumption preferences of the creative class.

Policies can follow different approaches. In a top-down perspective, state institutions take the lead transforming industrial spaces; this is the case of Matadero Madrid, a slaughterhouse and livestock market rebuild by the City Council into a contemporary art creation and exhibition space. In a bottom-up scheme, private and non-profit cultural actors are responsible for the art space and the cultural programming, but it is supported by state policies.

Top-down and bottom-up policies, however, may not effectively support creative practices because they privilege the commercial dimension at the expense of the aesthetics and social ones, and they overlook the complex dynamics of the creative process (Rantisi & Leslie, 2010). Grants and subsidies are directed to strategic sectors or success cases, but these are nurtured by a breeding ground made up of vernacular and quotidian creative practices (Edensor, Leslie, Millington, & Rantisi, 2010). Likewise, there is a 'policy gap' because policy-makers lack understanding of the concrete needs of producers and of the logics of the creative process, based on a complex system of formal and informal networks, clusters and scenes (Borén & Young, 2013). The latter is crucial because unless a deeper understanding of the nature of production and reproduction of cultural activities is achieved, the debate around cultural policy won't be effective (Pratt, 2005).

To overcome these limitations, several authors have proposed non-hierarchical governance mechanisms for the grassroots cultural economy. Lange (2011) states that these are better suited to respond to creative practices and their societal forms, i.e. scenes, and consequently creative policy should reorient itself to support these spatial-organizational forms. Such a governance strategy involves structural changes in decision-making, both for policy-makers and creative agents. Discussing the transformation of Suvilahti in Helsinki, Krivý (2013) proposes the idea of 'cultural governmentality', in which the role of the city's bureaucracy is to rule in a non-planned, non-bureaucratic way, delegating management to cultural organizations. This way, cultural producers have autonomy while planners restrict themselves to an overall guidance of the process, inspired by the ideal of enabling things to happen (Krivý, 2013).

Another venue for alternative modes of governance is encouraging participation of citizens and cultural agents in decision-making. Bringing together policy-makers and practitioners may bridge the 'policy gap' and engender new ways of thinking about urban creativity (Borén & Young, 2013). Moreover, it may lead to a smoother integration of art spaces within the neighbourhood if artists' view and the local community's interests are considered.

The community space

The literature has addressed a diversity of effects, from area revitalization (Finan, 2014; Stern & Seifert, 2010) to gentrification (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005; Zukin, 1989) to 'not-in-our-name!' movements in which artists oppose gentrification and the displacement of the areas' subcultural fabric (Novy & Colomb, 2013). Importantly, their impact depends on their inclusion in the neighbourhood and their role as agents of area

change. In a recent article, Pradel-Miquel (2017) compares the role of artists in the renewal of two neighbourhoods in Berlin. While in Südliche Friedrichstadt local authorities adopted a top-down vision of the role of artists in regeneration that does not fit its social reality, in Soldiner Kiez artists have become institutionalized in the neighbourhood and have promoted participative and inclusive models for urban development.

The policy rationale also conditions the effects on the local community. A place-oriented strategy will likely have positive impacts in terms of engaging the local community and improving the quality of life if cultural spaces get embedded within the neighbourhood dynamic, although the risks for gentrification may be latent. In a people-oriented strategy, policies are aimed at providing an attractive environment for the creative class, thus the neighbourhood will be rather exposed to gentrification without community spillovers. The other two policy rationales described above (product- and process-oriented strategies) are allegedly committed to support cultural production and dissemination; thus, in principle, the cultural brownfield's impact on the neighbourhood's socio-demographic change may be neutral, although the presence of artists may attract more affluent consumers and dwellers leading to the gentrification cycle, as described in the literature (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008).

Information sources and research design

Based on this theoretical framework, we analysed the transformations prompted by cultural agents in La Ribera, Bilbao. The research combined different information sources and techniques. First, neighbourhood-level statistics, planning documents and neighbourhood association's documentary material were examined to characterize the area and the planning process and to evaluate the socio-demographic changes. Socio-economic data were extracted from the Bilbao Socioeconomic Observatory (Bilbao Observatorio, 2017), and data on cultural activities came from the Basque Government's Directory of Cultural Resources (available at <http://www.kulturklik.euskadi.eus>).

Second, twelve video interviews with sixteen neighbours were transcribed and analysed. Interviews were recorded by Zorrotzaurre Art Work in Progress (ZAWP) cultural association as part of a project to preserve the local memory. Conversations dealt with residents' memories and their feelings about the master plan, but several references to the changes induced by the presence of cultural agents also sprang (interviews can be accessed in <http://www.zawp.org/memoria-visual/>).

Third, field observation, photography of sites and fifteen semi-structured interviews with key informants were conducted. Interviewees included a local planning official, a representative of ZAWP, three residents actively involved in the neighbourhood life that rejected participating in the aforementioned project to preserve the local memory and ten creative entrepreneurs working on audiovisual and interactive media, design, creative services and performing arts. Interviews were designed to collect data primarily on (i) the history and organization of the cultural brownfield; (ii) the location motifs and advantages; (iii) the importance of industrial premises for creative production, including landscape and urban design features, the buildings' characteristics and their historical resonance; (iv) the interaction between the cultural agents and local dwellers; and (v) entrepreneurs' and residents' feelings about the area and the master plan. Interviews were designed as factual interviews, in which the focus is less on the storyteller's own

perspectives than on his or her stories as venues to reliable information about a collective past (Kvale, 2007, p. 71).

The urban fabric

La Ribera is a peninsula of 70 ha and less than 500 dwellers distributed into two neighbourhoods: La Ribera de Deusto, where most of the population live, and La Ribera de Zorrotzaurre, the industrial area. The peninsula hosted several big- and medium-sized industries during the twentieth century (port activities, a cookie factory, a paper mill, chemicals, lamination industries and a chain factory), but nowadays, only a few firms operate and the landscape is full of vacant buildings and warehouses.

La Ribera was excluded from the major urban interventions of the last decades, despite being close to Abandoibarra, where the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum and the other major touristic attractions cluster (Figure 2). In 2004, Zaha Hadid presented a master plan to change the peninsula into an island for living, working and pleasure (www.zorrotzaurre.com), which was conceived as the latest major urban renewal project in the city. The area was also renamed as Zorrotzaurre in order to project a new image in the city's collective imaginary. Initially, the master plan outlined doing tabula rasa, but neighbourhood associations' opposition, technical problems and the Great Recession postponed the master plan. Actually, it lays out a complete transformation of the area in which old but renovated buildings will mingle with approximately 5000 new housing, offices, cultural facilities, green spaces and promenades (Zaha Hadid Architects, 2007). The plan has just started by converting the peninsula into an island to guarantee flood protection and by demolishing industrial buildings in the North and South.

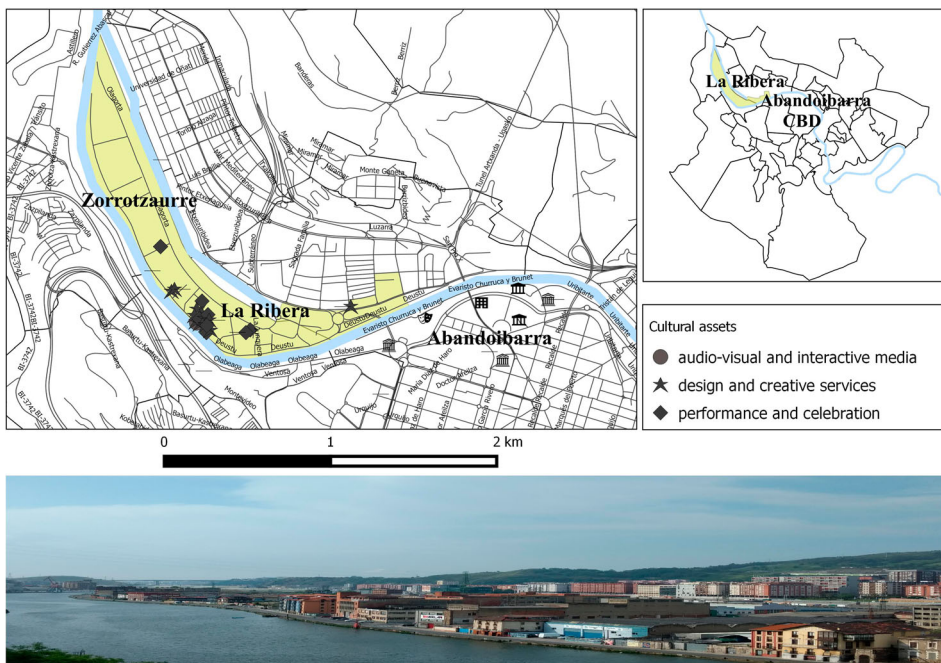


Figure 2. Map and panoramic view of La Ribera. Source: Author.

The origins of the cultural cluster date back to 1998, when a non-profit cultural association called hACERIA remodelled a factory into a multidisciplinary workspace and exhibition venue. In 2008, hACERIA launched the ZAWP project to support cultural production. ZAWP was conceived as a temporary initiative that will last until the area is redeveloped, but in the meantime the association rented nine buildings to transform them into exhibition and workspaces (Mayoral, 2012). The Basque Government has supported the rehabilitation of industrial buildings, and it has a mixed funding scheme based on grants from different institutions and its own revenues, but it is self-managed by hACERIA association.

Later, several entrepreneurs settled in adjacent warehouses. New media and design, socio-cultural activities, emerging sectors, alternative sports, handcrafts, circus, performing arts' companies and an indoor flea market of 2500 square metres can be found. Nowadays, around thirty cultural firms are hosted in eleven buildings. Quantitatively, these account for a small proportion of the total industrial premises in the area, but since they are clustered in the middle of the peninsula, the cultural brownfield is apparent (Figure 2). Besides, closeness favours contacts among cultural producers in such a way that it can be characterized as a community dynamic where non-formalized creative relationships predominate (Zarlenga et al., 2016).

Industrial spaces for creative production: spatial, social and planning dimensions

Spatiality and built form

The changes in the built environment are probably the first and most sensory impacts of cultural brownfields. Old industrial infrastructures have been converted into exhibition and workspaces, reconstructing the neighbourhood landscape into a hybrid, textured fabric in which factories mingle with new creative sites (Figure 3). Space and form are critical dimensions as they influence the material and the symbolic conditions. Artistic production needs room for experimentation, and industrial buildings provide adaptable and spacious worksites. This is particularly relevant for less market-oriented activities, such as the performing arts (music, theatre and circus) or for activities that need more space (an indoor skate park and an indoor rock-climbing facility).

In spatial terms, cultural activities in La Ribera benefit from its 'peripheral' condition. The inner-city core provides location advantages for creative industry formation (Hutton, 2009), but geographical and mental isolation may yield benefits because workshops remain affordable so that the most alternative activities settle. In La Ribera, peripherality results from the spatial fragmentation with the rest of the city and its representation as an abandoned, deindustrialized area in the social imaginary, despite being close from main touristic attractions. Interestingly, one of the interviewees described the peripheral condition as a market advantage:

I think that the people who come here have a positive attitude. It is poorly communicated, but when you come you talk to other people, I think people enjoy it. So, in a way, it [being poorly communicated] does help me selling, I don't know. (Marcos, luthier, personal interview)

The importance of form and spatiality goes beyond providing affordable and spacious studios. Social networks and face-to-face contact are stimulated by proximity and informal environments. Meeting places, terraces and open architectural forms encourage informal



Figure 3. Creative spaces in the post-industrial cityscape. Source: Author.

exchanges among different cultural producers. These synergetic relations were mentioned by a circus artist:

There are other initiatives nearby, and I think we all benefit from that scene that is germinating. I think this is not happening in other neighbourhoods. (Inés, circus artist, personal interview)

However, in La Ribera, relational advantages do not only seem related to collaboration opportunities due to trust and committed relationships, i.e. social proximity (Boschma, 2005), but with rather ‘mundane’ aspects, such as solidarity or stimulus to carry on. Social ties are affective and personal, probably due to firms’ reduced size, which makes them rely on the other entrepreneurs to overcome day-to-day problems:

You live together in this space so the relationship [with others], rather than professional, is familiar [...] In the end, this is a human relationship. (Iñaki, socio-cultural entrepreneur, personal interview)

Beyond material and relational assets, the attributes of the buildings and the area act as catalysts of individual creativity. According to Helbrecht (2004), the sensual dimensions of perceived realities and the aesthetics of the landscape are important stimuli for innovation. Interviewees signalled the industrial and decadent atmosphere as being inspiring. The following passages capture the importance of symbolic assets.

It is about generating spaces and atmospheres, or we sometimes speak about ethics and aesthetics, which did not exist in the city and we needed this space for something to germinate.

In the end, the whole neighbourhood is germinating part of the city's soul that maybe did not have space to grow, because they needed a great deal of space, or because at the scenography level fits with what you want to transmit.

These spaces being so huge and pretty, that in a way breathe history, are the perfect scenography for creative-based cultural projects. (Karim, creative entrepreneur, personal interview)

Being a liminal, in-between area also opens opportunities for experimentation because facilities can easily be adapted, there are fewer restrictions and, overall, the ephemeral feeds spontaneity and things to happen. Nonetheless, fugacity seems a double-edged sword for creative entrepreneurs. Like any other business, creative firms need stability and certainty to grow. The uncertainty about the future of the neighbourhood and the buildings dissuade investing in the physical space, which may well be a serious limitation for their sustainability, a concern raised by all the interviewees.

At the neighbourhood level, the industrial aesthetics and artistic interventions have spurred La Ribera's reputation as the alternative enclave of Bilbao (Figure 4). Graffiti and street art stimulate an area's image as transgressor and creative (Zukin & Braslow, 2011), and reputation is fundamental in the development of a cultural cluster. For the sustainability of the local cultural system, it raises awareness about these activities, thus legitimizing the project in the eyes of producers, consumers and institutions. For cultural producers, it may enhance the reputation of the firm and the product by aligning them with the images that external audiences hold about the distinctiveness of the place



Figure 4. Graffiti as area marker. Source: Author.

(Costa, 2013). Nevertheless, it is rather arguable that creative entrepreneurs have been able to translate the area brand into a marketing device. At least, none of the interviewees raised this question.

Neighbourhood institutionalization and the symbolic realm

One of the key issues in the trajectory of cultural spaces is their institutionalization in the neighbourhood because it conditions residents' perception towards the creative community and their role as drivers of social and cultural change. ZAWP embraced the aim of working on the neighbourhood's social, economic and cultural revitalization as a part of its project. Artists themselves stressed the importance of being involved in the neighbourhood as part of their artistic ethos and practice (Inés, Nerea and Karim, personal interviews). The commitment towards the neighbourhood is expressed through cultural activities, interventions in the public space and proposals to emphasize the local history (guided tours, the aforementioned project to preserve the local memory).

Several neighbours seemed sympathetic to entrepreneurs because they have revitalized the local cultural life and raised awareness of the area:

People in Bilbao now get to know the neighbourhood, not as an area where everything was to be demolished but as place where people live, where there is a vibrant cultural life, and not just warehouses full of iron. (Almudena, resident, video interview)

Besides, the presence of artists has not triggered the displacement of low-status occupants by higher income groups. La Ribera ranked 29th out of 39 on income in 2014, four positions ahead than in 2003, but one behind than in 2009, when cultural firms arrived. Rental housing dropped from 18% in 2001 to 9% in 2011 but the share of rental housing is still higher than that of the city's. Likewise, over 10% of the housing stock is vacant, the age of housing stock exceeds the century (by far the oldest in the city) and the housing comfort index is 50%, 20 points lower than the city's (Table 1) (Bilbao Observatorio, 2017).

The absence of socio-demographic and tenure change is probably due to the particular socio-economic conditions and the planning prospects of La Ribera: little population and very low density, a working area without residential use in the imaginary, poor transportation links with the rest of the city (one road crosses the whole peninsula and there is just one bus line), total absence of shops and basic services (just five bars, two antiques and a hotel) and a master plan envisaging a complete redevelopment deterred real estate investment. These circumstances have also had an influence on cultural spaces' inclusion in the neighbourhood because it has favoured bonding ties with the local community. Cultural entrepreneurs aligned with residents' demands reclaiming the preservation of industrial heritage buildings and an institutional commitment has been forced.

Nevertheless, some neighbours feared that cultural industries are being used by local authorities as a Trojan horse to sell the master plan and to attract future private investment (Eneko, representative of the neighbourhood association, personal interview). The Zorrotzaurre Management Commission, the institution responsible of this plan, promotes the actual existence of a true 'creative island', the ideal space for artistic and creative innovation (www.zorrotzaurre.com), and ZAWP received financial support from the Basque Government, which some neighbours perceive as evidence of its co-optation. Indeed, local authorities seem to be making use of a people-oriented strategy to brand the area

Table 1. Socio-economic data of La Ribera.

	Population ^a	Density ^c (hb/km ²)	Ageing index ^a (pop > 64)	Migrant pop ^a (%)	Firm density (per 1.000) ^b	Disposable income 2009	Disposable income ^c	Rental housing (%) 2001	Rental housing ^d (%)	Vacant housing (%) 2007	Vacant housing ^b (%)	Confort index ^d (%)
Bilbao	345,642	8545	23.65	7.4	94.9	20,081	19,761	7.9	8.2	9.6	4.6	70.8
La Ribera	422	597	17.06	5.6	324.5	14,682	15,406	18	9.4	22.8	11.3	49.8

Note: Data for the last year available: ^a2016, ^b2015, ^c2014 and ^d2011.

Source: Bilbao Observatorio (2017).

and to balance the city's profile as a city where art is being produced, not only consumed and visited (Plaza, Tironi, & Haarich, 2009).

Moreover, cultural activities introduce new representations that clash with the history, the social relations, the consumption practices and the local idiosyncrasy (Gainza, 2017). The neighbourhood is described by residents as a little town in the city core (Almudena, Ziortza, Esti, Jesse and Yolanda, video interviews) with community ties and 'bounded solidarity' (Morlote et al., 2007). As such, the transformation into a cultural hub seems unfamiliar. Figure 5 captures two different representations of the community: on the left, a more recent graffiti appeals to the 'alternative' character of the area (Your trash is my treasure); on the right, a collective graffiti claiming La Ribera is alive after a neighbourhood protest.

Some neighbours expressed tensions for the representation of the neighbourhood as a cultural enclave:

We find this popularity strange, this hype that has become La Ribera, but people do not really know us. (Yolanda, resident, video interview)

They have come up with proposals to a neighbourhood that is already built [...] they have not come to La Ribera, but to Zorrotzaurre, they come with the new name provided by the city council. Their intention is to change this neighbourhood, its culture, even us and, apart from that, they have not invited us to their party. (Naroa, personal interview)

While even the most critical with the master plan and the current evolution of the area accepted that change is inevitable, these passages echo the idea of a symbolic displacement,



Figure 5. Alternative representations of the neighbourhood. Graffiti legends: *Your trash is my treasure* (left)/*La Ribera alive* (right). Source: Author.

i.e. a form of symbolic dislocation and defamiliarization – the loss of a sense of a place to dwell without physically moving from it that operates within a locale damaged by the intrusion of wider hierarchies and powers (Atkinson, 2015, p. 385). In this regards, we agree with Whiting and Hannam (2016, p. 319) that gentrification as a process affects the meanings of places to their residents as much as it involves issues of pricing and of displacement. For the cultural brownfield, such a nuanced interpretation implies that the tensions for the use and the symbolic appropriation of space are part of the dialectical process involving their institutionalization in the community. Certainly, the translation of a given neighbourhood narrative to the collective imaginary stands within individuals' urban experience and comprises wider agencies circulating a prevailing discourse (local authorities, mass media, blogs, etc.). But a critical perspective on the role of art in urban development and an effort capturing the diversity of narratives would favour the cohabitation of artists' and neighbours' views in the symbolic realm.

Planning alternative cultural spaces

La Ribera highlights some of the tensions of planning former industrial areas devoted actually to cultural production. There is a fundamental contradiction between the projection towards the future and the long-lasting involved in master planning, and transient cultural projects' commitment with the present (Haydn & Temel, 2006). Such contradictions were captured by ZAWP when they proposed to invest on the use of old neighbourhoods in their transition towards urban decisions already determined, to avoid traditional renewal processes that ban the experimentation of the process and the coexistence with space (Mayoral, 2012, p. 538). Considering that the renewal process will last for at least twenty years, ZAWP rented industrial spaces for cultural production 'in the meantime'. The project was conceived as a 'work-in-progress', in which several spaces were to be recovered while others shut down. This interpretation questions the projections of space in traditional planning schemes into a 'stable' and 'finished' outcome, and forces institutions to consider the actual social fabric and the area's history and heritage, introducing day-to-day issues in the policy agenda.

As time has passed and cultural producers have gained social acceptance, they have been able to modify partially the planning prospects and twenty factories will remain to relocate the existing companies. Recently, a municipal proposal to set up in one of these buildings a factory of advanced services for the manufacturing sector was awarded by the European Commission's programme Urban Innovative Actions (Ayuntamiento de Bilbao, 2017). The Zorrotzaurre Management Commission has also adopted the discourse of the temporary use and highlights that creative activities 'in the meanwhile' will give a new life to disused industrial buildings during the modernization of the area (www.zorrotzaurre.com). Nevertheless, this seems just a perversion of the language, since the built environment, the social and economic conditions and the atmosphere will change. The regeneration process will allegedly revalue the area, so it is not hard to imagine that avant-garde activities will be displaced by better capitalized interests. It may be argued that a process of 'creative destruction' that displaces artists and low-income cultural producers by more affluent consumers is a constitutive element in the life cycle of creative districts (Zukin & Braslow, 2011), but in the case of La Ribera succession is planning-induced. This process resembles the 22@ project in Poblenou (Barcelona),

where an urban regeneration plan based on knowledge-based activities destroyed the pre-existing creative environment, despite claims by the city council of being promoting the cultural economy (Martí-Costa & Pradel i Miquel, 2012). In such large-scale processes, even if industrial spaces for alternative activities are preserved as part of the strategy for the creative city, it is unlikely that the creative atmosphere, dependent upon the material and the symbolic, will remain.

Against such a top-down conception, some cultural producers reclaimed different policies to preserve the existing microcosm:

The problem is that we find that institutions are so used to building the city by force of mega-projects and top-down, and we haven't yet seen that they have internalized that most of the social fabric that makes a city like Amsterdam being Amsterdam, or Berlin being Berlin, is what it is generated through grassroots projects. (Karim, creative entrepreneur, personal interview)

In other European cities, a different approach has been considered to maintain the actual use and to include local users in decision-making. The governance of Suvilahti in Helsinki (Krivý, 2013; Lehtovuori & Havik, 2009) or NDSM wharf in Amsterdam are examples of alternative ways of planning organic cultural spaces. Local users manage these facilities, while policy-makers restrict themselves to interventions for supervising and supporting the process. At the same time, unlike in master plans, mutability is acknowledged as a main factor: a building, an area is never 'finished' (Lehtovuori & Havik, 2009).

While these alternative policies reflect a more comprehensive approach, they may also overcome several pitfalls. From the cultural producers' side, the dilemma stands on how to preserve autonomy while being inserted within an institutional framework. The Dutch Breeding Places programme, in a way a 'best practice' policy, increased the fragmentation between those segments co-opted, those with intense but tense relationships with the local government and those that wanted to operate outside of governance structures (Uitermark, 2004). Even those artists favoured felt the contradictions of being tolerated, if not directly supported, while at the same time being used as a branding asset. Such tensions have also emerged in La Ribera, as some cultural producers perceive ZAWP too 'institutionalized' and dependent upon grants for its own reproduction.

Conclusions

Alternative cultural spaces located in old industrial sites are becoming the new 'big thing' of the creative politics toolkit, as policy-makers increasingly rely on grassroots initiatives to brand the city and strengthen its creative reputation. Drawing upon the experience of La Ribera, this paper has explored the edges of these cultural expressions concerning the influence of built form and spatial characteristics for entrepreneurs, their social impact and the dilemmas planning faces. We believe our research contributes to the literature on grassroots creative production in several ways. First, our findings add further evidence of the role of place yielding material, relational and inspirational assets. Producers find in obsolete factories adaptable and spacious worksites at low-rent, informal environments that stimulate collaborations and mutual aid, and the symbolic assets associated with old industrial environments (the 'look and feel'). The importance of the material and the symbolic has also significant normative implications because these depend on the transitory and peripheral nature of the site. Moreover, the peripheral condition is a planning

dimension; thus, if the sustainability of the cultural microcosm is a policy aim, the liminal character should in a way be preserved.

Second, the paper has highlighted the importance of cultural spaces' institutionalization in the community. These premises are not in a vacuum but inserted within a particular urban fabric, and the relationship between the cultural space and the neighbourhood is a critical dimension for their sustainability. In La Ribera, the presence of entrepreneurs has not prompted any upgrading nor noticeable demographic change, but on the contrary, they have revitalized the cultural life and raised awareness of the area. Certainly, this impact has been different in other cities where the real estate has taken advantage of alternative cultural agents, but La Ribera is yet waiting for the housing market's boom to come by the hand of the master plan. Nevertheless, creative agents bring new uses and representations that entail subtle tensions for the symbolic appropriation of space. The projection of a neighbourhood narrative as an 'area in decline' or as a 'cultural enclave' exceeds artists and involves wider powers and agencies, but certainly the symbolic and the representational constitute key elements in the dialectic inclusion of art spaces in the local life. In essence, to consider who has the 'right to the neighbourhood' involves also a politics of place that calls into question who has the right to 'use' and 'project' a certain image of the neighbourhood. This paper is a modest attempt in this regards, but a venue for further, empirically grounded, research is opened.

Third, our research has drawn attention to the limits of master planning meeting the needs of transient grassroots cultural projects. In La Ribera, the master plan outlined initially a blank slate, but cultural actors opposed the plan and strategically proposed to work on the area 'in the meantime'. Now, certain cultural infrastructures will be preserved to strengthen the creative profile of Bilbao, but this response seems somewhat naive and misleading of the built form, social and economic attributes of alternative cultural premises. These depend on studios' affordability, the industrial aesthetics and the do-it-yourself culture in which alternative spaces breed, so if the neighbourhood socio-economic composition is to be changed, the spontaneity and indeterminacy will allegedly disappear.

Alternatively, a non-hierarchical governance framework based on users' autonomy and respect for the actual use seems more permeable to the specificities of cultural brownfields. From this view, grassroots spaces are somewhat regulated by local authorities, which introduces the question of how to preserve self-management and creative independence. For instance: should these spaces be publicly supported, or government interference should be minimal to avoid stifling creativity? What are accountability mechanisms, if any? Do they clash with experimentation? Last, these policies are oriented towards cultural production, but the area's social context is not always a priority. In some cases this is not particularly relevant since the area is vacant, but other places such as La Ribera are lived neighbourhoods. In the latter, planning should not be restricted, not even primarily committed to promoting creative production, but it should be part of a comprehensive strategy that involves the area's socio-economic conditions and the role played by the cultural space in the community. Towards that aim, rather than large-scale redevelopment processes, small-scale interventions adapted to the particular circumstances of the actual built environment and the social conditions may well meet more accurately dwellers' and the creative community's aspirations.

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