The arts in rural place renaissance

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Main aim

To address and discuss socially creative forms of rural renaissance (real utopias) through arts

Real utopias:

- The need to find new responses to deal with adversity or (at least) with inquietude
- Political visions and critical thinking
- Creativity
- Comunication, participation and negociation
- The capacity to make real a project

"A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at" Oscar Wilde
Arts as a main lever of real utopias

• Developing creativity and critical thinking
• Facilitating communication (others than verbal discourse)
• (Re)constructing symbolic meanings
• Distinguishing/ennobling persons, organizations and places
• Being a vehicle of celebration
• Making easier social recognition
Montemor-o-Novo, Alentejo - Portugal
Montemor-o-Novo (MoN)

100 Km / 1 hour highway from Lisbon
ancient latifundia/big landowners rural centre (until the 70’s)

2011:
- 17500 residents (municipality)/ 11000 residents (city)
- 49% with more than 64 years old
- 20% of houses are second residences
- 50% of buildings were constructed before 1970
Montemor-o-Novo (MoN)

Relevant findings on place-based culture and arts
Culture and arts in MoN

The crucial role of local authorities

– Active development of cultural activities since the 80’s – culture as one of the three main pillars of local development

More recently

– Attraction of artists offering heritage buildings as work places and exhibition/performance spaces

– Mediation between the arts/artists and the local community
Culture and arts in MoN

The dynamics of arts and artists

- Integrated vision and transdisciplinarity (work and debate platforms)
- Networking (local, national e international)
- Embeddedness in the local community
- Interaction between arts creation and cultural heritage
Culture and arts in MoN

The present focus

- To understand and evaluate the stimuli and the outcomes of cultural and artistic initiatives

- Is MoN a real utopia?
Listening the artists in MoN

2 focus groups sessions:

(i) What does MoN give to the artists?
What do artists give to MoN?

(ii) Mapping MoN: where is creativity?
Focus group sessions

12 participants:

6 women and 6 men

ages between 31 and 62 years old

Cinema/video – 2
Theatre – 2
Dance – 2
Visual arts – 6

Arts as 1st activity – 8

3 were born in MoN

6 arrive to MoN after 1995
Mon ➔ Artists

- Environment
  - Food
  - No jams

- Human scale

- Tranquility
  - Time enough

- Urbanity

- Seminars
  - Workshops

- Good work
  - conditions

- Municipality
  - supports

- Landscape

- Rurality

- Heritage
  - buildings to be
  - used by artists

- The skyline

- Security

- Accessibility
  - (Lisbon, Spain)

- Cultural diverse
  - supply

- Local policies

- Partnerships
  - with schools

- Transference of
  - ideas

- Dissemination

- Professional
  - encounters

- Starry nights
MoN → Artists

Quality of life
- environment
- food
- no jams
- human scale
- security
- tranquility
- time enough
- urbanity
- rurality

Inspiration 'poetry'
- the skyline
- landscape
- starry nights
- good work conditions

Cultural policies
- culture and arts projects as local priorities
- municipality supports local policies
- cultural diverse supply
- transference of ideas
- dissemination
- professional encounters
- seminars
- workshops

Physical structures
- heritage buildings to be used by artists
- accessibility (Lisbon, Spain)

Local dynamics
- partnerships with schools

MoN
Artists ➔ MoN

- Openness
  - meeting spaces
  - sharing
  - expectations
  - new ideas
  - celebration
  - satisfaction

- Visibility
  - place’s image
  - prestige
  - distinction

- Economic and social dynamics
  - local demand
  - communication
  - rhythm
  - creativity
  - experiments
  - employment

- Change
  - ways of life
  - new routines
  - inquietude
  - innovation
  - values and attitudes

- Thinking
  - mediation
  - knowledge
  - complexity
  - political negotiation
  - critical thinking
  - vision

- MoN
Residence place

Escoural

Monte do Freixo

residence
Residence and work places
Daily routes
Work places
Work places and creative spaces
Inspiration sites
Final remarks

What seems to be relevant for the renaissance of MoN?

• The old city centre (walking, meetings, cafés, ...) – the organic city
• The social and cultural role of squares in the city - the houses turned to each other
• The crucial value of the imbrication between the city and the countryside – the landscape from the window...
• The cultural path of the city
• The commitment of artists with the local community via the municipal authority
What we have published about Montemor-o-Novo

Publications


Conferences and papers

- André I (2005) Por este rio acima... Montemor, uma cidade criativa. Em Conversas à Volta do Rio II, Montemor-o-Novo: Oficinas do Convento
- André I (2008) Les activités culturelles et le développement local : les arts dans la construction des milieux socialement innovateurs. Conferência no Centre de recherche sur les innovations sociales, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canadá
- André I, Abreu A (2008) - Understanding the dynamics of social innovation through arts: the case of Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal. KATARSIS Plenary Workshop 6 on Methodology Development, National Technical University of Athens, Department of Urban and Regional Planning
- André I (2009) Culture, Social Innovation and Development Strategies (a cultural shift in development policies?), Seminário Contemporary Society and Cultural Shifts in Public Policy, Universidade de Aveiro
- André I, Abreu A (2009) - Social creativity and postrural places: the case of Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal. Seminar 6 - Spaces of Social Innovation, University of Newcastle, School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape