



Qualitative planning philosophy and the governance of urban revitalization, a plea for cultural diversity

Carlos J.L. Balsas

Ind. Scholar, 1070 Western Ave. Apt.1, Albany, NY 12203, USA

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Urban revitalization is a substantive area of Urban and Regional Planning philosophy. Culture, arts and entertainment, and urban innovation have assumed a growing importance in urban revitalization. However, there is need to clarify the basis of research endeavors in this area. This paper analyses how downtown revitalization governance has evolved in recent decades. A thorough discussion on the causality of qualitative planning research to study urban revitalization is provided. The paper's approach builds upon various contradictions surrounding culture-based urban policies. Although, it concentrates mostly on the use of cultural mega events in Europe, it recognizes that a main research limitation is the paucity of published research on similar events of alternative cultures in other parts of the world. The paper identifies three main findings: The evolution of downtown revitalization has caused a substantial body of knowledge, which includes myths to be dispelled, and areas of proven success; in spite of various contradictions, downtown cultural policy has been used mostly as a form of civic boosterism; and qualitative planning research methods are critical to study empowering urban revitalization which has liberating city and culture developments at its core.

1. Introduction

Urban revitalization is a substantive area of Urban and Regional Planning philosophy (Rodwin, 2000; Grodach & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007; IADB, 2019; Balsas, 2019). Urban revitalization governance comprises all public and private entities involved in the enhancement of the social, political, physical and economic value of a certain area of a community. There are inherent tensions between the ultimate goals and motivations of these stakeholders. For instance, the real estate developer's aims are to extract rent from urban revitalization interventions without paying attention to the socioeconomic conditions of those likely to benefit from, or be negatively impacted by, the physical improvements, while the residents' goals are likely not to be displaced by interventions aimed at celebrating highbrow cultural flagship equipment, such as shining iconic museums and concert halls. In spite of large investments made to improve the urban livability of poor neighborhoods, impoverished persons are disproportionately impacted by urban planning schemes that tend to favor the most well off residents of cities. Since this is done using design and scientific models that place emphasis on positivistic and monetary calculations above the quality of life and future developmental opportunities of all persons, the research question asks whether qualitative planning research is better equipped to help deliver humanistic person-based results capable of empowering more

culturally diverse livelihoods.

This paper analyses how downtown revitalization governance has evolved in recent decades mostly in the United States and Europe. It has two sub-objectives. The first sub-objective is to provide a comprehensive discussion on the causality of qualitative planning research to study empowering urban revitalization. Causality here is taken as a researcher's positionality on the type of research process conducted and the empowering aims with which the research results are made available to not only the scholarly community but to decision makers as well. Empowering is presented here along what Denhardt & Denhardt (2000, p.549) have defended as the "New Public Service," a movement built on work in "democratic citizenship, community and civil society, and organizational humanism and discourse theory." It parallels Marcuse's ethical underpinning of revealing not only what is "wrong and needing change, but also what is desirable and needs to be built on and fostered" (Marcuse, 2009, p.185). Therefore, the overarching concept of the study is *empowerment in contexts of urban transition*. Empowering urban revitalization is defined as attempts at improving the livelihoods of those most in need and not the perpetuation of the status-quo. The second objective is the partial attempt at contrasting mainstream urban revitalization in the western hemisphere with a plea for more research on the subject of cultural planning in the Arab world.

The unique contribution of the paper is its comprehensive overview

E-mail address: cbusa06@yhoo.com.

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of the evolution of urban revitalization policies and programs in both the United States and Europe and its plea for expanding the scope to other less well known regions of the world. The frustration with positivistic approaches to urban improvements partially justifies the claim for new and more humanistic, person-centered, and empowering urban revitalization theorizations and practical applications.

In the United States, urban revitalization is also known as urban redevelopment. In Europe, urban revitalization is usually referred to as urban regeneration. Different terms illustrate slightly distinct ways of intervention across the Atlantic Ocean. In the US, greater emphasis has been placed on private sector actors as both initiators of planning and implementers of redevelopment (Fainstein, 1998). Geographically and up until recently, urban revitalization governance in the United States focused more on the problems taking place in the downtown area and less in the neighborhoods (Balsas, 2017). This is because downtowns have a structural nature, which makes them very vulnerable.

Contrarily to neighborhoods, which are mostly monofunctional and semi-permanent (e.g., housing), downtown areas are multifunctional and transitory by nature (e.g., retail, services, housing, work, leisure), and can very easily lose one or more of their functions, due to changes in transportation technology, lifestyles, societal shifts in preferences, or market trends. Downtown decline is caused by two sets of factors: Push forces out of the center and pull forces to the suburbs. The former includes increasing land and property values, traffic congestion and shortage of space (Deslatte, Swann, & Feiock, 2017). In contrast, the suburbs have relatively more affordable land, fewer regulations and can be transformed to accommodate individual transport needs. However, decades of suburbanization have caused areas to leave behind unused infrastructure and buildings mostly due to leap-frog development.

Western Europe has also experienced growing concerns with the effects of peripheral suburban development and experienced a real awareness for the negative consequences of urban decline and the need to implement urban regeneration programs. However, in Europe the phenomenon of city center decline has not been as spread out and violent as it was (and still is) in many North American cities, mostly because European cities tend to have many more controls and regulations over the way they can develop, and up until recently there was a stronger sense of social welfare than in the United States. Rather than allowing the same problems to occur, scholars and local and central governments ought to identify findings from exchanging lessons learned and implementing best practices (Rogerson & Giddings, 2020).

Cross-fertilization of research findings and distillation of the effectiveness of public policy practices has professionals studying each other's public administration and governance innovations. Prominent

among these is the public-private partnership mechanism (Sagalyn, 2007), which has been used to build downtown facilities and to help revitalize neighborhood cores for various decades now. While promoting retail activities was one of the major areas of public policy in many North American downtowns, changes in population demographics (e.g., aging of the baby boomers, single-person households) and lifestyles (e.g., increase in tourism and recreation activities) have caused cities to capitalize on “third space” societal areas, such as museums, art galleries, art and cultural districts, performances and cultural events. This is increasingly perceived as contributing greatly to tangible benefits such as local employment, business prosperity, tax revenues, and intangible place-marketing and image enhancing derivatives (Houstoun, 2000; Stevenson, 2013).

This paper's methodological approach builds upon various contradictions surrounding culture-based urban policies. The paper comprises a thorough threefold literature review analysis of:

- the contextual development of downtown revitalization in the United States and Europe,
- the relationship between City and Culture, and
- the criticality of qualitative planning research, with particular emphasis given to the case study method.

The literature was selected based on the author's familiarity with the topic for more than two decades. There was an attempt at identifying and demonstrating the most seminal sources on both the substantive area of *Urban Revitalization and City and Culture*, and the *Criticality of Qualitative Planning Research*. This was done by consulting customary specialized literature databases of scholarly articles and books and their citation scores, especially google scholar (see Tables 1 and 3). This methodological approach is judged to be the most adequate in face of the author's current physical constraints to conduct field-work in countries of the Arab World.

Although, the paper concentrates mostly on the use of cultural mega events in Europe, it also recognizes that a main research limitation is the paucity of published research on similar events of alternative cultures (e.g., Arab Capital of Culture) in other parts of the globe, such as the Middle East and the Arab World (see Fig. 1 and Table 2). Methodologically this is done by comparing and contrasting the most popular cultural cities featured in the 2015 World Cities Culture Report (Owens & Naylor, 2015) with the list of “Capital of Arab Culture” event cities and their respective population in 2021 (ALECSO, 2019; World City Population, 2022).

Table 1
Seminal sources on the substantive area of Urban Revitalisation (and City and Culture).

Author(s)	Source	Citation 2.24.2022(scholar.google.com)
Bassett, K.	Urban cultural strategies and urban regeneration. <i>Environment and Planning A</i> , 1993;	318
Bianchini, F. & Parkinson, M.	(Eds.), <i>Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration</i> , 1993;	1463
Boyle, M.	Civic boosterism in the politics of local economic development. <i>Environment and Planning</i> , 1997;	196
Eisinger, P.	The politics of bread and circuses. <i>Urban Affairs Review</i> , 2000;	608
Griffiths, R.	Cultural strategies and new modes of urban intervention. <i>Cities</i> , 1995;	261
Grodach, C., & Loukaitou-Sideris, A.	Cultural development strategies and urban revitalization. <i>International Journal of Cultural Policy</i> , 2007;	323
Hutton, T. A.	The new economy of the inner city. <i>Cities</i> , 2004;	421
Kong, L.	Culture, economy, policy. <i>Geoforum</i> , 2000;	241
Pratt, A. C.	Creative cities. <i>Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography</i> , 2008;	1097
Richards, G.	The European Cultural Capital event. <i>International Journal of Cultural Policy</i> , 2000;	223
Robertson, K.	Downtown retail revitalization. <i>Planning Perspectives</i> , 1997;	133
Ryberg-Webster, S., & Kinahan, K. L.	Historic preservation and urban revitalization in the twenty-first century. <i>Journal of Planning Literature</i> , 2014;	138
Waterman, S.	Carnival for élites? <i>Progress in Human Geography</i> , 1998;	447
Zukin, S.	<i>Loft Living</i> , 1989, 2014.	3133

Table 2

List of “Capital of Arab Culture” event cities, population 2021 (ALECSO, 2019; World City Population, 2022).

Cairo (1996)	21,322,750	Damascus (2008)	2439,814
Tunis (1997)	2402,680	Al-Quds (Jerusalem) (2009)	944,188
Sharjah (1998)	1794,248	Doha (2010)	646,177
Beirut (1999)	2434,609	Manama (2012)	663,893
Riyadh (2000)	7387,817	Baghdad (2013)	7323,079
Kuwait City (2001)	3177,315	Constantine (2015)	414,000
Amman (2002)	2182,151	Sfax (2016)	277,278
Rabat (2003)	1907,071	Luxor (2017)	422,407
Sana'a (2004)	3075,257	Oujda (2018)	570,257
Khartoum (2005)	5989,024	Port Sudan (2019)	493,366
Muscat (2006)	1589,865	Bethlehem (Palestine) (2020)	216,114
Algiers (2007)	2809,158	Irbid (Jordan) (2021)	559,386

Table 3

Seminal sources on the Criticality of Qualitative Planning Research.

Author(s)	Source	Citation 2.24.2022(scholar.google.com)
Andranovich, G., & Riposa, G.	<i>Doing Urban Research</i> , 2003;	170
Creswell, J. W.	<i>Research Design</i> , 1994;	3739
Gaber, J.	<i>Qualitative Analysis for Planning & Policy</i> , 2020;	174
Grillham, B.	<i>Case Study Research Methods</i> , 2000;	4856
Jacobs, J. M.	The city unbound. <i>Urban Studies</i> , 1993;	165
Kennedy, M. M.	Generalizing from single case studies. <i>Evaluation Quarterly</i> , 1979;	858
Krumholz, N.	Equitable approaches to local economic development. <i>Policy Studies Journal</i> , 1999;	154
Marcuse, P.	From critical urban theory to the right to the city. <i>City</i> , 2009;	1210
Marshall, C., & Rossman, G.	<i>Designing Qualitative Research</i> , 1989/ 1999.	50,244
Richardson, L.	Writing. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), <i>The Handbook of Qualitative Research</i> , 2000;	10,901
Rossman, G., & Rallis, S.	<i>Learning in the Field</i> , 1998;	7911
Yin, R. K.	<i>Case Study Research</i> , 1985/2018.	211,044

2. Contextual development of downtown revitalization

Urban revitalization is a very dynamic area. It has gone through various distinct phases and appears to be still evolving. This section reviews the history of urban revitalization governance in the US and then compares three mechanisms for downtown revitalization being used in the US, the UK and Portugal: The North American Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), the British Town center Management (TCMs) schemes, and the Portuguese Commercial Urbanism projects (CUPs). Similar, although slightly nuanced in nature and application, intervention mechanisms can now be found in many other European countries. As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, the historic differences between the two continents have necessarily shaped the socio-economic conditions and subsequent evolution of urban planning instruments and strategies. For instance, while Great Britain was reconstructing the cities demolished during World War II, the United States was experiencing suburban growth and white flight migration to peripheral areas, facilitated by new highways and expressways. In a later phase, while the US was demolishing entire blocks under the Urban Renewal federal program, some European cities, especially those which escaped war destruction, were busy implementing careful urban conservation schemes and the protection of monumental heritage in inner-city areas.

Overall, the first US redevelopment programs caused the clearance of large sites occupied by dilapidated structures and the construction of new buildings. Demolition was the main method utilized to deal with deteriorated buildings. Early programs were criticized for their ineffectiveness in stimulating new development and also for displacing low-income minorities (e.g., Italian-Americans in Boston, MA and Albany, NY and African-Americans in Baltimore, MD) to make way for business and upper-income residential occupation.

More recent schemes have succeeded in creating “new downtowns” of office buildings and retail centers, but have been blamed for creating dual cities, one for the well to do and one for the low income (Fainstein, 1998, p.615), while failing the middle-class (Florida, 2017). The former author also recognized that many central city governments began suffering from fiscal stress due to their inability to raise money to finance public works resorted to make deals with developers for building permits. Redevelopment started to occur increasingly on an *ad hoc* basis, with each project involving a customized package of financial arrangements, regulatory relief and developers’ own funds. This caused redevelopment planners to negotiate with investors over revitalization priorities, typologies and timings instead of being able to fully chart the future of their municipalities. It has been recognized that with the decline in federal involvement and oversight, cities’ redevelopment innovations increased considerably (Fainstein, 1998, p.617). However, the financial consequences in terms of solvency have been quite dire as Detroit, Michigan and Stockton, California have revealed during and immediately after the global economic crisis of 2008–2010.

Downtown revitalization in the US has been implemented for quite some time to the point of having generated a substantial body of knowledge (see Table 1), which also includes myths to be dispelled, and areas of proven success that can be used to improve these core areas (Robertson, 1997). Among the many existing myths, one finds physical improvements made on a grand scale or in isolation of a revitalization program, the demolishing of historical buildings, developing a key major project, and establishing uniform business hours. Among the many proven successes, one finds a community-driven vision, collaborative leadership and market driven strategies, the capitalization of interventions on an economic theme or niche market, self-sufficiency, pro-business and pro-quality, and the learning of management strategies from competitors (Ryberg-Webster & Kinahan, 2014).

If developing a plan and building large-scale redevelopment projects were standard *modus operandi* in revitalizing downtowns in the past, more recently the emphasis seems to be on urban management. The more recent downtown revitalization processes can be aggregated into two groups: (i) spontaneous, and (ii) institutionalized. The spontaneous are often self-financed by local businesses, initiated by innovative public-private partnerships, and typified by an attention to “historic preservation, consumer marketing, small-business development, pedestrian access, and the cleanliness and safety of streets” (Mitchell, 2001, p.115). This rethought approach has been coined “urban husbandry,” which equates to public-private entrepreneurs working in small-scale organizations seeking ways “to reinvigorate and build on existing community assets in order to stimulate a place-based rejuvenation” (Gratz & Mintz, 1998, p.61). A stronger grass-roots approach to caring for the places we own and utilize regularly has also been pointed out as a reason for the resilience of neighborhoods, even if they result from bottom-up tactical and incremental acts of dedicated activists and community leaders (Grineski, 2006; Fullilove, 2020; Kapucu, Ge, Martin, & Williamson, 2021).

The institutionalized category of downtown revitalization initiatives is best exemplified by the North American Business Improvement Districts. BIDs have been set up in cities throughout the United States of America and Canada (Mitchell, 2001; Grossman, 2016). Although BIDs vary from small retail corridors to large downtown areas, at the turn of the century there were around 800 BIDs across the United States (Levy, 2001), with recent estimates placing that number around 1500 districts. BIDs are formed and controlled by property owners within a self-defined locality. The purpose of a BID is to provide a mechanism whereby property owners can pay for additional services in the public areas around their buildings. The need for such services has arisen as traditional (and generally older) cities have faced competition from shopping malls, out-of-town business/shopping centers and other new business districts. BIDs are therefore private, not-for-profit organizations, which are entitled to levy a rate on all commercial property owners within a specified area for the purposes of providing a range of services (Schaller, 2019) (Fig. 2).

In Western Europe, city center management based on partnership arrangements has been firmly placed on urban agendas. The main issue involved in city center management is to draw up a structural organizational framework for public and private parties to cooperate, in order to improve or preserve the quality of city centers. Prominent among the city center management movement in Western Europe are the British Town Center Management schemes (TCMs). TCMs are the British equivalent to the North American BIDs. Since the turn of the millennium, Town Center Management has gained widespread acceptance from both private and public sectors as a means of maintaining and improving town and city centers in the United Kingdom. TCM in the UK is based on the idea of centralized retail management that emerged as the strategic application and coordination of resources towards a common objective – keep the city center a welcoming and livable place (Coca-Stefaniak, Parker, Quin, Rinaldi, & Byrom, 2009) (Fig. 3). TCM has been defined as a comprehensive response to competitive pressures, which involve development, management and the promotion of urban areas, for the benefit of all concerned.

In Portugal, the first long-term attempt to revitalize a downtown and to apply commercial urbanism principles was carried out during the reconstruction of Lisbon by Marquês de Pombal following the earthquake of 1755. The concept of living above the store and organizing streets according to major themes was fully used in the reconstruction works. But after this, commercial urbanism remained an unutilized planning approach. It entered the vocabulary of Portuguese central and

local policy makers, professional bodies and scholars with the first attempts at implementing urban revitalization schemes centered on retail modernization as a consequence of the shopping center revolution (Varanda, 2005).

Traditional small and medium size retailers started facing the impacts of new large stores in out-of-town locations. Aware of the first socioeconomic problems and influenced by strong lobbying from corporate independent retailers’ associations, the central government implemented a program of subsidies for retail modernization. This program aimed not only to help financially the modernization of small and medium size commercial enterprises per se but also their association and union representatives, and city center commercial revitalization projects. These projects show primarily a “top down” approach, with the central government subsidizing, through European Union funds, the commercial modernization of traditional small and medium size establishments and the revitalization of city centers. Since the participation rates of independent retailers in these early commercial urbanism projects were relatively modest, the contribution of these projects to the improvement of the livability of Portuguese city centers has yet to be fully established (Guimarães, 2017).

BIDs, TCMs and CUPs borrow many of their concepts from private shopping center management. However, the management of shopping centers is not quite as complex as that facing the city centers with their many roles, numerous stakeholders and the wide variety of customers. But more than developing a large project, it seems that public and private parties are searching for an ideal organizational framework that will cause city center revitalization and its intended quality-improvement to crystallize. So, more than redevelopment, it seems that the most important activities are management and collaboration.

Finally, and more recently, e-commerce has also started to create various challenges to the livability and vibrancy of European inner-city areas. A number of strategies aimed at ameliorating those transformations has been identified, which include:

- digital services,
- moderate fertilization,
- local community groups,
- vacancy management,
- concentration of inner-city retail locations, and
- alternative forms of mobility (Stepper & Kurth, 2020).

Of these, moderate festivalization, local community groups, and alternative forms of mobility are directly related to the theme of City and Culture, which is discussed in the next section.

3. City and culture interventions

Culture, arts and entertainment, and urban innovations have assumed a growing importance in the revitalization of cities. More than a symbolic importance, these sectors are having a real impact in the urban political economy of cities (Hutton, 2004; Kong, 2000; Diksmuide & Hambrecht, 2012). New emphasis is on place-marketing and the reconfiguration of industrial landscapes into arenas of culture, the arts, tourism and leisure (Burrup, 2019). In an era of deindustrialization and deep economic restructuring, planning has turned to the arts and culture as tools of urban regeneration (Griffiths, 1993). City leaders have been using arts festivals, convention centers and museums, sports arenas, festival marketplace malls and shopping districts as keystones of their urban economic development strategies, hoping that they will generate investment, high employment multipliers in the hospitality and retail sector, and local tax revenues (Eisinger, 2000, p.317). Three models of



Fig. 1. World Cities featured in the World Cities Culture Report 2015 (Courtesy of Owens & Naylor, 2015).



Fig. 2. Center City District Business Improvement District in Philadelphia, PA, USA (Author's own, 2004).

cultural policy have been distilled: (i) promoting civic identity, (ii) production and dissemination of cultural products, and (iii) city boosterism (Griffiths, 1995).

Cultural policy in the US has been used mainly as a form of civic boosterism rather than as a way of alleviating real poverty; the capacity of culture to improve the image of a particular place, and to enhance its attractiveness for outside investors and visitors (Grodach & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2017). Arts and culture are conceived by local elites as part of the local urban growth machine (Logan & Molotch, 2007; Zheng, 2017). Cities are capitalizing on their advantages as sites of consumption and recreation. Urban entertainment amenities gained renewed attention at the turn of the century and thereafter. They differed from those in earlier interventions in the following ways: “the pace and variety of construction have increased, the demographic and economic context is different, the intended patron base has shifted from the city’s residents to visitors, and the scale of entertainment construction is significantly greater” (Eisinger, 2000, p.319).

New York City’s SoHo is very often used as a model of successful urban cultural revitalization where old converted buildings house galleries and artists. However, the problem was that the upgraded properties caused gentrification with some displacement of the initial artists and residents (Zukin, 2014). Although other urban arts and cultural districts throughout the US are normally diverse in their offerings, most of them are integrated into the urban fabric of the city. The core mix includes museums, symphony and recital halls, art galleries, theatres, opera houses, cinemas and arts education facilities. Few arts districts have their own BIDs, though BIDs traditionally organize arts and culture events and festivals as part of their “clean, safe and attractive” philosophy of intervention (Rushton, 2015).

To build a city as an entertainment venue for visitors presents some dilemmas (Borchard, 2007). It affects the bonds of trust and accountability between citizens and their leaders, and specific projects can also distort the civic agenda (Eisinger, 2000, p.323). This is because funding decisions are many times shielded from the uncertain outcome of a public voter, even though most entertainment projects are highly profitable to their investors (e.g., Rock in Rio music festivals) so that they can be built without much public support.

An example of how the civic agenda can be skewed is the increased use of public safety towards those projects, while peripheral neighborhoods may see criminality rise. But despite this top-down “redevelopment cultural planning,” there are also communities and city planners integrating cultural planning in other areas of public policy, such as restoring old movie theatres, and implementing “bottom-up” plan-based cultural development plans (Borrup, 2019).

Urban leaders in Western Europe have also looked at the US experience with cultural redevelopment planning. This was very visible in Britain due to political affinities between the Reagan and the Thatcher governments. Many waterfront revitalization projects with strong cultural components in Europe (Mullin & Kotval, 2015) were influenced by American models such as Baltimore’s Harbor Place (Del Rio, 2016; 2018), Boston’s Quincy Market, and New York’s South Street Seaport (Garvin, 2014; Guinand, 2021). These strategies emphasized political consensus, the importance of partnership between businesses and public sector agencies, the value of “flagship” cultural projects in promoting a city’s image and the contribution of culture to economic development (Bianchini, 1993b). Despite considerable national variations, the same author also argued that it was possible to identify a common trajectory in the development of cultural policies in Western European cities. At their inception, there was a decentralization of cultural funding and responsibilities from national to local governments, while in later decades there was a shift in the policy rationale from social/political priorities to economic development objectives (Bianchini, 1993b, pp.5–6). And this trend continued with what have been termed “urban propaganda” projects (Boyle, 1997).

Nonetheless, there are a number of contradictions surrounding culture-based urban policies (Griffiths, 1995). There is a tendency to draw on a restricted palette of recipes (e.g., concert halls, international festivals, aquaria, and post-modern architectural projects), there are doubts about the alleged economic benefits of cultural initiatives, and the already mentioned skewed civic agendas (development priorities). In addition to these contradictions, four strategic dilemmas have been identified (Bianchini, 1993a, p.200). First, should the audience be primarily composed of investors, tourists and consumers or residents? Second, should the geographical focus be the downtown or the



Fig. 3. Reading City center (Author’s own, 2014).

neighborhoods, with all the possibilities for (un)desirable gentrification? Third, should those strategies focus on cultural consumption or on production? And finally, should they be directed towards buildings and spaces (permanent) or towards programs and performances (ephemeral)?

The European Capital of Culture can be considered a major event, since it shows how cultural festivals have become important in stimulating economic development and improving the image of cities to attract investment, even though it is flawed with all the contradictions and dilemmas explained above. Nevertheless, this event has become so popular that bids to host it have taken on “the same kind of competition only usually seen for the Olympic games” (Richards, 2000, p.159). The event has been hosted not only by many of the true European capitals, such as Athens, Berlin, and Paris, but also by non-traditional cultural centers, such as Antwerp and Bergen (Ooi, Håkanson & Lacava, 2014).

Lisbon, Porto and Guimarães have all hosted the European Capital of Culture event in Portugal (DaCosta Holton, 2002; Balsas, 2004; Sarmento & Ferreira, 2017). The support for this type of cultural events by the central government shows a more interventionist role in the field of culture than during the *Estado Novo* period. The main idea supporting the event is the expectation that a cultural image will enhance the attractiveness of the city for economic investments. Besides the physical rehabilitations, attracting visitors is one of the most important aspects of this cultural development strategy. While past events have been highly varied, they have shown that the events themselves do not necessarily lead to a long-term increase in staying visitors. But again, the major argument used by policy-makers is that there are long-term cultural benefits, which will last longer than the event itself (Fig. 4).

The use of cultural policy has been interpreted pessimistically as a cultural lockdown “carnival mask” (Waterman, 1998) used by local and national politicians to conceal growing social inequality, polarization and conflict within cities, or optimistically, as an attempt at social cohesion and shaping new civic identities (Bianchini, 1993b). Despite the promotional nature of many cultural policies, economists remain doubtful of the direct impact of culture on economic development (Azevedo, 2017). An example of this, is Storper’s (Storper, 2013, p.224) claim that “cities are workshops not playgrounds.” In fact, the economic impacts of mega-events have been exaggerated. The infusion of high-brow museums, restaurants, bars and entertainment venues seem to offer few guarantees of significant increases in employment or income for residents (Krumholz, 1999; Wagenaar, 2011). Cultural institutions provide few high wage jobs and most of the new jobs are low wages with little career mobility.

Finally, there is a tension between the aims of cultural and economic regeneration. Cultural regeneration is more concerned with themes such as community self-development and self-expression. Economic regeneration is more concerned with growth and property development and finds expression in prestige projects and place marketing. It has been argued that economic regeneration does not necessarily lead to cultural regeneration or to the improvement of the welfare of those most in need (Bassett, 1993).

It is important to note that even if top-down cultural mega-events cannot reach all those most in need; however, community-based arts and culture events and programs can function as engines for community economic development through a myriad of capacity building continuous and regular actions and processes, under the umbrella of neighborhood-based grassroots organizations. Moreover, we are also hard pressed for published research on the effectiveness of alternative cultural events (e.g., Arab Capital of Culture) in the Middle East and the Arab World (Stevenson, 2013). Bethlehem in the State of Palestine held the designation in 2020 and the city of Irbid in Jordan held it last year

(Gharaibeh & Lefdlawi, 2019) – see Table 2. In fact, Adam Bert’s edited book titled “2008 Arab Capital of Culture Damascus, Arab Capital of Culture, Arab culture, Arab world, Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts, Studio Festi” (2012) is a rare exception (Fig. 5), as at the beginning of March 2022 no books on the Arab Capital of Culture event were found on either GoogleBooks or WorldCat.

4. The criticality of qualitative planning research methods

Planning methods refer to a set of analytical and quantitative techniques used by researchers in their professional and scholarly activities. Research has been characterized as “a process of conceptualizing, designing, conducting, and writing up what is learned; it is recursive, iterative, messy, tedious, challenging, full of ambiguity, and exciting” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.3). Social research is organized around two activities: Measurement (observation) and interpretation. Qualitative approaches to understanding the urban realm have long been overshadowed by the hegemony of positivism, which was more concerned with measurement and quantitative analysis. But recent years have brought fundamental changes to the way the city is understood, “centering qualitative approaches in urban observation, commentary and analysis” (Jacobs, 1993, p.830). This does not mean that quantification of facts, occurrences, amounts, variations, and tendencies through structural equation modeling or difference-in-difference analysis is not relevant to studying urban revitalization with mixed methods (Gaber, 2020).

Urban research is “the systematic examination of the nature of political, social, and economic activities, processes, and outcomes at different spatial levels” (Andranovich & Riposa, 2003). According to Rossman and Rallis (1998, pp.1–10), the assumptions to conduct a qualitative research study are that “it takes place in the natural world, uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, is emergent rather than tightly prefigured, and is fundamentally interpretive.” The same authors also recognize that the qualitative researcher tends to view social phenomenon holistically, while “systematically reflect[ing] on who he or she is in the inquiry, [being] sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study, and us[ing] complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative” (1998, pp.1–10).

A qualitative methodology is particularly relevant in research that delves in-depth into complexities and processes, on little known phenomenon or innovative systems, on informal and unstructured linkages and processes in organizations, and in research for which relevant variables have yet to be identified (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) – see Table 3. Qualitative research uses inductive reasoning, which means that theories are constructed or tested from the experience (Creswell, 1994; Næss, 2016). Especially pertinent to this discussion is Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) that aims to balance the breadth and depth of analysis when the researcher has acquired substantial knowledge of a case study (Hudson & Kühner, 2013). Most City and Culture research within contexts of urban revitalization governance falls within a qualitative inquiry focus typical of a society and culture genre tradition, which often is better analyzed with research on case study, groups and organizations (Harrison, 2018). In the case study strategy, the researcher explores “a single entity or phenomenon bounded by time and activity and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time” (Creswell, 1994, p.12).

Case study strategies have a distinctive place in evaluation research. They are used in descriptive cultural or policy studies and in urban political research (Grillham, 2000). Case studies are the preferred strategy when how and why questions are being posed, when the

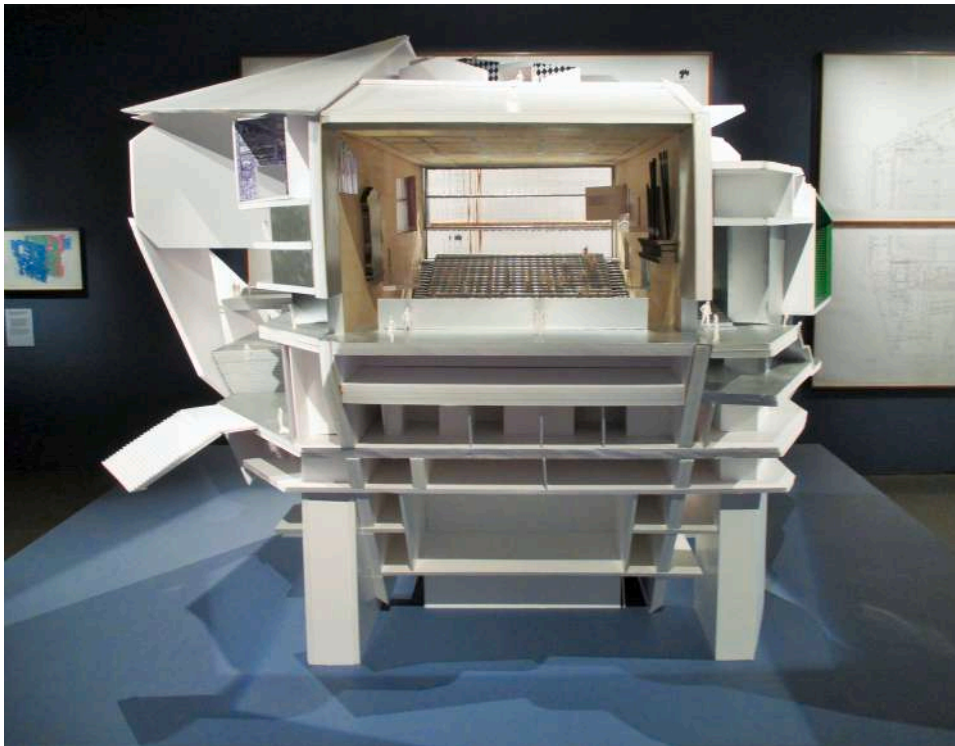


Fig. 4. Casa da Música built for the 2001 European Capital of Culture in Porto, Portugal (Author's own, 2017).

researcher has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (Yin, 2018). They can explain the causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for a survey or an experimental strategy. They can be used to describe an intervention and the real-life context in which it occurred. They can also illustrate certain topics within an evaluation, and they may be used to explore situations in which the interventions being evaluated have no clear, single set of outcomes (Yin, 2018).

Most case studies focus on a single city or on a pairwise combination of cities, such as the cities of Newcastle Upon Tyne in the UK and Newcastle in New South Wales in Australia examined recently in a study on the future of the city center (Rogerson & Giddings, 2020). Qualitative research often contributes more to a real understanding of urban politics than the best multivariate statistical research (Deleon, 1997). Case studies of cities excel at characterization. Critics might object that a sample of one case offers slim basis for generalizing results to other cities. However, as it has been explained, “if statistical inference were the goal, that would indeed be a real limitation; [however] case studies have a different aim, which is to gain insight into the conjectural patterns linking many variables in one city and to describe them accurately in terms that might apply to other cities” (Deleon, 1997, p.20). The criteria of longitudinal information, multidisciplinary assessment and precision of characterization have been offered as a suitable way to generalize from a single case study (Kennedy, 1979).

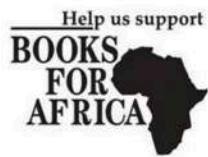
It is important to recognize that generalizations are normally done by the user of the case data rather than by the person who originated the case data, this means that other researchers will ultimately make their own decisions as to whether findings are applicable in their situations. Another response to the “sample of one” criticism is that there are many

opportunities within a single case study to expand the number of observations available for testing the theory (Deleon, 1997), and triangulating data sources for example. And this is possible because a case study strategy is methodologically eclectic. By methodology, we mean the study of how we know things rather than what we know.

It has also been argued that the distinguishing features of the case study methodology include problem definition, design, data collection, data analysis, composition and reporting (Yin, 2018). A research proposal typically has two major sections: The conceptual framework and the design and research methods (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Roughly corresponding to the what (the – urban revitalization - substantive focus of the inquiry) and the how (the means for conducting that inquiry). The typical qualitative data collection and analysis methods include primary techniques (e.g., photovoice, interviewing, observing, focus groups, collecting physical artifacts, surveying, reviewing documents, etc.), and secondary methods (e.g., historical analysis, archival records, films, videos and photographs, and netnography, etc.) (Silverman, 2015).

Three principles for data collection have been offered: (i) use multiple sources of evidence, (ii) create a case study database, and (iii) maintain a chain of evidence (Yin, 2018). Analyzing qualitative data includes organizing the data, immersing in the data, generating categories and themes, coding, searching for alternative understandings and writing the manuscript.

In terms of criteria for soundness, the conventional positivism paradigm uses construct validity, internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Yin, 2018), but there are four other alternative constructs that more accurately reflect the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm:



Adam Cornelius Bert (Ed.)

2008 Arab Capital of Culture

Damascus, Arab Capital of Culture, Arab culture, Arab world, Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts, Studio Festi

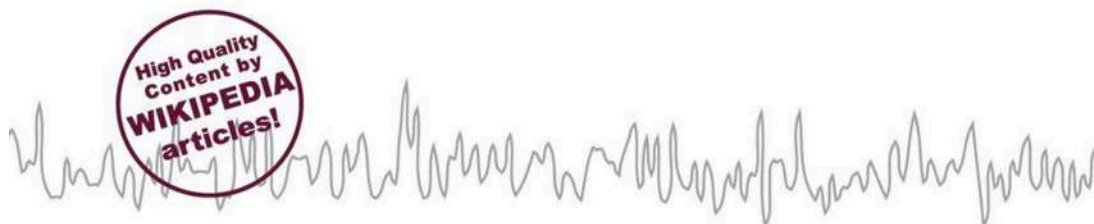


Fig. 5. Example of a publication on the Arab Capital of Culture Damascus 2008 (Courtesy of Chromo Publishing, 2012).

- credibility – the goal is to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner that the subject was accurately identified and described;
- transferability – in which the researcher must argue that his findings will be useful to other similar situations;
- dependability – in which the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study, and changes in the design created by an increasingly refined understanding of the setting; and
- confirmability – regards whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by other researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, pp.192–194).

These constructs are at the core of the qualitative paradigm and their humanistic perspective make them slightly more accessible than the heavy quantitative model-based research, which only with a few exceptions, tends to be utilized to perpetuate the status-quo and to not guarantee the empowerment aims of the desired research.

Hopefully, by living in “postmodernist and poststructuralism climates which allow us to link language, subjectivity, social organization and power in order to create meaning and useful knowledge about the surrounding world” (Richardson, 2000, pp.516–518), we are able to conduct competent and ethical research, which includes “comfort with ambiguity, a deep respect for the experiences of others, sensitivity to complexity, humility in making claims for what we have learned, and thinking that it is creative, analytic, and evocative” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.xii).

Critical qualitative planning methods can potentially empower researchers’ wisdom to feel more confident analyzing complex socio-cultural phenomena, which are typically embroiled in perverse locking relations of privilege, power, and limited access to resources at the expense of underprivileged societal groups. And perhaps even more importantly, such methods can help concerned constituencies utilize capacity building formulations, such as “expose, propose, and politicize” approach, in enabling more wide-spread community-based and culture-led urban revitalization processes (Marcuse, 2009). An example of this approach can be partially found in Radoine’s (2013, p.241) plea not only for cultural resilience in Sharjah’s contemporary urbanism, but in the “making of cities in the Gulf countries.” This plea follows Bamyeh’s (2000) earlier historical and contemporary formations of cultural globalization, specifically as a corollary to the political realm Marcuse has aimed toward.

5. Conclusion

This paper demonstrated that urban revitalization is a substantive area of Urban and Regional Planning philosophy (Balsas, 2004; 2017; 2019; Balsas & Silva, 2018). Urban revitalization has gone through various distinct phases and appears to be still evolving. Culture, arts and entertainment, and urban innovation have assumed a growing importance in the revitalization of cities (Pratt, 2008). The evolution of downtown revitalization governance in the US has generated a great amount of knowledge. Some of this knowledge has even migrated across the Atlantic Ocean causing the transformation of Town Center Management schemes into Business Improvement Districts and Commercial Urbanism projects into area-based regeneration initiatives. BIDs were introduced in the UK in 2004. In the first comprehensive overview of BIDs in the UK since their introduction 15 years ago, it has been argued that BIDs acceptance in the UK has experienced a general improvement over time (Grail et al., 2019). Various commercial urbanism projects allied with urban tourism campaigns have contributed to greater urban livability but also to some degree of displacement and gentrification.

The paper also recognized that cultural policy has been used mainly as a form of city marketing, the capacity of culture to improve the image and attractiveness of a particular place, rather than as a way of alleviating real poverty. Moreover, it also highlighted the tension between the aims of cultural and economic regeneration, and provided a thorough discussion on the relevance of qualitative planning research methods to study urban revitalization governance practices that have liberating city and culture developments at their core. In synthesis, the paper identified these three main key findings:

- downtown revitalization has generated a substantial body of knowledge, which includes myths to be dispelled, and areas of proven success;
- in spite of various contradictions, downtown cultural policy has been used mostly in a civic boosterism perspective, and
- qualitative planning research methods are critical to study empowering cultural planning urban revitalization interventions.

A limitation of this paper is its mostly general analysis of published literature without considering specific case studies. Further research on these topics could identify and analyze in-depth case studies where urban revitalization schemes have both succeeded and failed, and extract lessons learned for cities elsewhere, especially in the middle-east. A core concern of the case study selection can well be the emphasis on making a difference in the livelihoods of residents, and not simply in upgrading the built environment of cities.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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