TITLE:

Docklands engine in transition / Hybrid identity towards new urbanity: the (unpredictable) role of Art

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Docklands move in transition from old uses toward new urbanity at the border between city and sea. The process of change of these areas began decades ago. Nevertheless, as unstable sites they present a series of characteristics that are inherent to the understanding of this process: the size, the vitality, the short term conquests, the location, the overlapping of city and port, the presence of infrastructure, the network of relationships, the identity (meaning a presence in a map), and the wish of beauty as a possible outcome in the near future.

Spontaneous transformation usually affects relatively small sites, which can be a reference for larger developments. The vitality of a fraction of the whole area offers the chance to further develop the economy of a system. It seems a contradiction when we have spoken for decades of forgotten, derelict, abandoned spaces. Understanding that beside being abandoned and forgotten most of them are beyond the interest of investors and developers is a key to uncover their opportunities; Often the regeneration and development plans seem to think and act big: mainly the intention is to achieve a long-term vision through long-term initiatives, at extremely high costs. Experience shows how unsteady and dynamic areas can be activated instead through small initiatives, that lead them to grows dynamically and adapting to change.

The location is a central issue in the regeneration of the areas. Sometime industrial harbor areas sit next to the city centers, due to the port being the historic motor of the city's economy. More often these sites are peripheral but they surely share in a very central position when viewed at a larger scale.

They can be than well connected locally, with the city centre, but also at a larger scale: their network becomes than international. The "intersection"and coexistence between city and port is a theme worth investigation. Preserving or designing a mixed use city in these areas is remarkable but extremely complex commitment. The difference in scale, function, service and interests won't give the chance of an easy resolution. There is the need to understand what scale of new development could benefit from it, and how. Harbor sites are always accompanied by a rail link that, in many cases, intersects the site. The railway network includes a station and a strategic net of infrastructure such as roads, knots, exits, and services. Connection is a strong and important element -ready to use- in former industrialization places. In general each element has a strong identity: they have a familiar name and they can be precisely indicated on a map. Moreover, they are present in the mental map of all the users, even before the marketing strategies become involved in the process of change. Naturally, at a critical point in the course of its development, the spontaneous initiation of a change must give way to deeper support, in order to look for a partnership or network of connections to make the short term conquests grow bigger. The sense of freedom in an area

should trigger a freedom of ideas. A negotiation between agents and actors of the area and city is needed. All of these characteristics brought harbor areas to the centre of the development debate and, on the other hand, they attracted groups of artists to occupy them, causing a direct change, at least in use. The regeneration of a port area plays around the water which element which becomes the attraction for the idea of transition. Water is both a threat and an opportunity. Water attracts and is the omnipresent future of public space in port transformation areas. Water inspires, it suggests admiration and mystery, it is dangerous and beautiful, it is life. It means Identity, vitality, development and connection. Water is the "dynamic constant". Water is the added value to the place that designates it as a golden apple towards a cultural and artistic regeneration. The position of the city at the riverside or at the sea side determines its layout. After a total transformation in society and in the city, the layout can be reinvented. The presence of the "Water element" generates attraction for people and program, for beautiful views (and pollution!): these elements amplify its potential for smart spatial solutions. The future outcome and character of the waterfront line is related to this result. From both points of view, port heritage offers a unique chance to giving the area a new face. The reference of its maritime past can be used as a brand for new development.

Waterfront development has become a sign of the post-industrial city. Cases such as Baltimore's Harbor District, London Docklands, Cardiff Bay and Barcelona's Port Vell represent the transformation of districts in industrial decline into areas of new prosperity. Simultaneously, redundant industrial buildings are being re-coded as sites for culture. But if the post-industrial city is a post-modern site of abundance, its benefits are unequally distributed; centers of affluence construct margins of diversification. What strategies, then, are appropriate for art, culture or development in post-industrial cities, especially in such strategic areas as the waterfront?

Watersides have come to denote an affluent lifestyle in developments such as London Docklands and Port Vell, contrary to their history of hard labour and struggle, is now hidden behind the same physical structure.

The re-use of redundant commercial and industrial spaces for cultural purposes (which then re-name their surroundings as cultural districts) is a frequently encountered element in urban development, in keeping with a symbolic economy of culture, heritage, fashion and tourism through which cities are re-presented in a context of globalization.

Such sites are promoted as an iconic "place-identity", while conforming to global, market-led patterns of development. And it is in sites such as the Docklands that the post-industrial city of re-named sites of culture, and the global city of trans-national financial service industries, become contiguous. These models are the driving force behind most of new city developments.

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This obvious attempts of the city to reach maturity and to represent itself through its harbor areas, collides with the different conditions of the "infrastructure port". Sometimes the harbor retreats, leaving its space to the town, but more often, it grows faster, giving life to an interesting conflict. The "border space" – as we call it - plays an important role in the image, identity and the development of the city. The border between sea and city is a space. It is indeed an important space, a filter, an engine for the development of a new contemporary city identity, for the building of a relationship between the infrastructural "port" and the surrounding territory, being it urban or not.

Very often the art, in the way it expresses, can function as a filter - it has a role of an intermediary, role that once was peculiar of architecture.

The issue is to understand whether the art has this role or not, to study how it operates and what kind of landscape it could produce. It is to seek out, where it exists, a relationship between events taking place- almost unpredictable - in harbor areas, and to determine the relationship between art, architecture and a new urbanity.

There is a need to cross these territories, mapping the "events", and going through the complexity of the space and the system.

Among all forms of art, theatre, visual art and dance have few common research fields, exchanges, contamination. The investigation is to commence with the "events", collecting news, mapping the areas "taken" by the art for performance, exhibitions and show, and relate the collected datas to a research field. The
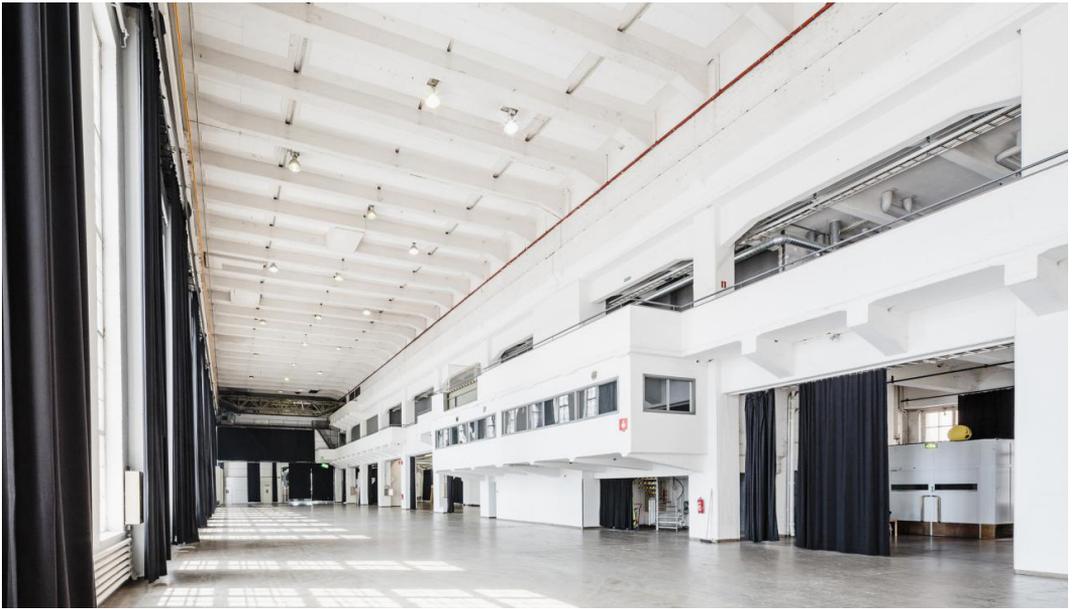
Fig2 / Kiinteistö Oy Kaapelitalo in Helsinki, Finland
*source / www.kaapelitehdas.fi*
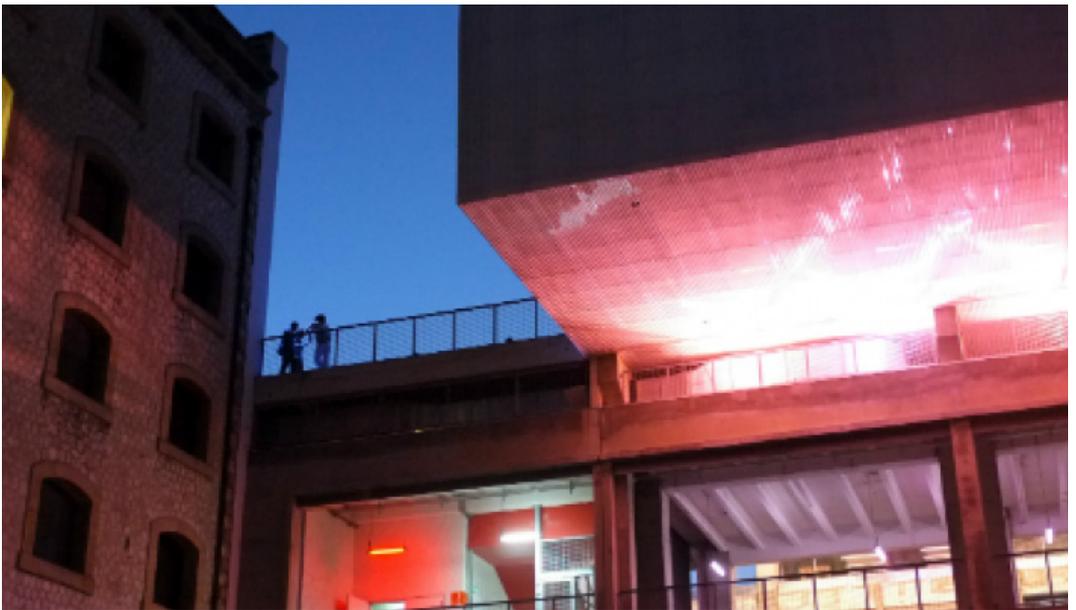
Fig3 / The "Friche la Belle de Mai" in Marseille, France
source / www.new-hotel.com
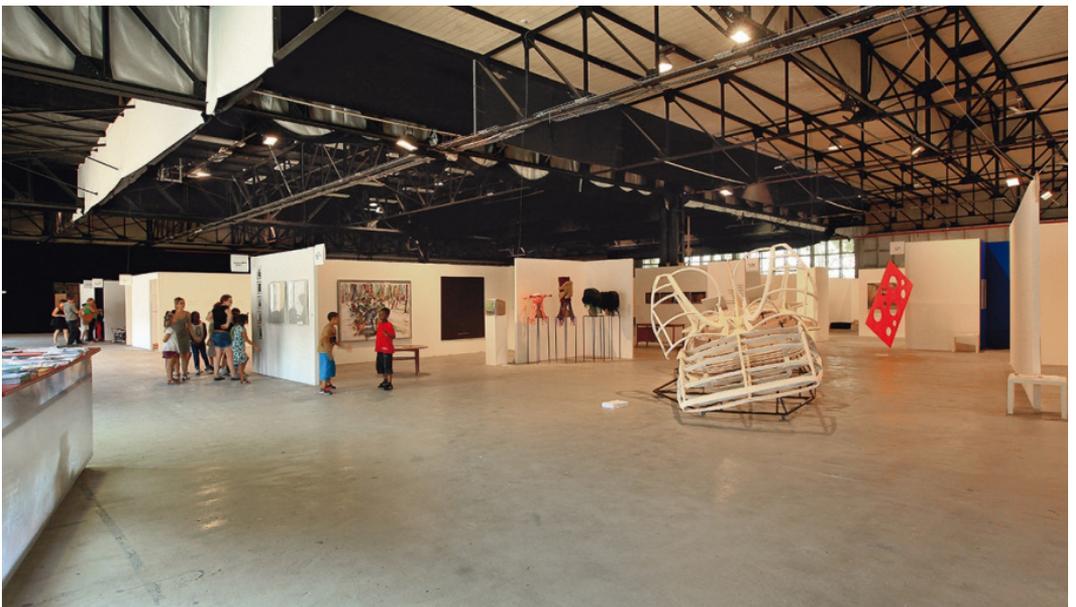
Fig4 / Internal view of the "Friche la Belle de Mai" in Marseille
source / www.urban-reuse.eu

Fig5 / Skate park in Marseille, France
source / www.tourisme-marseille.com

point of view is different. Contemporary art does not seek any longer for museums and theaters to express itself, not only, at least. It uses and searches for other types of space. The challenge is to investigate their appearance, location, potential, way of working and visibility. The investigation from two points of view – art and architecture- is a need to make the common living room more comfortable.

The space of the harbor finally became a stage where the city represents itself. It is its "space of events".

The archaeology that former industrial activities leave behind begins to be filled with new meaning, as they wait to become part of the town.

In some cases, a big event transforms the whole space. In others the place becomes a stage for a series of contemporary events and installations, starting to leave its imprint to the city imaginary. The urban and architectonic design of these areas should be more free in expression, helping to bridge the gap between art and architecture, to become a designed set – a backdrop for the new urbanity.

The border becomes than a laboratory where to experiment with new ways of producing art and architecture. Contemporary art as a dynamic expression animates the place in a contiguous way. The process itself becomes dynamic. Art, set free, from the museum, searches for a more direct connection to the public. Increasingly events and public exhibitions have been held in public, non institutional

places, challenging the rarefied aura of the traditional museum. The museum, in this way, became demystified; the process of democratization lead to a re-evaluation of user and context. Believing that art to date was too exclusive and elitist, artists began to work in public spaces far beyond art's traditional physical and intellectual boundaries. Their light and sound installations are located in new chosen points within the city, at places frequently used by people. The moving of the art from the museum to non-institutional locations, or public urban spaces, has changed both the role of the art, the artist and the architecture.

The role of the artist has become multifunctional: if the artwork has to deal with the public than its author has to be politician, designer and architect. In this new reacting architecture the building becomes a place of exchange, its structure permeable. The route to the finished design is more significant to us than the finished design itself, the process more than the result. The man made surrounding is defined as a series of events or a series of voids in which the unexpected manifests itself. The definition does not refer to a finished product but describes a series of fragments, linked to the person experiencing them; the call for an interactive and flexible architecture has re-established an obvious but long forgotten element in the planning and making of buildings and people. If architecture can only be understood by moving through it, then it can only exist if it is used. If we call for urban planning to

leave room for the unexpected then this must be understood as a play to prepare the ground for spontaneous human interaction. The user is once more the link between the idea and the physical reality and the catalyst in the creation of space.

Art and architecture seem both to be objects of desire. They have broken their historical moulds, and now the un-heroic is fashionable, the ordinary is acceptable.

Art substitutes the object to look at, for the environment to be felt. A new relationship between theory and practice, between the faculty of reason and physical experience is defined. The increasing necessity to invent new models is the consequence of the current process of transformation of the city environment. The role of the artist and architect is being redefined, and, as such, our expectations should follow. From another point of view, culture and entertainment are an important part of public life and have always been an important function of cities.

The policy of improving cultural facilities is currently playing an important role in the image of cities. Unrelated to the tourist industry of, but rather to central city marketing, in which the possession of cultural and entertainment facilities is a major factor in shaping a civic image, attractive to investors, residents and tourists. In replacing the existing urban image, there is great investment on campaigns that accentuate the role of culture and recreation as major components. As the image becomes more attractive it creates a net of new economic activities, with culture having an important role. At the urban scale the cultural function has a tendency towards spatial clustering, if only because the various facilities are serving the same nightlife market. Often facilities for the performing arts serve as a focus for specialized catering, shopping, and other related activities in marketed cultural quarters.

Smaller cities rarely have the market support to develop high order cultural events of this scale. Short festivals can often provide a range of events over a short time span to local and visiting populations. However, major regional capitals make intelligent use of cultural facilities in the shaping of their image and identity, and not having planned cultural quarters, they can at least use such facilities as elements in land use planning.

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