Musical vs. silenced neighbourhoods: Music in urban public space as (un)sustainable heritage?

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Knowing that music has played an important role in accompanying social activities in almost every culture (gatherings, rituals, religious practices, labour, and daily life), from the earliest civilisation to the present day, the paper discusses if art/music in public space (e.g. installations, street performances, concerts and festivals) can contribute to cultural sustainability of a community.

As part of the emerging discourse on culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, it builds on prior contributions underlining the vital role of art in public space in community social life (Mean and Tims 2005), and its probability to positively contribute to more memorable and meaningful urban place-making (Tornaghi 2007).

Referring to the concept of community wellbeing as a combination of "social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential" (Wise-man and Brasher), the author goes one step further. By incorporating art/music in public space in this notion, together with widely accepted claims that such initiatives affect people and their social behaviour, the paper discusses essential, yet, sceptical questions: can music truly encourage communication and social interaction in public space? Is symbolic level of inclusion sufficient for stating that it develops one’s sense of connectedness and social belonging, what is more, facilitate liveability, wellbeing, and cultural sustainability of a community? Is it urban sustainable heritage (or not)?

By making a distinction between music and noise (Atali 2007), and assuming that cultural participation, co-creation, community specific (Miles 1997) and dialogical public art (Kester 2004) are of utmost importance for cultural sustainability and culture-led sustainable community development, the paper argues that long-term effects of bottom-up initiatives are not conceivable without local government’s support. Moreover, it gives numerous good examples from across the world, and policy recommendations for local governments throughout Serbia.

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