



# Culture and the City: Towards a Context-Aware Assessment Framework

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**Abstract.** How to assess the capacity of cultural initiatives to generate social value in urban contexts? Which lenses allow capturing dynamics that affect their transformative potential? Assuming that the social value of cultural actions goes far beyond their direct impacts and depends on their capacity to intercept broader trajectories of change, the contribution identifies observation lenses capable of rendering a complex picture of relations between actors, actions, and context-specific variables. Through a process-oriented approach, the authors put contexts back at the centre and look not so much at impacts *per se* as at impact generation mechanisms. Moving beyond economic impact evaluation, they look at culture-driven social value generated in three impact domains: health and well-being, urban regeneration, and social cohesion. Without proposing a comprehensive evaluation scheme, the contribution identifies obstacles and enabling factors influencing the transformative capacity of cultural actions on an urban scale. In line with the conceptual and methodological setting of the research - carried out within the H2020 MESOC (MEasuring the SOcial impacts of Culture) Project - the authors reflect on these evaluative objects and question whether (and to what extent) they support a reflection on specific cultural actions but also on the capacity of urban contexts with different characteristics to welcome and promote transformation dynamics towards social impact generation.

**Keywords:** social impact assessment · cultural-led transformation · place-sensitive evaluation

## 1 Introduction and Theoretical Background

From long before the emergence of the “creative city” label (Florida, 2003; Landry, 2009; Evans, 2017), urban studies and cultural research have explored the relationship between culture and urban transformation, often invoking cultural actions as an essential driver of change in cities. In this debate, a large body of literature focuses on the role of large-scale cultural policies and strategies, looking at their medium and long-term socio-spatial effects and identifying cities as the stage where these effects materialise. A different perspective lends more to the capacity of cultural actions to generate social impacts in specific settings and the role played by context-specific dynamics. This latter point of view often identifies cities as the preferred loci of cultural production and

artistic activation (Parkinson & Bianchini, 1993) or as fields of experimentation where social innovation processes can emerge and consolidate (Concilio & Tosoni, 2019). In this regard, particular attention is paid to local cultural actions - from urban cultural policies to grassroots initiatives - and their capacity to produce impacts beyond the usual economic terms. When reflecting on the social impact of cultural actions in cities, literature often refers to local development (Sacco et al., 2014; Sacco et al., 2013) and urban regeneration (García, 2004; Miles & Paddison, 2005), emphasising aspects related to community activation (Kay, 2000), social integration, and quality of life. In line with this perspective, more recent research and policy frameworks focus on cultural action's contribution to long-term and high-level "missions" (Mazzucato, 2017; Mazzucato & Dibb, 2019), exploring their capacity to trigger or accelerate, e.g. democratisation processes (Négrier, 2023) or sustainability transition (Loorbach, 2022). In this case, the transformative capacity of (local) cultural initiatives is defined by the extent to which they can align or interact with broader trajectories of change (Concilio et al., 2023).

In this last perspective, a key challenge is represented by assessing the effective contribution of cultural actions in terms of social value generation within specific urban contexts (Cerreta & La Rocca, 2021; Cerreta & Panaro, 2017; Cicerchia, 2022). Obstacles of various kinds contribute to this evaluation challenge, grounding on heterogeneous and - at times - conflicting conceptualisation of what "social value" is and how it is generated in complex social and spatial settings. Cultural policies and initiatives are frequently evaluated regarding the (inherently positive) economic outcomes they provide. Less consideration is given to their social repercussions and long-term effects, as they are often related to intangible elements that are difficult to capture (Cerreta & La Rocca, 2021). Also, because of conceptual ambiguities and a lack of operational definitions (Vanclay, 2002), attempts to assess social impact tend to focus on measurable impacts, rarely moving beyond the mere identification of project or policy outcomes. This focus is problematic, as it does not allow for capturing unexpected results, not trade-offs or spill-over effects that might be generated in different sectors or arenas. The issue pertains to the theoretical presumptions underlying these evaluation methods as well. Determining cultural actions' contribution to social value requires overcoming cause-effect linearity assumptions that often underlie evaluative models. Problematising the cause-effect nexus within complex open systems such as cities implies recognising that multiple factors can contribute to social impact generation. Reductionist approaches to social impact assessment do not allow assessing transformation dynamics through which social value can emerge in specific settings, nor capturing their contribution to high-level challenges to broader transformation dynamics.

Starting from the need to investigate culture-driven social impacts in the framework of broader transformative dynamics, the article proposes to move beyond economic impact evaluation, to which social impact assessment is often relegated, and to recognise the centrality (i) of intangible elements of social impacts; (ii) of the processes through which social value emerges; and (iii) of place-specific dynamics. Without proposing a complete assessment scheme, this contribution identifies analytical categories to capture culture-driven social impacts and to read them within broader urban transformation trajectories. Relying on the theoretical and empirical research carried out under the umbrella of the Horizon 2020 Project - MESOC (Measuring the Social Impacts of Culture), the

authors reflect on evaluative objects and categories that might support the identification of obstacles and enabling factors affecting culture-led urban transformative dynamics. In particular, the contribution looks at culture-driven social value generated in three impact domains identified as crucial by the New European Agenda for Culture (European Commission, 2018): health and well-being, urban regeneration (in terms of better access to and use of urban spaces), and social cohesion.

After retracing the methodological steps that led to the identification of the observation dimensions and the corresponding evaluative objects, the authors reflect on the potential of the proposed approach, questioning whether (and to what extent) it can support the identification of obstacles and enabling factors affecting the transformative capacity of cultural actions at the city scale.

## 2 Materials and Methods

The authors are in the preliminary stages of building an evaluation model to assess the social impacts of (local cultural) actions in urban settings. In this process, they look for social value in three impact domains identified as crucial by the New European Agenda for Culture: health and well-being, urban regeneration and social cohesion. The investigation is carried out through an inductive approach inspired by the Theory of Change, as it investigates how and why an initiative works (Weiss, 1995). In doing so, it follows an open-ended and process-focused enquiry (Langley et al., 2013), which allows inferring a recursiveness of dynamics linking cultural actions to a set of designed or detectable social change impacts. The article relies on a triangulation of qualitative research methods, including desk research, surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, grounding on empirical materials collected during the Horizon 2020 MESOC Project<sup>1</sup>. The methodology consists of two main steps (Fig. 1). First, the authors identified a sample of cultural actions targeting social value generation. By looking at their implementation, they identified relevant impacts and a first set of information about factors hindering or facilitating social impact generation. This analysis allowed drafting preliminary categories of enabling factors based on their recurrence across different settings (step 1, see chapter 2,1). In the second phase, impact generation dynamics were investigated through mediated interactions with policymakers and cultural operators from the city pilots. The conversations focused on contextual dynamics related to the uniqueness of urban areas and specific impact domains rather than single cultural actions. Based on a process of abstraction and synthesis, this step allowed for testing previous categories and for identifying broader observation dimensions and hypotheses about descriptors able to support social impact assessment processes (step 2, see chapter 2,2).

### 2.1 Analysis of Cultural Actions

The first step included the analysis of 35 cultural practices from 7 of the European cities directly involved in the MESOC Project. These actions included cultural policies

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Step 1	Focus: <i>Cultural actions</i>	Focus: <i>Social impact generation dynamics</i>	Step 2	Focus: <i>Social impact generation dynamics</i>	Focus: <i>cultural and urban context</i>
	<p>Identification of 35 cultural actions targeting social value generation in the 3 impact domains (health and well-being, urban regeneration and social cohesion)</p> <p>Selection and analysis of 18 cultural actions from 6 European cities</p>	<p>Identification of factors enabling social impact generation and of corresponding categories (<i>clusters based on recurrence</i>)</p>		<p>Dialogues with 46 key actors from 9 European Cities</p> <p>Validation of the factors enabling social impact generation and of corresponding categories</p>	<p>Identification of context-sensitive observation dimension (<i>clusters based on recurrence and relevance</i>)</p>

**Fig. 1.** Methodological steps

and strategies, but also emergent cultural practices explicitly seeking to generate social value in specific impact domains, namely: citizens' health and well-being in Valencia (ES) and Cluj-Napoca (RO); urban regeneration in Issy-Les-Moulineaux (FR), Rjjeika (HR) and Milan (IT), and engagement and participation in Athens (HL) and Barcelona (ES). (For more insights: Bianchi et al., 2022; Bonet et al., 2023; Moro & Legale, 2023; Cacovean et al., 2022). Priority was given to well-documented activities already subjected to evaluation procedures. The initial sample was reduced to 18 cultural actions from 6 cities based on a selection based on the availability and quality of data and on the responsiveness of the initiative to the research objectives (see Table 1).

Data collection was guided by a survey completed by project partners in the pilot cities. More than a detailed description of the initiatives, the survey aimed to identify relevant dynamics for generating social impacts. Data was retrieved mainly through desk work. When necessary, stakeholders were contacted for clarification purposes. Within data availability limits, impacts were identified by observing how cultural policies and practices were defined, planned and implemented. Both social impacts and the enabling factors were identified through a set of exploratory questions investigating (i) changes recorded in the impact domains (beyond direct impacts); (ii) causal relations between these changes and specific cultural actions; and (iii) factors enabling or hindering the capacity of cultural actions to develop and generate impacts.

Data analysis was carried out through a textual analysis of the reports, which allowed identifying a first list of specific social impacts and recurrent conditions and dynamics affecting impact generation. This initial step lasted from September 2020 to February 2021. Numerous meetings with the Project's partners were held during this time to monitor the selection of examples and gather feedback. The first set of social impacts and enabling factors resulting from the analysis of cultural practices were grouped into thematic clusters according to recurrent features and characteristics.

**Table 1.** Cultural actions

Name of the Cultural Action (City)	social impact domain
Unspeakable: A music composition workshop for teenagers (Cluj-Napoca)	Health and well-being
Tablo: Training staff in the use of arts for the benefit of people with long-term conditions (Cluj-Napoca)	Health and well-being
Inner Space (Cluj-Napoca)	Health and well-being
Caixa dels Records: Memòria de una vida (Valencia)	Health and well-being
Museus per la Salut: Records de Festa al Museu Fallar de València (Valencia)	Health and well-being
Ocio inclusivo (Valencia)	Health and well-being
Istituto Comprensivo Sandro Pertini (Milan)	Urban Regeneration
Cascina Martesana (Milan)	Urban Regeneration
Caravanseray Selinunte San Siro (Milan)	Urban Regeneration
Le Temps des Cerises (Issy-Les-Moulineaux)	Urban Regeneration
Le CLAVIM - L'Espace Andrée Chedid (Issy-Les-Moulineaux)	Urban Regeneration
Musée Français de la Carte à Jouer (Issy-Les-Moulineaux)	Urban Regeneration
Culture in the Nieghbourhoods (Athens)	Social cohesion
Athens Garden Festival (Athens)	Social cohesion
Athens Escape Routes (Athens)	Social cohesion
Apropa CulturalUna porta a la inclusió (Barcelona)	Social cohesion
Xamfrà, Centre de Música i Escena del Raval (Barcelona)	Social cohesion
En Palabras [relatos migrantes] (Barcelona)	Social cohesion

## 2.2 Dialogues with Key Actors

The second step consisted of a series of semi-structured dialogues with 46 critical actors from 9 cities between January and June 2022. The city sample was enlarged including Turku (FI) and Jerez de la Frontera (ES), to test the robustness of the initial set of enabling factors. Interlocutors included cultural operators, public officials, top/middle managers in charge of culture at the city level and stakeholders from the three impact domains. They were selected based on their role and degree of involvement in cultural actions targeting social value generation and their knowledge of contextual dynamics related to culture-led transformation. Interactions with stakeholders took the form of semi-structured interviews or focus groups. As for step 1, the dialogues were centred on identifying factors enabling culture-driven social impacts. In this second phase, guiding questions focused not so much on cultural actions' development and implementation but on contextual dynamics affecting them. A semantic analysis of interview transcripts based on codes derived from the initial enabling factors was also performed. A database associating text excerpts with codes and anonymised respondent profiles were built. On the one hand,

the systematisation of text excerpts allowed identifying recurring factors affecting social impact generation and validating and integrating the categories mentioned above. On the other hand, this method made it possible to select those considered particularly relevant by the interviewees and to formulate hypotheses about general observation dimensions, potentially supporting the analysis of context-specific dynamics affecting social value generation.

### **3 Results**

Mirroring what is described in the methodological section, this chapter reports the main results of the research.

#### **3.1 Cultural Actions and Their Social Impacts**

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the final sample consists of 18 ongoing cultural actions from 6 cities aimed at generating social value in at least one of the three Projects' impact domains (see Table 1) and involving multiple cultural sectors, with a prominent role of performing arts, visual arts and audiovisual and multimedia. They were launched between 1997 and 2020, allowing for evaluating both established experiences and new initiatives. Most of the actions were initiated directly by public organisations (primarily municipal administrations or public cultural institutions). Public institutions also played an essential role in the community and private initiatives, mainly through well-established collaborative schemes. About half of the actions examined are permanent, while the rest are either one-time, fixed-term events or recurring activities (for example, Festivals). Most of the initiatives take place in a particular cultural or urban space, while a few take place simultaneously in different urban locations.

Analysing selected initiatives first allowed identifying impacts generated in the three social domains. If a comprehensive report of impacts is outside the scope of this research, some examples are provided for clarification purposes. Impacts recorded in the health and well-being domain include improvements in the quality and accessibility of healthcare services and healthcare personnel's skills, the spread of innovative therapeutic protocols and the use of well-being-focused space design in healthcare facilities. Still, others refer to higher awareness about health-related needs and gaps among decision-makers and increased cross-silos interactions across healthcare practitioners, cultural sector operators and local policy-makers. For what concerns urban regeneration, detected impacts include the valorisation of city history and heritage, the reactivation of underused urban spaces, the restoration and functional reuse of urban green areas and improved access to (green) public spaces in peripheral neighbourhoods. Some of the cultural actions analysed also synergised with educational activities and raised awareness among citizens and stakeholders on societal challenges related to urban sustainability futures. Finally, most initiatives targeting social cohesion and citizen engagement objectives succeeded (at least in part) in strengthening existing local networks, including citizens' alliances and collaborative schemes involving local decision-makers, private stakeholders and professionals. While some initiatives increased residents' participation in culture, others enhanced the social inclusion of marginalised groups (e.g. elderly, chronically ill patients, people suffering from mental diseases, and migrants).

Interestingly, initiatives developed in a single area (e.g. public health or urban regeneration) have impacted different domains. Recorded impacts could be traced back to different changes in the contexts. Some of them directly relate to the three impact domains and provide insights into the effectiveness of cultural actions in pursuing their intended scopes. These include (i) improvement of individual or group physical and psychological conditions (impact domain: health and well-being); (ii) betterment of physical facilities (impact domain: urban regeneration); (iii) empowerment of communities, reinforced identity and sense of belonging and (iv) higher participation in cultural activities (impact domain: social cohesion). Other impacts emerge transversely across social domains, impacting individuals and collective actors. They refer to the enhancement of artistic abilities, e.g. in terms of capacity for individual expression and interaction; better access to public and private resources; changes in governance and partnerships arrangements, with specific reference to the strengthening of social capital; design and provision of new policies and innovative services; and awareness raising and knowledge production.

### 3.2 Factors Enabling Social Impact Generation

The analysis of cultural actions allowed identifying an initial set of elements enabling social impact generation in the analysed domains. The set includes factors that recurrently emerged in the description of social impact generation dynamics. Table 2 illustrates the five categories and mentioned descriptors collected through case study analysis. These categories have been validated through interactions with key actors (including cultural operators and policymakers) from 9 cities. These dialogues allowed testing of the categories drafted in the previous phase. Their analysis, based on excerpts from interviews and focus groups, allowed for gathering further evidence and confirmed the validity of the preliminary set of enabling factors, supporting a more extensive description of the single categories.

The category “Networks and Partnerships” refers to linking, bonding and bridging social capital (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2001) in designing and developing cultural actions towards social value generation. As the majority of the cultural actions analysed were promoted or supported by local public bodies, a key role in social impact generation was given to political recognition and support from institutional actors at different levels and to their direct involvement in collaborative schemes involving cultural operators, as well as third sector parties. In this context, the crucial role of cross-sectoral alliances -e.g. among cultural institutions and actors in the health or care sector was emphasised. The capacity of specific actions to generate impacts was also enhanced by well-established collaboration with other local and non-local cultural initiatives and involving target groups (e.g. patients or specific social groups) in the design and implementation of the action itself. A second category refers to “Resources and Infrastructures”. Enabling factors grouped under this label refers to the capacity of cultural actions to mobilise or access different types of resources, including financial, infrastructural and human resources. While the former was needed for cultural action to take place, several interviewees stated that the availability of spaces and infrastructures and of dedicated working groups - including professionals, volunteers, or cultural operators - affected the effectiveness of the actions and their capacity to resonate in local contexts. Also, interviews revealed the relevance of the processes through which funds and resources

**Table 2.** Factors enabling social impact generation and corresponding descriptors. (Adapted from Concilio et al., 2023)

Enabling Factor	Descriptors (from the analysis of cases)
Networks and Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political recognition and support</li> <li>• Existence/Emergence of cross-sectoral collaborative schemes</li> <li>• Inclusion of consultants and professionals from different domains</li> <li>• Existence of well-established synergies with other cultural initiatives</li> </ul>
Resources and Infrastructures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of financial resources</li> <li>• Capacity to mobilise new financial resources</li> <li>• Availability and accessibility of spaces and infrastructures</li> <li>• Availability of human resources</li> </ul>
Norms and Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of favourable normative frameworks in the cultural domain</li> <li>• Existence of favourable normative frameworks in the impact domain</li> <li>• Openness and flexibility of normative settings</li> </ul>
Narratives and Discourses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a strong identity</li> <li>• Alignment with discourses from the cultural sector</li> <li>• Alignment with discourses from the impact domain</li> </ul>
Knowledge and Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancement of the skills and expertise of the actors involved</li> <li>• Capacity to build on the skills and expertise of the actors involved</li> <li>• Learning from other experiences</li> </ul>

were mobilised, referring, e.g., to participation in calls for funding, activation of private-public partnerships and activation of broad and diversified support networks. A third recurrent factor, grouped under the label “Norms and Regulation”, refers to favourable normative frameworks.

On the one hand, they include policy and regulatory frameworks that support the emergence of transformative cultural actions. On the other, they refer to organisational settings and procedures affecting the implementation process and its long-term effects. A third set of recurrent factors refers to the role of “Narrative and Discourses”. The extent to which cultural actions were able to align with policy discourse from the cultural sector or from the impact domains deeply affected their transformative potential towards social impact generation. The use of words, images and symbols recognised as relevant in the contexts in which the action develops has made it possible to increase its perceived value in the eyes of the various subjects active in the urban ecosystem. Examples from the analysed cultural actions include the adaptation of high-level principles to context-specific dynamics and target groups; the promotion of emerging discourses from the social impact domains (e.g., promotion of well-being-focused design, prioritisation of mental health, embedment of local identity in the design of cultural initiatives’ scopes and action areas). Finally, a key - intangible-element was recognised as “Knowledge and Abilities”. This dimension refers to the ability to capitalise on existing knowledge and experience and trigger learning processes in the target groups. Concerning the former, attention was paid to the involvement of experts and practitioners from different domains (e.g., researchers,



healthcare professionals, social scientists, and urban policy experts) and their interaction with cultural agents in the design and implementation phases. Regarding the latter, promoters of cultural actions stressed the relation between social impact generation and the enhancement of skills and expertise of different groups to which the cultural actions were addressed, including vulnerable social groups, early-career artists, and inhabitants of specific neighbourhoods. The analysis of cultural actions aimed at generating social value in specific domains has made it possible to identify transversal categories that affected their ability to generate impacts and trigger transformations on a local scale despite differences in urban settings and areas of action. The results of this first analysis were validated through a dialogue with a heterogeneous group of policymakers and cultural operators, different in origin, interests and points of view.

### 3.3 Lenses of Observation for a Context-Sensitive Assessment Framework

Dialogues with key actors have also made it possible to shift the perspective from cultural activities to the context in which they develop and to formulate some hypotheses on the observation lenses that can allow evaluating the capacity of urban and organisational systems to welcome, promote and proactively support the generation of culture-driven social value (Rausell-Köster et al., 2022; Bonet & Calvano, 2023; Rausell-Köster et al., forthcoming). These dimensions partially overlap with the ones described in the previous chapter. However, they are partially reframed to provide insights into the degree of readiness of specific contexts towards social impact generation.

1. **Network changes.** First, the observation of transformations taking place in local networks and social capital structures can provide insights into the degree of proactiveness of the social context and its capacity to trigger transformative processes towards social value generation. Beyond cultural actions' design and implementation, the existence and characterisation of interactions across policy levels and units, as well as among cultural actors, public agents, private stakeholders and local communities, constitute a relevant object of observation.
2. **Market reactiveness.** In line with the factors identified in the "Resources and Infrastructures" cluster, this lens of observation focuses on local market reactiveness in terms of capacity to detect unsatisfied needs and demands, propose new products and services and involve different categories of actors, including professionals from the cultural and creative industries and the impact domains. In addition, market dynamics might amplify the effects of single initiatives in the contexts of reference, supporting their capacity to "scale up, down and deep" (Moore et al., 2015) and to intercept broader trajectories of change.
3. **Public policy sensitivity.** The attention shown by public policies both to the objectives pursued in the single impact domains and to the role of cultural actions plays a fundamental role. Public policy sensitivity is manifested through favourable policy provisions and many other factors affecting social impact generation, including political recognition, the orientation of resources, the availability of public spaces and the definition of agreements and partnerships. At the same time, this lens can be explored through the observation of intangible dynamics, e.g. through the activation of symbolic resources and the emergence of new policy discourses.

4. Symbolic reactiveness. This observation lens examines dynamics related to “Narratives and Discourses” by abstracting them from their role in single actions. The degree of reactivity to the emergence of new discourses and new values, new models of sociality in the use of space and the interaction between groups contributes to determining the level of predisposition to change and might allow social impacts to resonate in contexts.
5. Learning awareness. Acknowledgement and access to critical information and expertise can be vital in initiating transformative processes towards social impact creation. Agents open to learning are generally more capable of recognising and mobilising valuable knowledge and embedding it in their activities. Therefore, an assessment of the degree to which the linkages between cultural experiences and social impact are acknowledged by media, educational bodies, and local associations can allow evaluation of the extent to which positive social impacts can emerge and diffuse in specific settings.
6. Spatial intelligence. Finally, understanding the relationship between cultural experiences and social impacts requires understanding its spatial determinants and the way spaces are used to facilitate social impact generation of awareness of socio-spatial needs and dynamics emerging alongside urban transformation processes. This dimension is critical to re-connect changes in the urban environment with positive social impact generation and to support context-sensitive cultural interventions. At the same time, spatial intelligence is required to avoid or minimise risks connected to negative socio-spatial impacts often triggered by cultural projects and practices.

## 4 Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The contribution assumes that the evaluation of the social impacts of cultural policies requires us to rethink how we look at social impact generation dynamics and to adopt a process-focused approach, more attentive to local context dynamics and the cross-cutting social and cultural consequences of public or private actions (Cicerchia, 2021, 2022). In line with the evaluation challenges described in the first section, the authors tried to identify evaluation approaches and objects capable of going beyond an economic-centred evaluation and rendering a complex picture of relations between actors, actions, and context-specific variables. Without presenting a comprehensive assessment scheme, the authors remark on evaluation objects that can help in the identification of impediments and enablers influencing the transformational capacity of cultural actions at the city scale. Rooting on the qualitative investigation carried out under the umbrella of the Horizon 2020 MESOC Project, the contribution first identifies dynamics affecting social impact generation and reflects on their recurrence across different urban settings. In particular, it identifies categories of factors affecting, driving, reinforcing, and multiplying impact generation and proposes to use them as sensors to identify changes in the interaction between cultural niches and broader urban change dynamics. In a second step, the article investigates to what extent the observation of impact generation dynamics triggered by single cultural initiatives can contribute to capturing the predisposition to change of specific contexts and evaluate their ability to trigger and consolidate transformative processes relevant.

While recognising the multiplicity of dimensions related to the culture-city nexus, the evaluative approach tries to reconcile the evaluation of specific cultural actions, the observation of contexts and their effect on the dynamics of generating social impact. In doing so, the contribution contributes to (i) a reflection on the role of cultural actions in urban transformation processes and (ii) to the debate on the assessment of cultural initiatives, which is still mainly focused on economic impact evaluation. Concerning this last point, this article acknowledges the complex character of impact generation mechanisms, thus freeing the observer from the theoretical conundrum that in any ecosystem, internal processes are unlikely to be linear (i.e. action  $x$  will not lead straight to result in  $y$ ), which makes any impact assessment exercise virtually impossible to handle.

The article outlines evaluative objects and observation lenses, indicating a possible direction to follow in the definition of evaluation models capable of considering the effects of contextual dynamics on the mechanisms of generation of social impacts. Further research is needed to refine and test them, and to develop a comprehensive assessment scheme. The results presented in this work are affected by the way actors involved define “social impacts” and interpret social impact generation mechanisms. Future research should aim to include a broader range of participants and perspectives, to include a wider range of cities, and to further validate observation categories against existing assessment frameworks.

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