

## Chapter 8

# Third–Spaces and the Creation of Socio–Spatial Identity: Fostering a New Model of Creative Cities (Basel, Switzerland)

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter provides a polite critique of the conventional ways of thinking about space and the intertwined dialectics of the socio-spatial narratives. Conventionally, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) main document on the Creative Cities Network (UCCN) emphasizes two crucial pillars of sustainable development and urban regeneration which are creativity and culture. The first term deals with creative cities and urban areas, while the second addresses culture as the human product that takes either a tangible or an intangible form. Regarding the meaning of activities in contemporary human society, one of the aims of this chapter is to decode the cultural activities in the city of Basel in Switzerland. In other words, this chapter is about exploring some aspects of the cultural life and creativity in the ancient city of Basel from a sociological perspective. Theoretically, Basel’s culture of festivals and carnivals could be seen as the fundamental quality that brings the people of the city together. For instance, the cultural features of Basel Fasnacht, Morgenstreich, and Basel Herbstmesse reveal highly important aspects of the tangible and intangible dimensions of the culture of Basel as an ancient, medieval European city dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Methodologically, this chapter aims to represent and produce anthropological knowledge using visual media of research through the methodology of the “Actor-Network Theory”. This method of research comprises three main steps: 1) collecting visual ethnography, 2) designing the Actantial model based on Aristotle’s semiotic square, 3) creating visual storyboarding to finalize the Actantiality map through analyzing power dynamics among the human narratives, the historical and cultural narratives, the spatial-environmental narratives, and the official narratives of the state. The main findings of this chapter may confirm or rebut the author’s two hypotheses, stating “the city’s identity is a mutual manifestation of human-spatial interaction,” and “not all creative cities have to be modern ones; some ancient cities are indeed creative cities based on their cultural, historical and social uniqueness.”*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-4948-3.ch008

## INTRODUCTION

*“Cities that are already well endowed with strong historical and cultural associations clearly have a marked advantage in this respect,” (Philo & Kearns, 1993)*

When exploring different cases of ancient cities and creativity around the world, it might be difficult for the some to believe that some ancient cities could be, indeed, creative cities. Sometimes, it is difficult to consider that ancient cities possess a resilient ability to preserve the unique characteristics of their cultural heritage, while following up with postmodernism. Bearing in mind that, while every city has its own historical trajectories, so how to adapt to the global transformations without losing their social cohesion, their history, and most importantly their identity?

Academically, there is a pressing need to reconsider the canonical perspectives in academia on the contemporary human societies generally and on cities in particular, taking into account the global perspective of the city as the central hub for achieving sustainable development to all nations that opted to follow the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2020b). The main focus of the UCCN is to achieve the 11<sup>th</sup> goal of the SDGs that aims to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,” (United Nations, 2015: 14). Nevertheless, the UCCN assigned seven areas of creativity; *Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts and Music*. Currently, the network is gathering 246 cities in order to achieve one specific goal, placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of the developmental plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the global level (UNESCO, 2004). Surprisingly, the UNESCO list of Creative Cities comprises cities located in developing countries more than that located in the developed countries. For instance, Egypt is mentioned twice on the list after identifying both Cairo and Aswan as creative cities in the field of crafts and folk art. The same list excludes Switzerland, for example, as if the Swiss nation has no creative city at all. The reason of that exemption because the UCCN is intended to *serve cities development*, thus it involves more cities of developing countries, rather than the already developed ones, as it is more directed to help cities located within the global south, especially in Africa and the Arab region (UNESCO, 2017b:1; UNESCO, 2019: 3).

Moreover, UNESCO has distinguished 13 elements of *creativity* and created a prospective safeguard for the cities and urban areas, in order to make a difference in a rapidly-challenging changing world, which are as follows (UNESCO, 2007: 1-2):

1. Advocating social cohesion.
2. Promoting economic growth.
3. Ensuring citizens well-being.
4. Stimulating cultural industries.
5. Applying intercultural dialogue.
6. Supporting innovation and creation as an everyday life style.
7. Promoting citizens participation in the public sphere.
8. Building on the creative assets of the urban cities and areas.
9. Ensuring an active role of: a) public authorities, b) private sector and c) civil society.
10. Supporting international cooperation and networking through experience and knowledge sharing.
11. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda (SDGs- 2030).

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