

Submission to S07: Innovation and sustainable real estate: cultural institutions as drivers of urban regeneration

Urban and real estate transformation and inclusion of artistic spaces

Cities with a higher percentage of artists in the labor force tend to experience higher rates of downtown gentrification and condominium conversion (Gale, 1984). Post-industrial cities are known to appeal to artists for their affordable and often industrial spaces located in the city. Today, those are also the cities facing urban transformation processes, that risk gentrifying areas in the city. Zukin (1987) defines gentrification as “the conversion of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city to middle-class residential use” (p. 129). It reflects a movement of private-market investment capital into downtown districts of major urban centers, starting in the 1960s.

Spaces that previously housed artists working on their production are demolished or converted into other spaces. The paradox lies in the displacement of what created value in the city—the artists and their contributions. Vibrant artistic spaces risk being transformed into sanitized, commercialized environments catering primarily to the preferences of new residents, investors, planners, and builders. Culture or cultural experiences are still considered important, but mainly in the form of consumption whereas spaces of production, such as studios and workshops ousted. The lost spaces need to emerge in other parts of the city if these actors are to have the opportunity to remain in the city and contribute to its development.

To address this challenge, some post-industrial cities are actively seeking ways to include artistic spaces in their urban transformation processes. The goal is to avoid symbolic violence against artists by preserving their cultural contributions, maintaining their communities, and safeguarding their artistic identity.

This study explores how urban transformation can successfully incorporate artistic spaces. Key questions include: How can this inclusion be achieved, and what challenges must be overcome? The research involves interviews with municipal representatives and real estate developers in a city undergoing transformation.