

SELF-GOVERNANCE AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN A POST-SOCIALIST CITY: CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN CITY-DESIGNATED AND NATURALLY-OCCURRING ARTS DISTRICTS

Abstract. *The tendency of artists and creative professionals, ranging from non-profit and for-profit firms, individual artists, and cultural participants, to cluster in a specific area is observed and discussed in a large body of literature. However, the ways these districts are internally organised has received much less attention. In Ljubljana, one can find five different arts districts that emerged via grass-roots and top-down planning approaches. The article explores their community through the concepts of self-governance, social inclusion, and the right to the city. Our examination of the collective activities in these districts shows that the naturally-occurring districts reflect a spatial political agenda. Those active in such areas are resistant to heteronomy, formal regulation and hierarchy while being engaged in activism, social justice advocacy and artistic self-expression. In contrast, a city designation allows less freedom in management and organisation of the space and does not conflict with authorities over control of the land. While both district types reveal a strong desire to constantly change and produce novelty, the naturally-occurring districts are evolving at a faster pace. The article highlights the value of self-organisation and informal networks in the construction and development of arts districts.*

Keywords: *arts district, cultural clusters, creative place-making, self-organisation, sense of place, grounded theory*

Introduction

Ever more areas featuring a high concentration of cultural facilities can be found in modern cities today, as intended by public authorities (Chapple et al., 2010, Guinard and Molina, 2018). Investing in cultural (creative) industries in an urban space is a common way of revitalising low-income

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neighbourhoods (Stern and Seifert, 2007; Vazquez, 2012), with positive implications for the city economy and the cultural and aesthetic needs of the city's inhabitants (Lauderbach, 2013; Montgomery, 2007). Cities often attempt to develop creative quarters (a spatial agglomeration of creative industries) through top-down intervention to build a creative economy (Musterd and Murie, 2011). Arts districts as a type of place for creative activities may be designated by public authorities and are hence also known as "institutional" (Montgomery, 2003; Evans, 2009; Vivant, 2009; Murzyn-Kupisz, 2012; Lavanga, 2013).

However, the success of these areas remains unclear because they seem unable to attract a spontaneous creative class (Florida's (2002) bohemians), one that prefers non-formalised cultural districts (Lauderbach, 2013; Zukin and Braslow, 2011). Therefore, non-planned arts districts are a common phenomenon in larger cities, creating a challenge for planners and city officials alike. They spontaneously emerge through a bottom-up initiative, with the actors involved being varied and often unwilling to engage in any formal structures (Lauderbach, 2013; Groth and Corijn, 2005).

The clear habit of artists and creative professionals, non-profit organisations and profit-based firms, individual artists, and cultural participants to cluster in a certain area is described in many studies (Ley, 2003; Lloyd, 2004; Waitt and Gibson, 2009; Stern and Seifert, 2007; Florida, 2003; Scott, 1997). A 'natural' arts district develops when artists and cultural workers start to build social networks within a specific location. Network building is vital because communities exchange information and rely on mutual support. Yet, naturally-occurring arts districts are often regarded as contested because they occur organically (not as part of some policy) with a bottom-up approach and depend on the self-organised efforts of local players (Stern and Seifert, 2007).

Arts-based clustering in Ljubljana

In the past four decades, Ljubljana has arisen as a regional centre for alternative and subversive culture (Ehrlich, 2011), having been considered the pioneering city of punk rock in Yugoslavia. This new wave movement held strong implications for the subculture of all of Yugoslavia and for the social and political changes seen in the region during the 1980s (Mulej, 2016). In Ljubljana, the movement later took different paths and dissipated within a broader alternative scene (Mulej, 2011). The earliest sizeable clustering of arts and cultural forces came in 1989 with a social initiative called *Mreža za Metelkova* that sought to find a place for a considerable number of artists and cultural workers who had no suitable work spaces. They gradually occupied *Metelkova*, an abandoned former Austro-Hungarian and later

Yugoslav army base located in the city centre (Babić, 2013). Such spatial transformations were possible after socialism. Ravbar (2007) was the first to observe a distinct spatial agglomeration of occupants from the cultural industries in Ljubljana. Spatial agglomeration was also later discussed by Peterlin et al. (2010), yet neither author described the particular character of these agglomerations.

Arts districts in Ljubljana came to be defined in a unique and contested process. *Metelkova* was established in 1993 by some 200 people who began to hold concerts, art exhibitions (Bibič, 2003; Žagar, 2006), political debates and social activities for vulnerable groups (Nabergoj, 2013). Today, *Metelkova* holds semi-formal status and has become a tourist hotspot promoted as an “alternative culture centre” by Ljubljana Tourism, a tourist organisation under the auspices of the City of Ljubljana (*Metelkova mesto*, 2016). The former bicycle factory, *Rog*, was occupied in 2006 by the TEMP initiative made up of artists, cultural workers and activists. The reason for this “temporary” spatial acquisition was their inability to find a work space anywhere else (Tosics, 2016; Stam, 2016). These days, over 20 collectives are active in *Rog*, mainly the younger generation of artists, including students of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design who have built their own studios there (*Portfolio tovarne Rog*, 2016). In 2016, the municipality attempted to start demolishing some building structures within *Rog* but met with strong resistance and several months of loud demonstrations accompanied by cultural, arts and sports events. The issue of *Rog* is well discussed, photographed and even mapped in popular media (e.g. Vojnovič, 2016; Brdnik, 2016; Rožman, 2016). In contrast, *Kino Šiška* is a city-designated arts district created in 2008 when the “Centre for Urban Culture” was officially opened to help decentralise cultural activities in Ljubljana and “transform Ljubljana into a culturally and creative city attractive for citizens, tourists and investors” (Ehrlich et al., 2012). The intentional coming together of members of the arts community continued in 2011 when a neighbouring building (former premises of the Municipality of Šiška) was transformed into art studios (Krajčinović, 2011) and the associated parking lot into a public square. *Križevniška*, an old and largely residential street in the city centre, has always hosted prominent figures from Slovenian literature and intellectual circles (Mrevlje, 2015). In 2011, when the Mini teater theatre group moved into the area and started to bring people together in an urban greening project (Mrevlje, 2015), the complete renovation and rejuvenation of the street containing the theatre was accomplished. The project was co-funded by the city municipality (Marn, 2013) which was also in favour of the idea to declare *Križevniška* a cultural quarter in the same year (*Kulturna četrt Križevniška*, 2014; *Križevniška ulica*, 2011). The former tobacco factory, was built in 1871 and closed in 2004 (Bojc, 2012) as part of a development project to transform the area

into a zone containing residential properties scheduled to be completed by 2013 (TOBACNA City, 2012). The economic recession caused the construction company involved, IMOS (IMOS-G), to go into bankruptcy, although it started to let out rooms there to arts, cultural and creative workers, turning the area into an “artistic and creative space” (Old Ljubljana Tobacco Factory Turning into New Art Centre, 2015).

Key concepts and study aims

The article examines these five districts by considering their collective actions through the concepts of self-governance, social inclusion, and the right to the city. Self-governance is a new imaginary associated with notions such as participatory planning or network governance (Sørensen and Triantafillou, 2009). In this text, the concept is partially understood as contradicting heteronomy, as often occurs in a social vacuum. Social inclusion is conceptualised in terms of avoiding discrimination based on income, ethnic origin, sexual orientation and other factors. Moreover, social inclusion is examined as being inconsistent with the goal of economic development as one of the municipality’s aims in supporting creative clusters (Bagwell 2008). The right to the city, an idea proposed by Lefebvre (1968), namely, to reclaim spaces in the city in an era of capitalist urbanisation, is relied on to understand the struggles of those active in the arts districts to ensure a space within Ljubljana that supports self-expression.

The five districts have varying legal statuses and levels of city official acceptance and entail a mix of grass-roots and top-down planning approaches. We consider the integration of social and political activities into arts and cultural placemaking. By studying these five cases, we aim to establish whether arts district planning should be city-designed or left strictly up to local initiatives to avoid snuffing out the very spark that makes them distinctive.

Methods

The nature of arts districts and their users (actors) who are arts providers and members of arts district communities is examined in this article, where “arts” as a descriptor of activity speaks to a broader range of bohemians engaged in arts, culture and the creative sector without regard to formal occupations (Clifton, 2008; Boschma and Fritsch, 2009).

Several terms are used to describe urban arts and cultural agglomeration (Frost-Kumpf, 1998; He and Gebhardt, 2013; Designation Guidelines, 2018). The term “arts district” is adopted because its definition ascribes considerable importance to its changing nature and evolution, while denoting a

spatial agglomeration of actors who are 'responsible' for transformation of the neighbourhood (Vivant, 2010; Chapple et al. 2010). Arts districts form a complex cluster of activities, albeit they are focused on arts and culture.

We initially relied solely on a quantitative approach to identify the locations and spatial extensions of agglomerated working spaces for arts providers in Ljubljana. A quantitative spatial analysis was conducted based on data acquired from the Slovenian Business Register (SBS), which contains information on all business entities (including their address and number of employees) involved in profit or non-profit activity whose principal place of business is within Slovenia. Business entities involved in arts and culture activity located in Ljubljana were extracted, joined with a national register of residences, and their locations were mapped using *ArcMap*. We calculated the density of the extracted business entities (where the number of employees was used as a proxy for *population value*) with a *point density* tool. The analysis led to a heatmap of Ljubljana's arts and culture business entities (see Figure 1). However, while studying the spatial patterns of the work spaces for arts providers, this method could allow wrong conclusions. Namely, artists and cultural workers in Slovenia are mostly freelancers registered at their home or parents' address. Their home is not necessarily their work space.

Therefore, in the second phase, we identified the greatest density of business entities within areas featuring the highest density of residential apartments (Tiran et al., 2016). High density also describes the city centre, which is the commercial and administrative hub with both private and public arts and cultural firms. If anything, this method revealed a discrepancy between the official data and our own field observations. It is important to reiterate that arts providers often work informally at a location which is not the same as their home address and not registered in SBS.

At this point, it became clear that to properly understand the full complexity of arts districts, including their spatiality and location, it was necessary to also apply qualitative methods.

Media content analysis was performed and narratives in the media examined to identify arts districts, both profit/non-profit, formal/informal. A keyword search was performed in the news aggregator Google News using both »Ljubljana« and one of the following keywords "arts districts", "cultural quarters", "cultural commune" or "cultural cluster". We then reviewed news sources that appeared in English and Slovenian.

The analysis revealed five such agglomerations: Metelkova, Rog, Križevniška, Kino Šiška, and Tobačna (Figure 1). *Metelkova* is the arts district most mentioned in the Slovenian press. The media has labelled Metelkova variously as "an artistic collective" (Oser et al., 2009), "the leading centre of underground music and art in the region" (Niranjan, 2015),

an “Art Space and Anarchist Squat” (Arthur, 2013), “an autonomous social centre” (Jacobsson, 2015) and “the stronghold of the alternative cultural scene” (Haas, 2012). *Rog* has been described as “an autonomous creative and social space” (Mrevlje, 2016), “an autonomous creative zone” (Brdnik, 2016), “an area occupied by creative people, artists, graffiti artists, dancers, skaters, associations and centre for social integration and empowerment” (Krajčinović, 2013) and “a cultural and social centre” (Stam, 2016). *Kino Šiška* has been proclaimed “a centre for contemporary and urban creativity” (Center urbane kulture Kino Šiška, 2016), “a centre of urban culture” (Matoz, 2012) and “a cultural square” (Megla, 2012). *Tobačna* has been called “an art centre” (STA, 2015), “a creative centre with great potential” (N. Ar., 2015) and »a creative quarter« (Cerar, 2015). *Križevniška* has been mentioned as a »cultural quarter« (Mrevlje, 2015; N. Ar., 2014; N. A., 2011) and »an artistic street« (Tihole, 2014).

Figure 1: HEATMAP OF ARTS AND CULTURE BUSINESS ENTITIES (LOCATIONS OF ARTS DISTRICTS ARE MARKED SEPARATELY IN LJUBLJANA)



Source: Statistical Office of Slovenia (2014), SBS (2014).

In the fourth phase, after spatially defining the five arts districts, we conducted face-to-face interviews. The main research findings presented in this article reflect the narratives of 26 actors from Ljubljana arts districts and 4 stakeholders involved in the arts sector (two city officials and two non-profits engaged in arts and cultural regeneration projects).

In July 2015, we started conducting in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews (Kumer, 2015) with people active in Metelkova, Rog, Kino Šiška, Križevniška and Tobačna. By the end of 2015, we had conducted 26 interviews. As part of theoretical sampling, the last four interviews were conducted between January and April 2016. Since those active in arts districts are characterised as a hard-to-reach population, we employed snowball sampling to find interviewees (Heckathorn, 2002). Many of these people promote their activities via websites or on Facebook and this is how we initially found actors and invited them to participate in the interview. After the interview, we asked them to suggest further interviewees from their district and they helped contact them. The ongoing referral process continued until at least four interviews had been completed in each district and additional parameters to ensure a diversity of arts and cultural activity had been satisfied. The interviews in Rog were conducted prior to the demonstrations against demolition activity in the summer of 2016 (Panjan, 2016; Kopf, 2017). We observed that, after this series of incidents, those active in Rog had become more aware of the space. Their emotional attachment to the place and sense of community had grown stronger. During our interviews, the press had started to describe Tobačna as a community-based arts district, which might have made the actors feel more strongly aware of others in the district.

The average interview took around 45 minutes. In three cases, more than one person was present in the interview. Altogether, we interviewed 35 individuals. Of these, 17 were below 40 years of age and 18 came from the generation aged 40 years or above. A generation shares a similar social background, formative experiences and common signifying points of identification (Mannheim, 1952). In our case, the biggest difference between the arts districts lies in the mean age of those interviewed. For example, Metelkova, established in the 1990s, is made up of members of the older generation (mean age 45 years), whereas Rog (established after 2000) is occupied by a younger generation (mean age 35 years). Older and younger generations also grew up in different conditions. Whereas the older generation (born before 1983) has experience of living in Yugoslavia and an authoritarian socialist regime, the younger generation has grown up and been socialising in a competitive market democracy. We discovered that this experience was an important element of people's decisions to occupy spaces in arts districts. For instance, when we asked about reasons for occupying spaces in arts districts, the younger generation often mentioned that the occupation was either an expression of the artists' disagreement with the commercialisation of space or that they had simply been looking for an affordable space in which to work. On the other hand, the older generation, in particular those occupying work spaces in Metelkova, noted that turning the area into

a political space to show disagreement with the government had played an important role while occupying the space.

In the fifth phase, we performed computer-assisted grounded theory analysis. We fully transcribed the interviews and performed a coding process in *ATLAS.ti*. We relied on Friese's translation (Friese 2019) of the constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz's 2000) to apply the coding process in *ATLAS.ti*. The coding process included the theoretical sampling, along with the initial, focused and axial coding and building of the category system. The data gathering and analysis were carried out concurrently.

Results

In this section, three dimensions of arts districts are examined with respect to whether they naturally occurred or were designated by the city municipality (see Figure 2). The first section scrutinises what caused these five arts districts to emerge and how they have developed. The second section considers how arts and culture in the arts districts are complemented with other activities. The third section investigates how heteronomy and creativity are related and the ways in which this contributes to the districts' success.

From "the need for a work space" to forming a cluster

The responses revealed that the reasons the actors occupied work spaces in the five arts districts depends on the way they emerged. Metelkova was clearly the result of a bottom-up initiative. Although not intended to be an arts district (Bibič, 2003), my informants noted that they occupied the space because "Mreža za Metelkovo was an association of societies and individuals, together between 200 and 250 people, who needed a space" (male, born 1962, Metelkova). City officials had been unwilling to assign a proper place to them. An interesting finding is that the network construction process took place before the 'occupation'. Similarly, actors from Rog noted that the new generation of artists "had urgently needed our own place for rehearsals which is accessible the whole day" (male, born 1992, Rog), which they found in a spacious 20th century factory.

Arts districts supported by the local municipality (Križevniška, Kino Šiška and Tobačna) started to receive new actors mainly because art studios were sublet for non-commercial rental amounts: "Paying no rent means a lot to us. Really a lot. We wouldn't be here if we needed to pay rent" (female, born 1985, Križevniška). Kino Šiška, which is the only entirely city-designated arts district, began to attract new artists after the artist studio programme was established in the area, proving to be the only way they could afford to stay

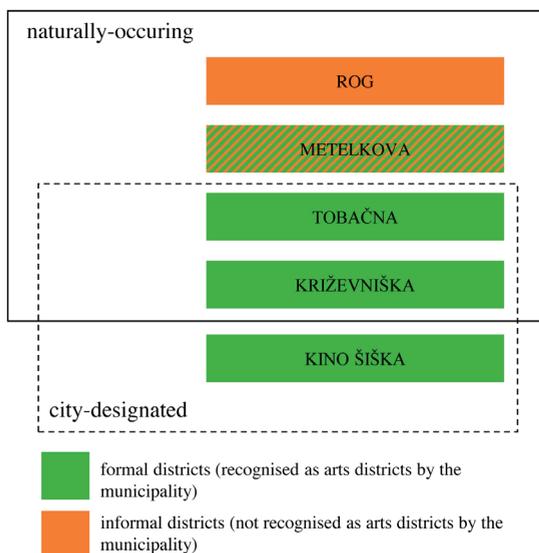
there. Tobačna is not owned by the municipality. The investing company started to sublet rooms soon after it was put into receivership. Artists, cultural workers and designers quickly favoured the place, noting that “maybe the interest was not due to the industrial heritage but simply because a space was made available for rent. There is no other way to afford such a place in the city centre” (female, born 1988, Tobačna).

Naturally-occurring districts, in contrast to the city-designated ones, are evolving at much faster pace. An informant described how “some places host the same activity from the outset, some are empty, and others are now managed by different actors” (male, born 1992, Rog). Similarly, an informant from Rog commented that:

Metelkova is the mother and Rog is her son. Metelkova has a problem of being old and its 'family' hasn't changed. When I go there, I see stagnation and a community which doesn't accept anyone new. If you want to visit a studio here in Rog, that's not a problem. The doors are open. This is not the case in Metelkova. (female, born 1984, Rog)

In contrast, the city-designated districts have not experienced considerable changes: “There were visual changes because of the flowers, but we didn't see other changes” (male, born 1968, Križevniška).

Figure 2: MODEL EXPLAINING THE LINKS BETWEEN ARTS DISTRICTS THAT ARE NATURALLY-OCCURRING, CITY DESIGNATED, FORMAL AND INFORMAL



Source: Authors' own findings.

The peculiarities helping the districts to thrive

The agglomeration of people from the arts and cultural sector has attracted other socially engaged groups. The cohabitation of artists, cultural workers and activists has been successful because “Metelkova was free for independent and alternative culture which finally got its own place. Looking from an LGBT perspective, we finally got a place which was ours” (Male, born 1983, Metelkova). Our informants noted that working in an arts district brings “a remarkable opportunity to work in a lively space where other activities, besides your own, are taking place”. A male from Rog, born in 1992, also said that, when he finishes with his own work, he often participates in another workshop and becomes the audience: “Rog is a living art and some sort of public space. Apart from that, we work on projects that include many people. It’s an advantage that these people are close to me”.

For those people who occupied their spaces only after the arts district had been established, the biggest factor influencing their decision to move there was the close proximity of actors from the arts, cultural and creative sphere. The clustering of arts and cultural activities brings a multitude of benefits for many actors and is not regarded as competition:

I think this [being part of an arts district] adds value to our building and does not negatively influence our activity or its concept. Through all these different spaces, a variety of ideas emerges. By creating a creative zone or an arts and cultural neighbourhood, new concepts of culture are being developed (female, born 1976, Tobačna).

The fight for autonomy to maintain the creative spirit

The responses show that these actors relate freedom of expression, which they had found in such districts, with non-commercialisation. Artists more freely express themselves when they themselves do not feel they like a product or that they must produce things. This is what they sensed in Metelkova and Rog, spaces which “are not part of the idea that you have to produce something profitable in order to make profit to someone else” (male, born 1992, Rog). Rog’s illegal status allows for new ideas and creates new movements not forming any part of bureaucracy and also not controlled:

I think it’s great that there’s this alternative to all overpriced rents in city centre and places which are made to limit peoples thinking. We use unused space, usually abandoned buildings in the city centre. We bring

meanings to these buildings, use them and maintain them. (male, born 1990, Rog)

Improving the general infrastructure at Rog would lead to demands for formalisation that, in their thinking, would create limitations on their creativity:

Basic things such as running water, electricity and heating are missing here. At the same time, I think that such conditions created Rog as it is and worked as a sieve to divide people who are willing to stay from those who can't work here. At some point people would start to work on their own and privatise spaces and earning money. (male, born 1992, Rog)

The site-specificity of the arts district was often mentioned by the interviewees as a large reason for why such an arts district could not have emerged anywhere else.

If you move to another place, that place becomes part of a new story. And, most likely, the same people from Tobačna would not be able to come together at a different place. (female, born 1976, Tobačna)

Being an actor from an arts district means being part of a larger community which is conscious of the space in which they work.

A statement by a city administration representative reveals that they see one naturally-occurring arts district as a threat:

Rog has activities that are not just arts and culture. They are very divided internally: there are those who are willing to wait for the building to be refurbished and then apply for an art studio and then there are the 'hardcore' activists, who don't want any changes and wish to proceed with business as usual in a building that is so dangerous that the ceiling could fall on your head. Activists also established an ad-hoc kitchen to distribute food to immigrants who came during the first wave of the refugee crisis. That is something which does not fit with this context. (female, city official).

In another interview, a lower ranked city official added to the above statement:

The municipality will turn Rog into a contemporary arts centre and it has been agreed with the users that they will move out, since the city bought the building and holds a vision. (male, city official)

Discussion

Two principal ways of emergence and constant evolution

The city of Ljubljana's incredible cultural mash-up is historically based and has led to arts districts now at various stages of evolution. Each is associated with a distinct set of actors of different genres and generations and meant for a different audience. A key reason driving the emergence of the naturally-occurring arts districts was the considerable number of people seeking an appropriate space to work, with mounting pressure sustaining claims to the right to access (unused) urban resources. They found a working space in large empty buildings that became a contested place following the disapproval of the city administration and the public.

Once a district is established, others become interested in joining the community due to "importance of being in places where they can share and be challenged by other artists and audience" (Naturally occurring cultural districts, 2010). On the contrary, city-designated districts 'emerge' by policy design and the actors are attracted to join the initiative by low rents. Constant evolution/fluctuation is a characteristic of naturally-occurring districts. The actors invest great energy in establishing the place which grows in popularity, attracting ever more visitors.

Over time, the doors have locks installed, and temporary actors become permanent fixtures. The place then becomes less popular to visit, as is currently the case with Rog. The private owners of Tobačna recently cancelled their tenancy arrangements due to the stronger economic performance of Ljubljana and extreme rise in land values. One may assume that this step is part of an effort to quickly turn this temporary yet legal uncontested arts district into a business/residential estate of enormous value.

The 'co-habitation' of creativity and active citizenship

After an arts district is established, a vital component of a successful arts cluster is commitment to the place and its distinct character that helps to build partnerships (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010; Supinka, 2016). All of the areas under study show a high level of interdisciplinarity, bringing together arts, culture, design, sports and activism. It seems that freedom of expression is what they all strive for. Art and activism go well together because art makes you 'think outside the box' and extends beyond imaginary limits. The city administration does not see arts districts as places where art and culture can be complemented with active citizenship and where socially excluded groups of people are welcome. They instead see them as a threat to their gentrification plans, especially in places close to the city centre with high property values.

Fighting heteronomy to keep the flow of creativity

We investigated the formal and informal networks within the community of arts districts and showed that formality is akin to a poison to creativity, in line with previous findings (Lauderbach, 2013; Zukin and Braslow, 2011). Basic working conditions and the lack of appropriate infrastructure can sometimes spur creativity. Commercial activities are also often seen as a threat. Non-commercialised space creates room for political debate. We can therefore consider our naturally occurring arts districts as spaces that stimulate active citizenship.

Arts districts have many indirect impacts on the city economy and the city administration should therefore work to support such place-based arts initiatives. Like Stern and Seifert (2010), we found that arts districts should not be planned but cultivated and should work to support the self-organised efforts of actors. This is out of step with the current policy of the municipal cultural department that is planning its own 'arts district' and take decisions about which activities are welcome and which not. In the case of Rog, the plan is that the current actors will move out and a new exclusive, Rog art centre will then be established. This centre will exclude sports activities and socially engaged groups (Obnova Roga, 2017).

The city administration should support naturally occurring arts districts without excluding certain initiatives such as groups that promote civic engagement. It is important that a district be located close to busy areas (like the city centre) since this is also the market for actors and enables their survival. In line with a district's evolution, it gains in popularity and becomes attractive to urban dwellers. Tsang (2006) states that affordable rents are important preconditions for a successful arts district.

Conclusion

The article is analysing differences in processes related to the formation and evolution of arts districts. They appeared while Ljubljana was in transition from a socialist to a capitalist city. The five arts districts of Metelkova, Rog, Kino Šiška, Križevniška and Tobačna are conceptualised with respect to their grass-root or institutionalised character. Reflecting previous literature (Bell and Jayne, 2004; Murzyn-Kupisz, 2012), two principal ways in which an arts district emerged (city designation or natural occurrence) were found in Ljubljana. Three main dimensions of the arts districts were examined: emergence and evolution, interdisciplinarity, and the relationship between heteronomy and creativity. Two main factors explaining the occurrence of arts districts were found: spatial requirements (large empty halls) and affordability. In the natural- occurring arts districts, a specific world

view also played an important part in the struggle for a place in the city. The way the arts districts were formed profoundly influences the nature of the collective activities within these districts in Ljubljana.

Actors in naturally-occurring arts districts tend to work closely with socially engaged groups and their cohabitation tends to positively affect the district's success while, in contrast, the city administration sees social engagement as a threat to the city and does not recognise them as legitimate arts district actors. An interesting finding is that full immersion in creative tasks demands heteronomy and political autonomy. This may explain why naturally-occurring districts have appeared as contested spaces within the urban landscape despite their nature of free mind and tranquillity.

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