

Editorial  
City, Culture & Society  
Special Issue: **Circular economy and cultural governance. Forerunner practices.**  
**Christian Ost and Ruba Saleh**

When the report « The Limits of Growth » was published in 1972, it was seen as a first signal for radical change needed in both society and economy. It is worth remembering that this 'Club of Rome' report was written by academics and industry professionals, finding a consensus on the need to alert society to the negative outlook that would result from the uninterrupted growth trend during the future decades. Awareness of the need either for a slowdown in growth, or for drastic technological measures to limit expected disastrous effects, was not immediately shared by economic or political actors. In reality the world was moving in the opposite direction and did not really care about saving resources or correcting destructive impacts from excess in growth at that time. Globalization was on the move and any sustainable development agenda unable to oppose it.

History shows that main changes often appear at the last minute, when a consensus is no more achieved through persuasion and negotiation, but when real facts oblige everyone to admit evidence for something that was until then open to discussion. In particular, this is when crisis becomes a trigger to turn challenges into opportunities. We had to wait the turn of the century when things would almost be reaching a threshold of no return to see them become mainstream. The global definition of sustainability concept during the last years of the twentieth century finally emerged as a global agenda accepted by most public and private actors. Nevertheless, the urgency to implement it, although clearly related, is still an on-going process and an incredibly arduous task to achieve, as the recent Cop-26 in Glasgow indicates.

Recently, implementation has taken forms and names of amongst others, circular economy, solidarity economy, cooperative economy, in which actors perform innovative processes of production, marketing and consumption. Innovative schemes of combined new technologies and new behavioral habits aim to transform the political concept of sustainability into practical tools, actions, and programmes.

In November 1972, the same year that saw the publication of « The Limits for Growth », UNESCO adopted the World Heritage Convention which became the cornerstone of the protection and conservation of architectural and cultural heritage around the world. That was a success-story which created awareness to preserve scarce cultural resources throughout 167 states all over the world, with a list of several hundred monuments, sites and natural areas being recognized as universal. And there is no coincidence that worldwide concern to protect scarce cultural resources appeared in the face of economic development primarily marked by the waste of equally limited natural resources. No coincidence either that the consensus which has been established around the need to control the damage done to the environment by excessive growth, has paralleled the consensus which has developed around the maintenance of an exceptional cultural heritage to the benefit of all, including future generations.

From now on, natural, cultural, economic and social resources were definitely linked in a sustainable evolution of all sectors of activity. Circular economy in particular provided a concept which challenges the existing linear economy and calls for a new system for exchange and production. Designed to be regenerative, replacing the linear end-of-life concept with new circular flows of reuse in an integrated process, it mimics nature's cycle and turn economic processes into metabolisms. As cities are known to be hotbeds of culture, creativity, diversity, economic growth, experimentation and innovation, they will be key components of the transition towards a circular economy, boosting competitiveness, providing sustainable economic growth and turning innovation and opportunities into wellbeing and jobs creation.

Innovative governance models will be crucial in implementing circular economy processes. This special issue of the Journal of City, Culture and Society aims at discussing circular economy and cultural governance at all levels starting from the global level, investigating the regional, speculating on the city and finally examining it at the building level. The guest editors aim at spurring reflection and debate around the evolving theoretical framework of circular governance and to draw lessons from seminal practical case-studies, with a particular insight from Belgium, heart of the European Union and probably good sample of the stakes at broader level.

Cecilia Maria Bertozzi provides evidence of how the government of Brussels Capital Region has put effort into leading the transition from a linear to a circular model of economy. As an example, specific measures have been developed to enable and support the change in the construction sector. Building on direct observations and personal experience of the author, the paper dives into the reality of the day-to-day practice to provide feedback on the level of acceptance, understanding, development, and implementation of circular strategies and tools among the stakeholders of Brussels' construction sector.

The contribution of economics to the value chain of urban conservation is explored by Christian Ost and Ruba Saleh. The paper provides a comprehensive perspective to heritage economics, and its contribution to urban conservation. The approach is the value chain of all activities directly and indirectly related to the conservation of cultural heritage, namely: the creation of value, conservation and co-production of value, dissemination, and transmission/fruition & engagement. The paper elaborates on different activities and diverse typologies of (re)use and provides practitioners with a circular business model for testing desirability, feasibility and viability of urban conservation projects.

Andy Pratt explores what can be learned from the recent debates about the environment in the Anthropocene as seen through the lens of the circular economy, as well as that of the creative economy. The author builds upon the foundations of innovation in the Heritage domain identifying similarities and differences as well as shifting substantive concerns. He further indicates that other cultural domains aside from heritage should receive more research attention for the entire production process. Pratt provides also illustrative examples of how digitization has posed some new issues for sustainability and the cultural economy. Finally, he draws four general conclusions aimed at inspiring further work, namely: the notion of circularity and the hidden ends of chains; how to question taken for granted taxonomies of stand-alone products vs assemblages; circularity vs relationality of product value; and how to reconfigure the object (culture) and policy mechanisms.

In her research paper, Ruba Saleh contributes to the burgeoning debate on the role of adaptive reuse of cultural heritage in transitioning towards a circular-human centered approach. With the help of heritage as a living system (Fusco Girard 2019) lens, she decodes the entrepreneurial practice of Miss Miyagi, a positive impact real estate developer. This theoretical framework enables the author to put the experience of this innovative Belgian start-up into perspective, and to highlight the role heritage plays as a unique opportunity for commoning, innovation and contributor to the circular agenda. More importantly, the author sheds light on the fact that as per every entrepreneurial journey, the opportunity, the characteristic of the entrepreneur, and the process were not the only essential ingredients to success of Miss Miyagi. Building an ecosystem and being supported by an enabling environment were equally crucial for fulfilling this governance model.

Finally, the conversation with Jean-Louis Luxen, provides a refreshing retrospective of how the concept of heritage economics evolved since the eighties, how it was embraced by ICOMOS and other international heritage organizations, how it is inextricably intertwined with sustainability and more recently with the circular economy, and why it is still relevant today.