

The Role of Urban Cultural and Youth Policies.

CHAIR SESSION2

Giuliano Volpe

University of Bari Aldo Moro

giuliano.volpe@uniba.it

How does the University contribute to the growth of cultural life and of quality of life in the cities in which it is located? How does it promote the cultural inclusion of those strata of the population increasingly excluded from cultural life? How does it promote the development of cultural and creative enterprise?

Culture represents one of the main keys to reading the relationship between universities and cities: it is the engine of participation, confrontation, and growth in urban communities, especially in the southern regions, where, according to the April 2022 Fair and Sustainable Welfare data, there is a particularly sharp decline in cultural consumption, well below the European average. This is a worrying picture that threatens to undermine the understanding of society's complex problems and the democratic frameworks.

A great master of archaeology and ancient art history, Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, who always combined his university teaching with civic engagement, argued in the 1970s that *«l'essere tagliati fuori, esclusi dalla possibilità di comprendere certi valori culturali è, per la classe operaia, una ingiustizia e una sofferenza non minore di quella dovuta alla diseguaglianza economica e sociale»*. The insistence on education and culture as a tool for emancipation and freedom had, on the other hand, been a *leitmotiv* in the battles of the great trade unionist Giuseppe Di Vittorio, but the issue remains highly topical today.

The university cannot but be in the forefront: it is the main social lift (long since stopped), through education and research, but also through widespread cultural promotion that goes beyond the boundaries of the academic community.

Culture is an essential right, as emphasized by the Council of Europe Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro), ratified by the Italian Parliament in 2020, according to which communities and cultural resources are linked by dynamic, plural and complex relationships: cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is the main "resource for sustainable development and quality of life, in a constantly evolving society."

In this sense, the University can assume the role of an essential urban actor: open to listening, sensitive to the needs of the citizenry, it must

foster integration, social turnover, and open, inclusive and democratic dialogue.

The first need felt was related to the acquisition of information in all Apulian universities: a survey on the places and events of cultural production and fruition, on the collaborations established with local administrations, associations, and the world of cultural enterprises. The results are of considerable interest and provide a basis for developing and evaluating proposals to be put in place.

During the discussion, numerous and varied initiatives were presented to enhance university cultural resources in favor of city communities, from university film clubs to projects focused on the relationships between culture and food, many of these directly promoted by and with student associations. The emerging picture is vibrant and multifaceted, but it is also marked by a certain fragmented nature, a still poor coordination at the level of the individual university, the city and local area (including the areas of travel of the many commuters) and the region, that prevents it from becoming a system. What is needed, therefore, would be steering committees, composed of faculty, students and technical-administrative staff, open externally to stakeholders that would encourage the construction of integrated networks with the different components between universities, businesses and associations in the area. To trigger encounter and dialogue in this regard, joint initiatives, such as the *Beautiful Minds Festival*, a proposal developed from student suggestions, would be desirable. Ultimately, cultural professions should be more recognized and guaranteed, affirming the centrality of work and quality employment in this field as well: culture can and should also be enterprise, as so many encouraging experiences already show, such as, for example, the Cineclub run by the students of the University of Salento. Opportunities for real collaboration between the Universities and the many energies present in local society should be multiplied: an example of this is the cycle "I giovedì della Camerata Musicale di Bari," conversations and concerts that the University of Bari will host in the summer months in the courtyards of the Ateneo building, so as to offer citizens who remain in town and tourists the chance to spend a few pleasant evening hours with speakers who will cover multiple topics and various musical genres. Above all, universities should give voice to the desire for experimentation and free creativity, supporting original and "less academically stuffed" projects (as someone pointed out during the debate).