

# DEBATING SPACES & PLACES

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## 'Contentious' politics and the production of place:

The case of Cottonera

### Introduction

People believe that the European Capital of Culture nomination leads to social and economic regeneration of designated areas. Urban development projects undertaken in past European Capitals of Culture show that these did nothing to help ameliorate the quality of life of residents, especially those who suffered from material and social exclusion. Those country who took part enacted projects that led to highly visible, economic additions which make money for developers and produced look-alike cities.

The research focused on two 'political projects' undertaken in the Cottonera area where local people came together to bring about changes to ensure a better quality of life. Similar exercises should be integrated in future European Capital of Culture projects so that 'culture' can benefit all social strata.

### Method

Institutional ethnography was adopted as the main analytical tool to find out how practices and actions are interpreted and evaluated by participants in terms of time and space. Ethnography involves the use of multiple methods. Researchers took part in activities, events, and meetings organised by two organisations led by two women. Interviews were conducted with organisation leaders and residents.

### Variables considered

- Physical and symbolic characteristics of place influence the formation of contentious political organisations and their actions. The struggle can lead to changes in structure or meanings related to place.
- Types of political action: This can involve the politics of demand, where the political action is directed at the State, and/or the politics of the act, where the action taken by political agents helps to resist the power of the State and the market.
- Gender: Female planners are more likely to involve people in the process of design. Local people are the experts on the issues they face in a given location. They should be considered as the regeneration professionals.

### Findings & Conclusions

- Which changes did the people who took part in the two political projects want and why?
- What was the interaction between place and action?
- What effect did the community leaders have on the communities in question?
- How effective were the actions taken and why?
- What did the community mean by regeneration and development?

