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## EDITORIAL

### Public spaces and local life: Questioning the participatory approaches

The socio-economic changes and the democratization processes that started to unroll across the eastern part of Europe three decades ago opened new questions and challenges to the existing urban planning systems across the continent. The prevailing spirit of optimism assumed that the changes would bring positive developments to various societal sub-systems, including urban planning, seen not merely as a technical discipline but also as a political process concerned with development of inhabited spaces (Abbot, 1996; Tewdwr-Jones and Thomas, 1998). The democratization of the urban planning system was interpreted as setting new standards for an equal input of citizens in urban (re)development processes (Smith, 1999; Akkerman et al, 2004). At the same time certain other major changes were taking place across the European continent and at the global scale at the turn of the millennium, such as the progress of neoliberal and profit oriented market environments and the decreasing powers of welfare states within the broader framework of globalization. The ideals of equitable distribution of wealth and equality of opportunities were largely replaced by the ideals of free trade, market deregulation, privatization, and decreased governmental spending in social affairs, while the role of the states in neoliberal systems largely changed from regulatory into that of a notary, with the role of social reproduction largely reflecting the logic of capitalist production (Smith, 2002; Tasan-Kok and Baeten, 2012).

Under those conditions, it became easier to consider the democratic principles and consensual decision making in urban development at the theoretical level rather than in practice, despite the development of new technologies that could technically support democratization processes (Hamilton, 2005; Ertio, 2015; Beebeejaun, 2016; Sennett, 2017). When it came to everyday experiences and practices, some essential questions still needed to be answered: How to attain a decision making process that would be more reflective of the concrete needs and desires of heterogeneous urban populations? How to give the residents a true voice in decision making and how to mitigate the often contradicting interests that exist among them? And, last but not least, how to restore the *demos* – in its most noble ancient meaning – back into the centre of the decision making?

Urban public open spaces are highly contested areas where different interests and desires meet, which is why they are an ideal arena for considering such questions. Both their conception and their management are a matter of interest to the widest group of people, and they thus present an ideal testing bed of the level of societal ability for a democratic and consensual decision making as well as its tolerance towards its own diversity (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2011;

Madanipour, 2016). In this special issue of the journal, we attempt to put the spotlight on different aspects of consensual decision making in spatial and urban planning in general, with particular focus on improvements of open public spaces with the direct or indirect participation of the regular users (i.e., both residents and other groups that inhabit and use them). We define public spaces as places of common good that can take different spatial forms (from small urban places to wider landscapes) as well as different forms of appearances (such as real places on the one hand and virtual places of a digital world on the other).

This volume was made possible thanks to the project Human Cities Challenging the City Scale 2014-2018, co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union (Human Cities, 2008; 2010; 2014), addressing the issues of participatory approaches to contemporary urban design. The project focuses on bottom-up initiatives that self-organize in order to improve public spaces within their living environments. Important pillars of the project are research as well as experimental and educational activities related to public spaces and undertaken by twelve project partners from different European cities (Belgrade, Bilbao, Brussels, Cieszyn, Graz, Helsinki, Ljubljana, London, Milan, Saint-Etienne and Tallinn). The main goal is two-fold: to help citizens develop an affinity for common urban spaces and strengthen their approaches to participatory re-design of these spaces, as well as to advance the theoretical foundations in the field of participatory provision of urban public spaces (Human Cities, 2014). The project also stresses the importance of shared values of community members in relation to public urban spaces, including empathy, wellbeing, intimacy, sustainability, conviviality, mobility, accessibility, imagination, leisure, aesthetics, sensoriality, solidarity, and respect. It emphasizes practicing more inclusive pathways for provision of public space, including engagement of marginal and minority groups, as well as experimenting with the long-term circular process in which public spaces' economic, social, and cultural dimensions could be adapted to cater for increasing solidarity, environmental concerns, and critical heritage studies.

Human Cities advocates the kind of critical and constructive dialogue on the processes related to issues of participatory approaches in contemporary urban design that equally involves researchers and practitioners, locals and guests. If the urban renewal process is to be undertaken in a participatory way, the regeneration strategies should be built around the values shared by local inhabitants and different stakeholders, such as NGOs and local businesses. This special issue with selected contributions from authors from different communities argues the need for reflection on the distinctive social and cultural values expressed in public spaces, resulting in the conclusion that place attachment and identification with places are encountered and experienced differently by different individuals and groups. It suggests that the main obstacle to a truly democratic approach to public space design and management is the neoliberal drift, promoting individual and strictly private interests and excluding instances of more vulnerable and disadvantageous groups.

The other aim of this volume is to critically review, select, explore, and rethink novel and original transdisciplinary texts related to:

- Cities facing austerity, crisis, and a variety of migration patterns;
- A civic response in the form of emerging practices of self-organization, social innovation, and planners' investments in building solidarity, hope, and trust;
- (Re)design and (re)organization of local environments with socially, economically, and ethnically more diverse communities in order to improve their capacity to act as a medium of social cohesion;
- Urban design solutions which can stand the changing nature of value systems over time;

- Presentation of established methodologies (interviewing, perceptual mapping, cognitive mapping, etc.) upgraded/combined with new technologies and social networking media, as well as usefulness and real value of the new ICT and crowd-sourcing in revealing people's attitudes towards their living environments;
- The meaning of partnerships of different stakeholders—focused on local initiatives, residents, local and city authorities, urban planners, and other players—in maintaining a long-term and long-lasting cooperation forms for improving local public spaces;
- Presentation of research practices in public space that offer an investigation into different perceptions/attitudes of social groups.

The topic has been approached in a dialectical manner and conceived as a dynamic framework that allows for the exploration of various (relational) aspects of public spaces and urban cultures as well as those socio-theoretical approaches that critically investigate and shape them.

The paper by Maria Cerreta, Gaia Daldanise and Sabrina Sposito, **Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action**, presents the basic idea of interdisciplinary innovative approach for culture-led urban regeneration policies and practices. In opening the discourse of new collaborative cultural regeneration of urban public spaces and places, the authors are questioning the new uses for public spaces to improve the engagement of communities and awake their self-activation for building complex values networks. The paper explores the new forms of local complex values networks in regeneration processes, based upon the evaluation of the selected Italian practices with the multi-criteria method PROMETHEE-GAIA.

The contribution by Matej Nikšič, Biba Tominc and Nina Goršič, **Revealing residents' shared values through crowdsourced photography: Experimental approach in participatory urban regeneration**, similarly addresses the issue of communities' shared values as a fundamental element in co-creation and implementation of shared future visions of local environments. In the case study of the aging planned residential neighbourhoods, the authors develop an innovative tool to reveal these values through the usage of digital photography with captions. They argue that photography is an appropriate communication tool between the two groups of actors that are deeply involved in the participatory process: the residents on the one hand and the planners on the other. Nonetheless, the authors caution that photography must be accompanied with certain other pre-defined elements that help to establish a common language between the two groups.

The paper by Elena Marchigiani, **Accessibility to welfare spaces in council housing neighbourhoods of Trieste: Research at the interface of public policies and communities**, also underscores the problems of the built environments erected Europe-wide after the Second World War, defined by large quantities of houses, community spaces, and facilities. Their current poor spatial quality is coupled to an increasing demand for public social and health assistance. The author stresses the need to re-orient local welfare from a quantitative and functionalist approach to the concept of welfare spaces and to a stronger attention to the qualities of services' physical setting. It presents the approach of an action research that was carried out in four peripheral neighbourhoods of Trieste, Italy.

Tomaž Pipan's paper, **Interactive tangible planning support systems and politics of public participation**, illustrates the duality of augmentations of cities through digital technology and the ever-more-present participation requirement in the urban planning processes. Digital technologies are presented as a promising technicality for an efficient running of the cities, while on the other hand the participatory agenda requires a more levelled playing field for

different stakeholders and a wider consensus. The dilemma of connecting the digital city, unreadable to the public, with decision-makers and the specialized professionals with a consensus of all stakeholders in the planning process is central to the paper, which compares two examples of interactive tangible planning support systems.

**Finding the “local green voice”? Waterfront development, environmental justice, and participatory planning in Gowanus, NY** is a contribution by Zeynep Turan that examines the question of polluted urban landscapes, vulnerable to climate-induced sea-level rise and inhabited by lower-income population. At the same time, these areas are faced with an arrival of newcomers, eager to exploit the waterfront property. The article charts the progress of neoliberal urban development in Gowanus through the lenses of critical urban theory, identifying stakeholders and power dynamics. It presents the usage of rezoning and revitalization in transforming an industrial business zone and low-income neighbourhood while coping with the issues of climate change and sea-level rise.

A discussion based on studying the urban-suburbs dichotomy is presented in the paper written by Boštjan Bugarič, **Urban acupuncture treatment: Implementing communication tools with youth in Ljubljana suburbs**. Urban acupuncture is presented as a valuable tool for place-making, characterized as citizen-driven activities on small-scale, bottom up projects. These foster community building and motivate residents of neglected neighbourhoods to engage in place-making. Zalog, a suburb of Ljubljana, is taken as a case study of a successfully stimulated local participation. The paper shows how the needs of youngsters can be explored and evaluated, and how the residents can be encouraged to become active partners in the transformation of public space.

The paper by Sara Basso, **Rethinking public space through food processes: Research proposal for a “public city”**, investigates the urban peripheries made up of council housing neighbourhoods that are frequently equipped with large open spaces, yet lack the public dimension in physical and social terms. The author discusses the redevelopment of the “public city” through rethinking the food-processes. Her useful insights serve as incentives to update planning tools and define new types of public spaces. The article pleads for innovative ways to activate cohesive social and economic relationship networks, vital to disruption of those mechanisms that lead to characteristics often affecting peripheral council housing neighbourhoods: isolation, closures, and marginality.

**Sharing responsibilities to regenerate publicness and cultural values of marginalized landscapes: Case of Alta Irpinia, Italy**, authored by Stefania Oppido, Stefania Ragozino, Serena Micheletti and Gabriella Esposito De Vita, looks at Italian non-core areas in order to investigate the role of the “landscape community” within the collaborative regeneration strategies in which the landscape could be considered the driver for the development. Authors present the case of Alta Irpinia in Southern Italy where successful bottom-up initiatives contributed to the reusing process of the historical Avellino-Rocchetta Sant’Antonio railway.

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Special thanks go to the team of scholars of the AESOP Thematic Group Public Space and Urban Culture (<http://www.aesop-planning.eu>) that values a critical and constructive dialogue on the processes related to the series UNSTABLE GEOGRAPHIES – DISLOCATED PUBLICS (2016-2018) with an equal involvement of researchers and practitioners, locals and guests. It aims to explore and rethink relations between different concepts and meanings, related to both cities facing austerity, crises, and a variety of migration patterns as well as civic responses in the form of emerging practices of self-organization, social innovation, and planners' investments in building solidarity, hope, and trust. Special thanks go to Human Cities partners too who invested time, knowledge, energy and enthusiasm to make the whole project a success: FH Joanneum, Graz [AT]; CultureLab, Brussels [BE]; Pro Materia, Brussels [BE]; BEAZ/Bilbao-Bizkaia Design & Creativity Council, Bilbao [ES]; Association of Estonian designers, Tallinn [EST]; Aalto University, Helsinki [FI]; Cité du design Saint-Etienne [FR]; Politecnico di Milano, Milan [IT]; Zamek Cieszyn [PL]; Design Week Belgrade [RS]; Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana [SI]; Clear Village, London [UK].

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Maria CERRETA  
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## Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action

### Abstract

According to the current European conditions, culture-led urban regeneration policies and practices are being enhanced by the introduction of interdisciplinary innovative approaches. These involve the development of methodologies and tools that are able to address material and immaterial networks of micro-communities in a systemic and circular manner of thinking among cultures, economies, and processes. When talking about overturning hierarchies and power relations and creating the conditions that are necessary to encourage a new collaborative cultural regeneration of urban public spaces and places, some open questions can be relevant: What kind of cultural resources do we have to optimize for achieving local sustainable development in response to global challenges? What kinds of new uses for public spaces and places must we improve in order to generate complex values and enhance the engagement of communities? How could communities activate themselves for building complex values networks? In order to understand how positive initiatives are activated as a “chain reaction” and facing unsolved conflicts and building new productive values systems tailor-made for a specific context are made possible, the present paper explores the components of new forms of local complex values networks in regeneration processes, based upon the ex-post evaluation of some selected Italian practices with the multi-criteria method PROMETHEE-GAIA.

**Keywords:** culture-led regeneration, complex values networks, public space, micro-communities, multi-criteria ex-post evaluation

### 1 Introduction

In the age of global development, it is clear that urbanization is spatially and socially contradictory and conflicting (Corboz, 1998; Secchi, 2000; Brenner, 2014). Therefore, the ultimate aim of urban disciplines is to integrate natural, societal, and economic aspects through creative and adaptive processes (McHarg, 1969; Corner, 2006). McHarg (2007: 24) argues that creative fitting concerns either a social or a natural system. Consequently, the creative process is “the ability to find of all environments the most fit, and to adapt that environment and oneself”. As such, cultural processes and values systems have become focal points when it comes to debating urban regeneration as a creative and a complex reaction to controversial environments. Contrary to the arguments of globalization and capitalism, the necessity of tackling their large-scale crises has pointed out that local transitions towards sustainable patterns and flexible models of development are key activators of urban and economic upgrowth. Significantly, since the last decades of the twentieth century, in many European cities, culture has emerged as the main driver of this activation (Bianchini, 1993). As McCarthy (1998) underlines, the synergy between culture and urban regeneration constitutes a multifaceted issue, thus it has nurtured a profuse discussion around the necessary objectives and instruments of a culture-led regeneration (Evans & Shaw, 2004; García, 2005; Miles & Paddison, 2005). When García (2004) and McCarthy (2006) investigate the effects of prominent culture-led experiences,

respectively in the context of the European City/Capital of Culture programme and the cultural quarters, certain controversies are nonetheless outlined. Despite undoubtedly successful, argue the authors, the adopted models reveal various externalities such as gentrification and ephemeral links with the smaller scale and its intrinsic complexity.

In this respect, five issues appear to be crucial when it comes to interpreting the potentials of local contexts in regional as well as global settings. The first point examines the concepts of space and place as distinct but connected entities. In comparing the ideas of Lefebvre and Lynch regarding the critical thinking on production and waste of spaces, Neuman (1992: 158) underlines that “[b]oth posit culture as fundamental to urban processes”. Space is the measurable container of places (Lefebvre, 1970) inhabited and overlaid across history by societies and their cultural systems (Manzini, 2017). Thus, identity and culture of places (Zamagni, 2017) are the primary assets that communities claim to reaffirm and remodel in rapidly changing contexts.

The second point addresses culture in the 21st-century economies and societies. Culture relates to a set of meanings, symbols, values, ideas, organizational rules of a society that are reflected in the way that it shapes the institutions, uses the environment and nature, regulates human relations (Fusco Girard & Nijkamp, 1997). Upon analysing the industrial decay, it is evident that Western societies have restructured the basis and actors of the economic production, thereby implying several effects on the urban spaces and the socio-cultural processes (Madanipour, 2011). Since wealth and well-being no longer rely on the manufacturing of goods, other factors, such as sharing and knowledge transfer (enhanced by digital technology), have arisen as culturally-shaped channels through which creativity produces interconnected values.

The third point concerns a new approach, whereby production and consumption become part of a unique social system, “societing” (Fabris, 2008). This is a new form of contemporary marketing, which is attentive to the dynamics of society. The market is an integral part of society: a sphere where tangible and intangible relations meet. In this domain, we can count emerging economies related to eco-innovation, culture, and creativity that reflect new types of cooperation and responsibilities. This implies that competition mainly relies on the social, technological and governmental infrastructures that territories can provide in support of culture-led regeneration (Zamagni, 2017).

The fourth point considers culture, social entrepreneurship, and urban regeneration as the strategic priorities of institutional policies. Since 2010, the new economic strategies of Europe, from the Lisbon Strategy to the well-known “Horizon 2020”, have aimed to achieve three shared goals: smart growth (based on skills, research, and innovation), sustainable growth (linked to the environment and sustainable development), and solidarity growth (for increasing employment and training towards better economic, social, and territorial cohesion). Within these three objectives, Europe is boosting national and local governmental bodies, thereby enhancing territorial responsiveness and cultural competitiveness by promoting multi-sectorial and multi-actor networks.

The fifth and final point illuminates the repertoire of creative practices led by the civic society and the third sector for achieving regeneration processes. In declined areas, these practices sometimes originate as smaller scale tactics to create temporary community places (e.g. tactical urbanism approaches and tools). Indeed, this approach involves the combining of a site-specific “adaptive re-cycle” (Gasparri & Terracciano 2016; Sposito,

2016) with the empowerment of the social and cultural values that are locally embedded. At other times, these practices derive from Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) or cultural districts (Sacco & Pedrini, 2003). To put it simply, these are companies or clusters of companies which re-use deprived areas and abandoned buildings to operate creative economies by generating knowledge and benefitting from the intellectual property, in particular through cognitive abilities, capacity building, and community engagement (Ufficio Studi Federculture, 2013; Community places, 2014). Moreover, it is true that, in all its nuances, this repertoire challenges the traditional hierarchies built in the planning and decision-making processes, thereby creating conditions for encouraging new hybrid models of public-private partnerships (Micelli, 2009). Yet, the fact remains that, on the one hand, policy and governance models rarely capture the heterogeneity that distinguishes the local creative scenes. On the other hand, the chart of creative practices only partially makes the difference in triggering the processes of urban regeneration. Indeed, it is common that the practices dissipate the efforts and thus weaken the outputs and jeopardize the opportunities of being engaged in wider cultural, social, and economic arenas.

Against the depicted background, this paper elaborates on the hypothesis that creative practices linking culture and urban regeneration should place particular emphasis on:

- Generating complex values of places;
- Building complex values networks.

The former helps to integrate and balance the various dimensions of value (spatial, economic, social, environmental, etc.), making value a complex output of culture-led regeneration. The latter put the complex value in action through the means of networks that increase and redefine it through “chain-reactions” among culture, economies, and processes, strengthening their related ties. As such, culture-led urban regeneration is investigated as a driver of complex values networks tailor-made for a specific local context. Indeed, “thinking through complex values implies the inclusion of a multi-dimensional perspective, taking into account tangible and intangible values, hard and soft values, objective and subjective values, use values, non-use values and intrinsic values, and their synergic and complementary relationships” (Cerreta, 2010: 382). The central questions that motivate this paper are indeed the following: What kind of cultural resources do we have to optimize for achieving local sustainable development in response to global challenges, especially in controversial contexts? What kinds of new uses must we improve in order to generate complex values and enhance the engagement of communities? How could communities activate themselves for building complex values networks? The present paper attempts to respond to these research questions, and it is structured in the following manner: the first part (Section 2) proposes a methodological and data collection approach, which links culture, economies, and creative processes for urban regeneration; the second section (Section 3) explains an ex-post evaluation of certain cultural creative experiences in Southern Italy, applying the multi-criteria method PROMETHEE-GAIA for analysing results from different perspectives and finding a balanced decisions system that considers the role of each criterion; the third section (Section 4) presents a discussion on the entire process and highlights conclusions (Section 5) while putting forth follow-up points related to the research inputs.

## **2 Culture, economies, and creative processes for urban regeneration**

In recent times, the industrial/urban system has had significant negative impacts in terms of economic and social inequalities. This is due to technological and IT revolutions as well as the implementations of new financial models that are not always oriented towards local sustainable development (Napolitano, 2016). The main problems encountered relate to the lack of a systemic approach to territorial productivity in the process of community development. The production should be oriented towards the enhancement of the local context, and it should cater to the people's specific needs, interests, and abilities to network and build new relationships. As such, production cannot be focused on a single market, but it should be able to respond to the territorial complexity of resources (Cerreta & Daldanise, 2017), thereby supporting long-term sustainable development.

The cultural creative enterprise (Solima, 2005; Bosi, 2017), with its multidisciplinary nature, is designed for the exchange of knowledge; indeed, it represents one of the first experimental alternatives to "traditional" industrial development. It stimulates the growth of many sectors, as evidenced by research reports produced by several governmental agencies, which had important effects on development models and the economy in general. In 2003, the turnover in Europe's creative and cultural sector stood at around 654 billion euros, representing 2.6% of the European Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In the same year, while the nominal growth of the European economy was 17.5%, the cultural and creative sector grew by 12.3%, contributing 19.7% to the overall economic growth in Europe (Napolitano, 2016). In 2016, the cultural and creative sector in Italy produced an added value of nearly 90 billion euros (approximately 1.6 billion euros more than the previous year, and 6.0% of the total wealth produced in the country). It is worth noting that the major investments come from the private component, prevalent in all activities, and then from public institutions for valorizing and preserving historical and artistic heritage. In addition, investments also come from non-profit organizations, mainly present in performing and visual arts (Unioncamere & Fondazione Symbola, 2017). However, disadvantaged or peripheral territories are particularly noteworthy areas of unsolved conflicts (Esposito de Vita & Ragozino, 2014), which require a governance system tailor-made for the local context and for the creative/cultural industries within.

In the South of Italy, some disadvantaged areas, despite criticism, offer fertile ground for developing new cultural approaches for learning and sharing instruments. The main conflicts relate to unemployment, industrial abandoned areas, deprived historical centres, different interests of the public and the private, and inclusion of foreign citizens, etc. With the aim of countering these kinds of conflicts, "creative capital" (Florida, 2003) is considered to be a key element for attracting and implementing a new workforce and innovative forms of experimentation on multicultural identities, knowledge economies, and innovation cultures. Creative capital is able to optimize local cultural resources for rebuilding relationships among communities, values, and public spaces (Forester, 1997; Scott, 2000; Fusco Girard, 2010; Sassen, 2011; Bertacchini et al., 2012; CHCfE, 2015) in a productive way, thereby enhancing culture-led urban regeneration processes that are locally-embedded.

From this perspective, the methodological approach, as elaborated in Figure 1, aims to find out which new sustainable uses in a space are able to stimulate this creative capital and build networks of micro-communities as socio-cultural places. These considerations are strictly linked to new forms of welfare that consider the proximity of services,

activities and places (Boschma, 2005) as an opportunity of regeneration in a wide chain of micro-networks. By attempting to respond to the research questions that have been highlighted in the introduction, and by starting from the local cultural values and the changing uses of urban spaces, this study explores if creative practices are able to:

1. Optimize tangible/intangible cultural resources for local sustainable development;
2. Generate values and enhance the engagement of communities through new sustainable uses;
3. Build capillary complex networks among people, values, and spaces.

Starting from these objectives, the methodological approach aims to build a virtuous relationship among the local culture, which captures the territorial pulse, and the process for stimulating creative capital together with the economy for implementing productive clusters.

### 3 Methodology

The methodological approach (Figure 1) explores the synergy between culture and urban regeneration, underlying that it can be effective if it is able to provide a common framework which brings together the different issues (economic, social, and environmental). In the cooperative process of social and urban re-weaving, culture becomes an enabler and an autopoietic tool, which is able to become a link between the different components of urban life, key problem-solving strategies, and local communities directly involved in the identification and implementation of change (Brigato et al., 2014; Torre et al., 2016).

The whole approach of this study is structured as an ex-post evaluation process of three creative practices of regeneration processes in Southern Italy that have been selected for understanding how to build micro-communities and complex values networks in public spaces (Cerreta, 2010). By definition, ex-post evaluation is interpreted as an objective and systematic assessment of an ongoing or completed project, practice, programme or policy, its design, implementation, and results (Samset, 2003; OECD, 2002). The ex-post evaluation approach is comprehensive, and it relates to many types of assessments, from socio-economic to business-value, and from holistic to performance measurement (Olsson et al., 2010). Some examples include:

- Ex-post recalculations of ex-ante cost-benefit analyses;
- Evaluations based on the principles of corporate finance;
- Multi-criteria evaluations.

The analysis considers three domains as the major aspects of the cultural, social, and economic vitality of cities, elaborated from a new tool for monitoring the performance of cultural and creative cities adopted in Europe, with both quantitative and qualitative data (European Commission, 2017):

1. Cultural Vibrancy (CV) for capturing elements of the cities' "cultural pulse";
2. Creative Economy (CE) in terms of creative sector opportunities, cultural innovation, and knowledge-based jobs;
3. Enabling Environment (EE) for stimulating creative capital and engagement in tangible/intangible heritage regeneration.

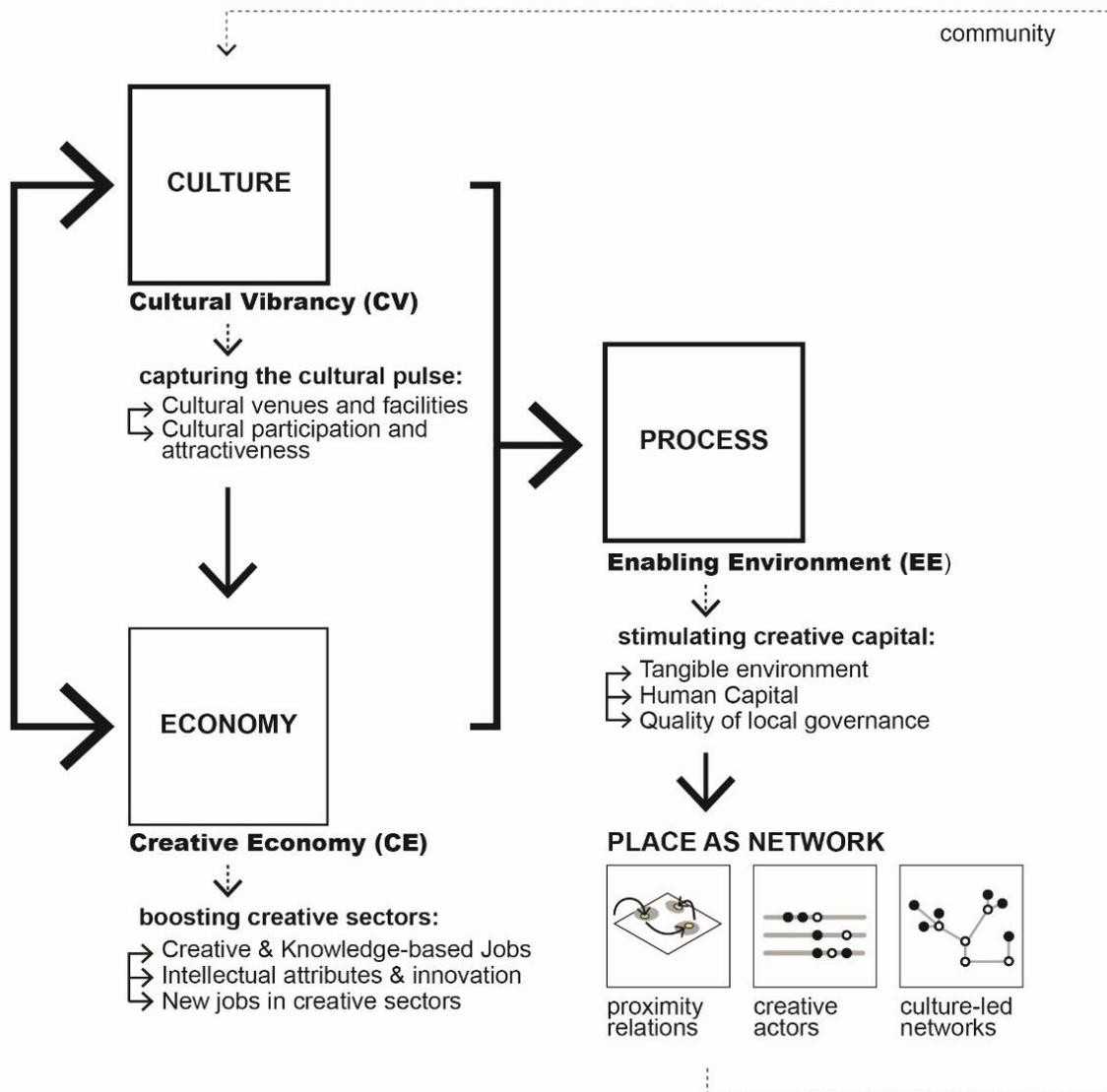


Figure 1: Methodological approach (illustration: authors; source: European Commission, 2017).

The nine dimensions of Cultural and creative cities monitor (European Commission, 2017) in this paper are modified in order to achieve the three main research objectives that are described above; the ultimate goal is to achieve a culture-led (Miles & Paddison, 2005; Sacco, Ferilli & Blessi, 2014) urban regeneration that is locally-embedded. We employed a diverse scale of analysis, rather than the metropolitan range that is used with the European tool, and focus on a municipal or district scale linked to proximity and local welfare. The evaluation framework considers the European Union's Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor as a reference framework. On the one hand, the Monitor's domains and dimensions are representative of describing creativity. However, on the other hand, its criteria and indicators are not adequate to reveal the peculiarities, efficacy, and impacts of singular local practices. In light of this observation, the reference framework has been adapted to describe local features and proximity issues. We argue that an appropriate evaluation framework should consider the relationships between culture, economies, and processes that are activated by the local practices on the municipal and district scale. Using this approach, we consider the domains, dimensions, criteria, and situated indicators as shown in Table 1. The relationship between these categories of domains,

dimensions, and criteria valorizes anthropic and natural resources as a foundation for the participatory and culture-led regeneration of local public spaces and improves an “ex-ante” evaluation framework for future practices.

Table 1: The ex-post evaluation framework: Domains, dimensions, criteria, indicators (based on: European Commission, 2017).

<b>Domains</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
Cultural Vibrancy (CV)	CV.1. Cultural venues and facilities	CV.1.1. Virtual landmarks	I.1. Number of people who report the site as a point of interest
		CV.1.2. Recovered sites	I.2. Number of recovered properties
			I.3. Surface of regeneration site
		CV.1.3. Surrounding territory	I.4. Distance from the urban centre
	I.5. Percentage of foreign residents		
	I.6. Number of tourists		
	CV.2. Cultural participation and attractiveness	CV.1.4. Cultural activities	I.7. Unemployment rate
			I.8. Number of cultural services
		CV.2.1. Cultural participants	I.9. Number of cultural events
			I.10. Number of participants at cultural events
I.11. Number of institutional actors			
I.12. Number of non-institutional actors			
CV.2.2. Place attractiveness	I.13. Number of cultural projects activated		
	I.14. Number of crowdfunding campaigns		
Creative Economy (CE)	CE.1. Creative and knowledge-based jobs	CE.1.1. Creative opportunities	I.15. Number of jobs activated
			I.16. Funds collected by crowdfunding or through other campaigns
		CE.1.2. Network	I.17. Revenues for the year from the activities offered
			I.18. Private investment on the project
			I.19. Number of associates
	CE.2. Intellectual attributes and innovation	CE.2.1. Innovation	I.20. Number of temporary employees
			I.21. Number of business partners/collaborations
		CE.2.2. Intellectual attributes	I.22. Innovative format
	CE.3. New jobs in creative sectors	CE.3.1. Jobs for young people	I.23. Number of digital tools
			I.24. Number of cultural sectors included in the project
I.25. Number of enterprises for young people			
CE.3.2. Jobs in new cultural creative sectors		I.26. Number of young people involved	
		I.27. Number of enterprises involved	
I.28. Number of people employed			

Enabling Environment (EE)	EE.1. Tangible environment	EE.1.1. Design solutions	I.29. Number of eco design projects
			I.30. Number of existing plans or urban regeneration projects
		EE.1.2. Accessibility and connections	I.31. Number of infrastructures
			I.32. Number of creative paths
	EE.2. Human Capital	EE.2.1. Education and engagement	I.33. Number of courses activated
			I.34. Number of workshops for the year
		EE.2.2. Local and international relationships	I.35. Number of local promoters
			I.36. Number of international partners
		EE.2.3. Communication strategy	I.37. Number of likes received
			I.38. Number of social accounts
EE.3. Quality of local governance	EE.3.1. Public funds and incentives for culture	I.39. Incentives for culture	
		I.40. Public funds	

In search of a balance among the three main issues (culture, economies, and processes), we selected the multi-criteria evaluation approach, which takes into account a systemic view of such a multi-dimensional problem (Roy, 1985; Munda, 1993; Proctor & Drechsler, 2006; Ishizaka & Nemery, 2013; Cerreta et al., 2016). Subsequently, within the ex-post evaluation framework, a core set of indicators has been identified depending on available and common data. Based on the indicators pointed above, the comparative analysis has been applied to the case studies through a multi-criteria decision support system, the PROMETHEE-GAIA method of Preference Ranking Organisation Method for Enrichment Evaluations family (Behzadian et al., 2010). The PROMETHEE method is one of the most recent Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis MCDA methods, which was developed by Brans (1982), and further extended by Vincke and Brans (1985). It is an outranking method that is used for a finite set of alternative actions to be ranked and selected among criteria that are often conflicting.

The choice of the PROMETHEE-GAIA method is linked to useful features of outranking methods, in which a disadvantage on a specific point of view could be compensated by advantages on other viewpoints (Pirlot, 1997) and finding a degree among stakeholders on the predominance of one option over another (Vincke, 1992). On the basis of several criteria defining a set of options, the method identifies the pros and cons of the alternatives, obtaining a ranking among them with a pair-wise comparison of indicators while also attributing different weights to the criteria for defining a sensitivity analysis. In particular, the GAIA plane is a descriptive tool that supports the PROMETHEE method and provides a powerful graphical representation of the results, which is useful in understanding the conflicts among criteria and in dealing with the problem of the weights related to them (Behzadian et al., 2010). The GAIA plane is the result of the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and is based on the reduction of multi-dimensional problems to two-dimensional ones. The PCA provides a valuable tool for the decision-maker to identify the criteria, expressing similar or conflicting preferences, as well as the quality of each alternative on the different criteria. Starting from these premises, our line of work has been carried out to pursue the research objectives following these steps:

1. Defining the main objectives and the results of practices for highlighting the kind of cultural resources optimized in a creative production for achieving local sustainable development;
2. Selecting ten indicators common to all case studies, on the basis of data recovered, within the dimensions of: Cultural venues and facilities (CV.1.), Cultural participation and attractiveness (CV.2.), Intellectual attributes and innovation (CE.2.), New jobs in creative sectors (CE.3.), Human capital (EE.2.). This common framework demonstrates the ability of these practices to generate values and enhance the stimulation of communities through new sustainable uses;
3. Evaluating the alternative practices using a multi-criteria analysis and a sensitivity analysis to underline and test the real capacity of these “creative communities” in building complex productive networks among people, values, and spaces.

According to the above steps, the ex-post evaluation framework elaborated has been useful in identifying the relations among domains, dimensions, criteria and indicators, and their relevance for the performance of each selected practice.

#### **4 Case studies: Ex-post evaluation of creative practices in Southern Italy**

In the South of Italy, local communities are usually seen as repositories of fundamental values and traditions, which are expressions of local potentials in various sectors (e.g. agriculture, education, art, architecture, and manufacturing). In particular, within a large framework of virtuous experiences spread across the South of Italy, the following best practices (Figure 2) have been selected for their operative attempt to build job opportunities for young people, develop micro-economies' networks for local public spaces, and improve social innovation involving different actors:

1. *VàZapp' – Coltiviamo idee*, Foggia, Apulia Region;
2. *ExFadda – Laboratorio urbano*, San Vito dei Normanni, Brindisi, Apulia Region;
3. *Officine Culturali*, Catania, Sicily Region.

The first example involves a digital platform and a physical headquarters in Foggia (in Apulia) where young farmers are trying to change farming methods (Internet 1): “*VàZapp' – Coltiviamo idee*” (*VàZapp' – We cultivate ideas*). The focus of the project is on reinventing the short food supply chains (SFSCs) into a cultural food supply chain, the idea of which was inspired by an Italian word game: from a supply chain “*corta*” (short) to another “*colta*” (cultural). The project aims to help people meet virtually or physically in order to share ideas and problems while building networks and businesses. *VàZapp'* has the goal of rethinking the classic SFSCs steps, such as packaging, logistics, and communication for selling a product to shops or directly to consumers. In fact, in a *cultural* food supply chain of oil, for example, the farmer produces oil, the designer studies the packaging, and the expert in communication builds a marketing strategy. Everyone brings an added value that translates into real income (Cinquemani, 2016).

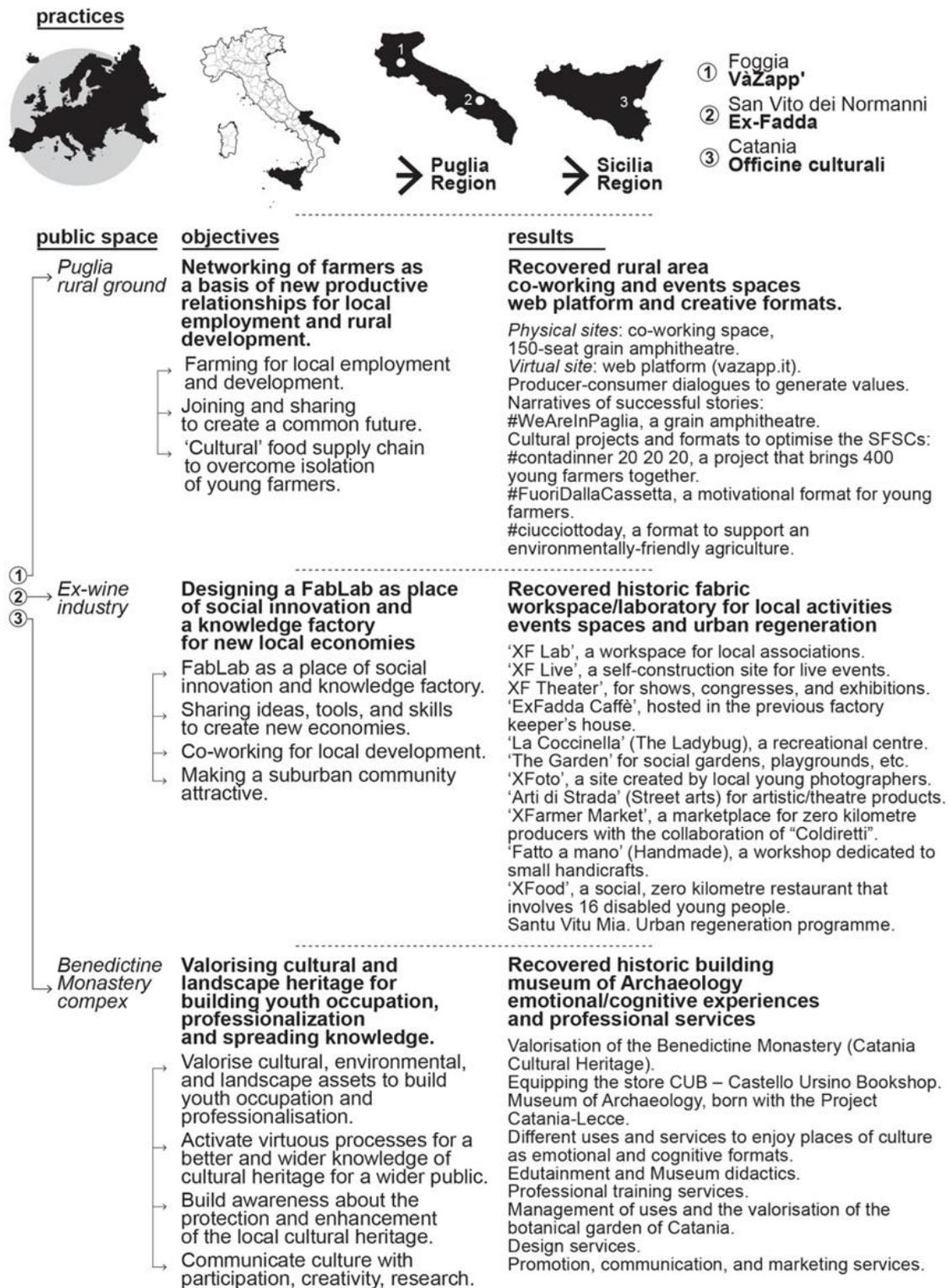


Figure 2: Creative practices localization and synthetic matrix referring to achieved objectives and results (illustration: authors, based on data retrieved from Internet 1, 2, and 3).

In the heart of the Apulia region, there is another experience of local regeneration in San Vito dei Normanni (near Brindisi): an old abandoned oenological factory (Internet 2), “Dentice di Frasso”, which is being transformed into a new cultural industry for creativity and social innovation, called ExFadda. ExFadda is a multidisciplinary hybrid space where daily workers and volunteers involve themselves in the regeneration of the wine fabric

through activities ranging from workshops, theatre, live music, playground, bar, large garden, etc. The project was promoted by the Municipality of San Vito dei Normanni and the Apulia Region, and within the “Bollenti Spiriti” youth policy. ExFadda is managed by several local realities such as Sandei s.r.l, Magazzini Teatrali Dardagnam, the associations Un Futuro a Sud, Bencicò e le Stelle, and Epifani Barbers. This organized community has developed the word “welfare” in sharing actions for professional and economic opportunities (La Redazione, 2014). In the region of Sicily, another successful experience is represented by an association (with an operational office in the Benedictine Monastery complex in Catania): the “Officine Culturali” (“Cultural Offices”). The key idea involves the development of professionalism in the field of activities related to the management and enhancement of cultural heritage. These professional skills are oriented towards future generations in order to promote knowledge of history and place identity. The valorization strategy of cultural goods and activities is managed at every stage: from designing the project with economic and social impacts analyses on the territory to data monitoring and the dissemination of results (Internet 3).

<b>scenario 1</b>	<b>I2</b>	<b>I4</b>	<b>I5</b>	<b>I7</b>	<b>I8</b>	<b>I13</b>	<b>I22</b>	<b>I26</b>	<b>I37</b>	<b>I38</b>
<i>Unit</i>	unit	unit	unit	unit	unit	unit	unit	unit	unit	unit
<b>preferences</b>										
<i>Min/Max</i>	max	min	max	min	max	max	max	max	max	max
<i>Weight</i>	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
<i>Function of preferences</i>	usual	usual	usual	usual	usual	usual	usual	usual	usual	usual
<i>Thresholds</i>	abs.	abs.	abs.	abs.	abs.	abs.	abs.	abs.	abs.	abs.
<i>-Q: Indifference</i>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<i>-P: Preference</i>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<i>-S: Gaussian</i>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>statistic</b>										
<i>Minimum</i>	2.0	500	2.0	15.0	5.0	6.0	2.0	8.0	13316	5.0
<i>Maximum</i>	3.0	7500	4.0	20.0	43.0	17.0	17.0	21.0	17302	6.0
<i>Medium</i>	2.3	2833.3	3.3	17.0	20.0	12.7	7.7	13.3	15014.3	5.7
<i>Standard deviation</i>	0.5	3299.8	0.9	2.2	16.2	4.8	6.6	5.6	1679.8	0.5
<b>evaluations</b>										
 <b>Ex Fadda</b>	2.0	500.0	2.0	15.0	43.0	17.0	17.0	8.0	17302.0	6.0
 <b>VàZapp'</b>	2.0	7500.0	4.0	20.0	5.0	6.0	4.0	11.0	14425.0	6.0
 <b>Officine Culturali</b>	3.0	500.0	4.0	16.0	14.0	15.0	2.0	21.0	13316.0	5.0

Figure 3: The evaluation matrix: The PROMETHEE-GAIA Method (illustration: authors).

The aim of this analysis is to compare different typologies of realized practices in distinct surrounding contexts, thus highlighting the main objectives and the main results that have been achieved. Starting from the ex-post evaluation framework (Table 1), and based on data recovered, ten indicators were selected (I.2, I.4, I.5, I.7, I.8, I.13, I.22, I.26, I.37, I.38) that were common to all case studies. The practices, conceived as alternatives (Table 3), are assessed upon implementing the multi-criteria method PROMETHEE-GAIA, in which an outranking procedure of data aggregation is applied as the basis of evaluation (Brans & Mareschal, 1990).

The method is also a key negotiation tool for finding an agreement among conflicting points of view, and it helps to better understand the difficulties in making good decisions owing to the following actions:

- Visualizing decision or evaluation problems;
- Achieving consensus decisions among several decision-makers;
- Justifying or invalidating decisions starting from objective elements.

The PROMETHEE-GAIA method is based on the computation of unicriterion pair-wise preference degrees (scored between 0 and 1), which rank all the alternatives from best to worst from the point of view of the decision-maker. The pair-wise comparisons of the alternatives are based on three preference flows for consolidating the results:  $\Phi^+$  (f+): the positive flow;  $\Phi^-$  (f-): the negative flow;  $\Phi$  (f): the net flow. The PROMETHEE-GAIA points out how the decision-maker perceives the difference between the objective evaluations (often measured) on every criterion. The unicriterion preference degree is computed for each criterion, rescaling or enriching the evaluations of the actions by means of preference information. The pair-wise comparisons refer to the difference between the evaluations of the two actions, like the difference in price or in quantity: e.g. cardinal scale (unit) as shown in our cases study evaluation matrix (Figure 3).

In this study, we use several PROMETHEE-GAIA tools in order to evaluate the three creative practices. We also employ a sensitivity analysis, which shows the changes in different alternatives from different perspectives of the decision-makers. The variation in the values of the criteria parameters may change scores and ranking, and it is crucial for performing some tests of the stability of the final decision (Ishizaka & Nemery, 2013).

The PROMETHEE Diamond is a two-dimensional representation of both PROMETHEE I partial and II complete rankings; each alternative is represented as a point in the ( $\Phi^+$ ,  $\Phi^-$ ) plane angled at  $45^\circ$ . In the PROMETHEE Network, actions are instead represented by nodes and arrows drawn from emerging preferences. Both tools can appreciate the proximity between actions and, thus, the levels of incomparability in the partial ranking (Mareschal, 2013).

The GAIA Web window tool shows a representation of the unicriterion net flow scores for the selected alternative in order to compare the profiles of every alternative with the use of a spider-web display for one action. Furthermore, the GAIA visual analysis (Figures 4 and 5) can help to analyse and better explain the decision problem, as it allows to understand the choices that are possible and the ones that are not (Mareschal, 2013). The complete ranking identifies Ex Fadda, followed by Officine Culturali and VàZapp'.

The profile of Ex Fadda practice (Figure 4a) is more relevant for the indicators I37 (Number of likes received), I38 (Number of social accounts), I4 (Distance from urban centre), and I2 (Number of recovered properties), which combine the tangible transformation with its ability to communicate on the web. The profile of Officine Culturali (Figure 4c) identifies the following relevant indicators: I4 (Distance from urban centre), I2 (Number of recovered properties), I26 (Number of young people involved), I5 (Percentage of foreign residents). The physical components and the communities-related components constitute the main characteristics of a complex process, where young people and foreign residents can be considered to be the drivers of change in values. The profile of VàZapp' (Figure 4b) describes its performance considering the following indicators: I5 (Percentage of foreign residents), I26 (Number of young people involved), I2 (Number

of recovered properties), I39 (Incentives for culture), and I38 (Number of social accounts). It is not only able to activate different communities (foreign residents and young people), but it also able to reuse properties and enhance the incentives for culture. The ability to improve the web communication is another relevant factor that has contributed to the success of the regeneration process.

The figure 4c shows the results of the GAIA Visual Analysis with the final ranking of the practices and the position of the indicators.

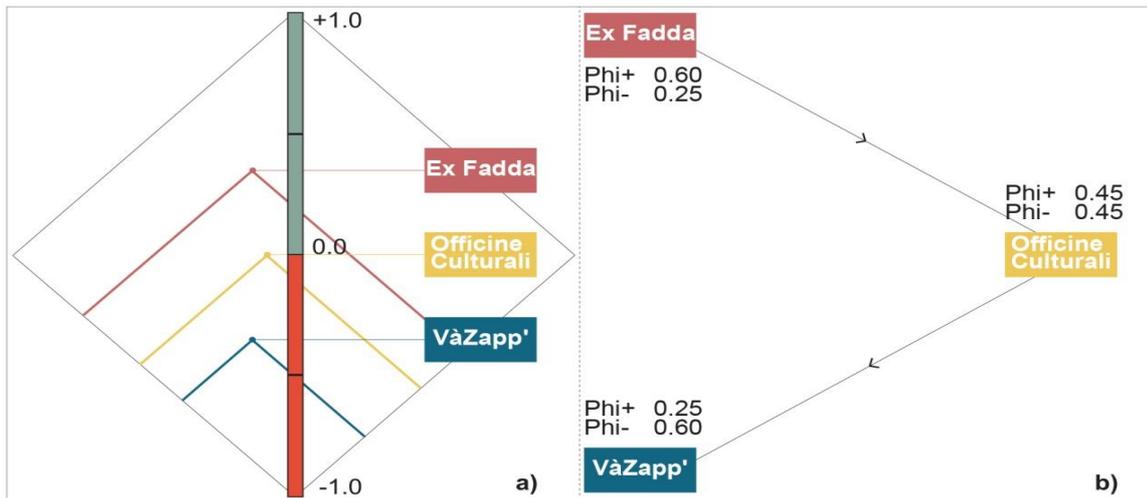


Figure 4: Evaluation of alternatives (a) PROMETHEE Diamond and (b) PROMETHEE Network (illustration: authors).

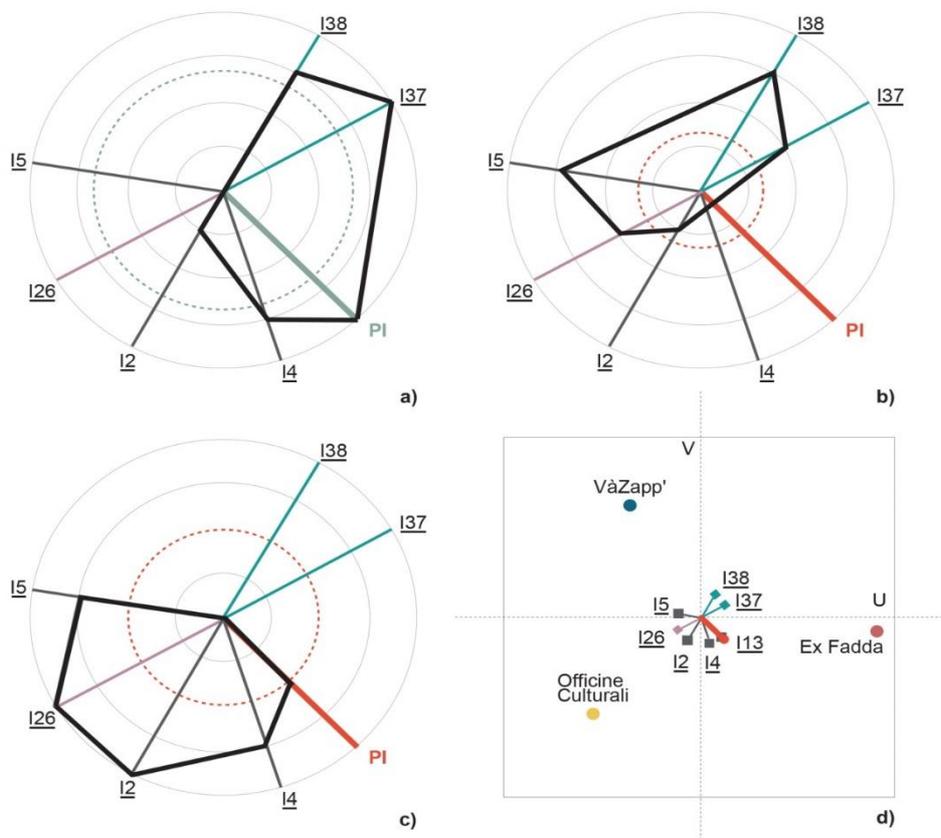


Figure 5: Evaluation of alternatives: GAIA Webs of a) Ex Fadda; b) V&Zapp; c) Officine Culturali; and d) GAIA Visual Analysis (illustration: authors).

The decision aid models used are focused on analysing the decision problem and providing the decision-maker with sound advice (Mareschal, 2013). For this reason, with the help of the Walking Weights sensitivity analysis, we compare the point of views of three decision makers in order to highlight the evaluation changes of different alternatives: the first hypothesis is without weights, while the second hypothesis is through the weights of criteria related to the local practices framework and one that considers the domain related to Enabling Environment (EE) to be more relevant, and the third hypothesis is consistent with The Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor weights, related to the European framework. In the Walking Weights, all the computations and windows contents are continuously adjusted and updated. It is an interactive tool used for modifying the weights in real time (Figure 6).

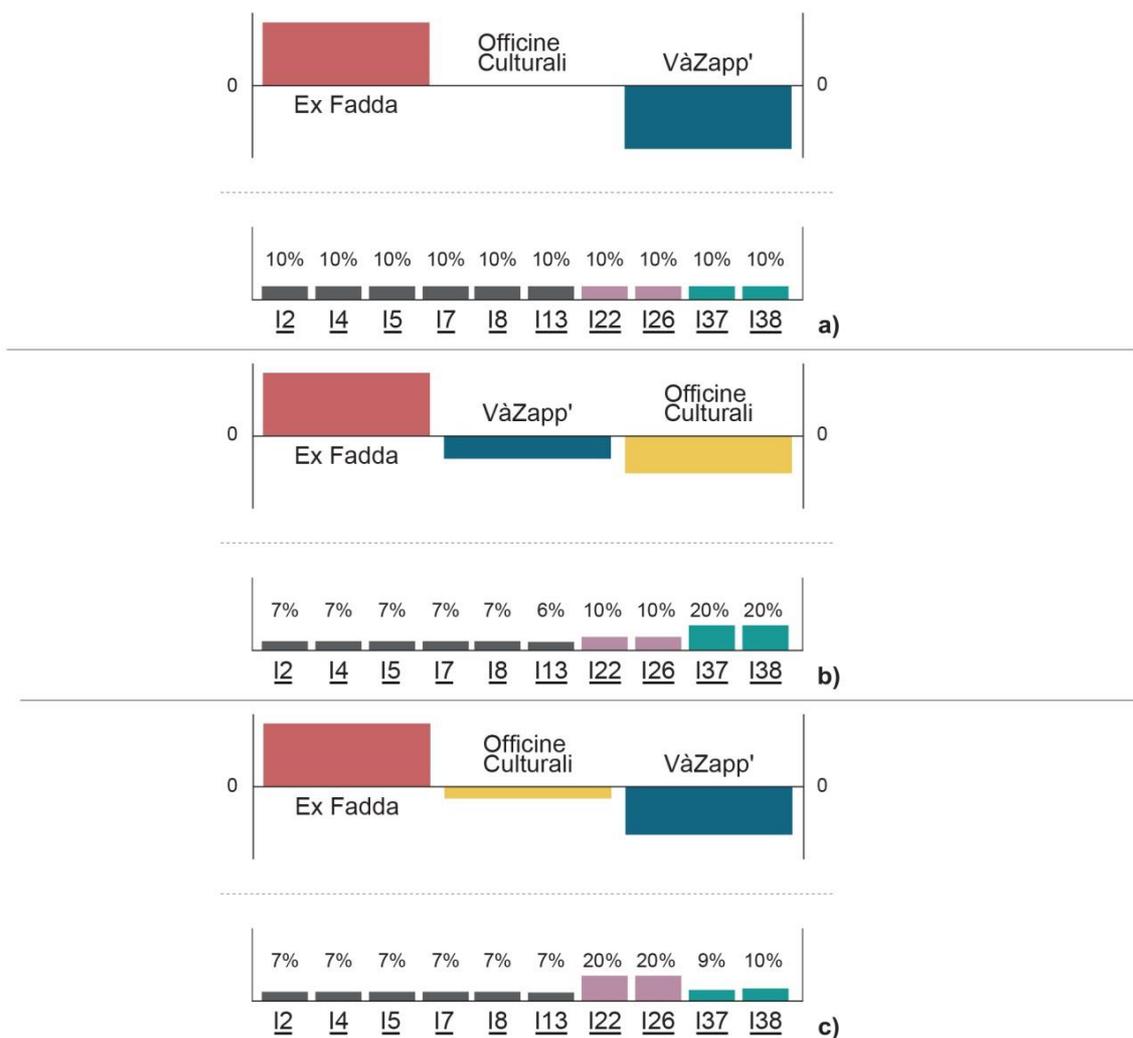


Figure 6: Sensitivity analysis – Walking weights for: a) Without weights; b) Practices' criteria weights; c) The Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor weights (illustration: authors).

The analysis of the data suggests that Ex Fadda is the most balanced practice in terms of activating culture-led urban regeneration. This is because it can insert new types of creative economy and welfare linked to the proximity for local-embedded development. Conversely, Officine Culturali and V&Zapp' alternate in the second and third place. Reading these experiences highlights how culture can be a driver of development and enhancement based on local resources and identity and, on the other hand, based on

participatory resources, such as communication technologies and innovative forms of cooperation among people and creative experts.

## 5 Results and discussion

The methodological approach has been enacted in six phases: literature review, evaluation framework, case studies selection, core set of indicators, ex-post evaluation of alternatives, and sensitivity analysis.

The literature analysis has indicated that culture-led regeneration is a strategic priority in current theories, policies, and practices. Indeed, culture, as an integrated and driving component, can make a difference in the processes of urban regeneration: renewing the image of the city and its neighbourhoods, fostering pride and a sense of belonging amongst its residents, attracting investment and tourism, improving the quality of life and social cohesion, enabling new job opportunities in the cultural and creative sectors, etc. The synergistic effect of culture-led regeneration depends, therefore, on how the process is able to create a shared and inclusive social representation, in which the various local communities can learn to expand their ability to interact, creating and sharing information and ideas to cooperate and compete together. The complex value of places (Fusco Girard & Nijkamp, 1997; Cerreta, 2010) is generated through an interactive growth process and a governance model in which both the bottom-up and the top-down approach coexist, enabled by cultural experiences to which urban space is, at the same time, the social and the cultural arena.

The evaluation framework identifies three main domains, Cultural Vibrancy (CV), Creative Economy (CE), and Enabling Environment (EE), and the related dimensions, criteria, and indicators that are selected in order to develop the ex-post evaluations of practices results. The elaboration of the described decision tree combines the suggestions derived both from literature analysis and the characteristics of analysed experiences.

In the case studies selection phase, taking into account the research questions explored by the paper, we can underline that the local selected practices observed in their implementation process, and the results identify as main cultural resources the man-made capital, the human capital, the social capital, the local knowledge, and the traditions. The identification of the change opportunities enhances the specific and situated resources and activates a decision context that is able to optimize their mix in order to achieve local sustainable development goals.

Starting from the decision tree elaborated during the phase of elaboration framework, a core set of indicators has been identified in order to compare the three experiences considering the main common issues. The indicators used are expressed in quantitative units of measurement and allow the results to be described, taking into account information that is centred on the objective components of the evaluation. In a subsequent phase of the study, it is considered essential to develop appropriate indicators that allow the inclusion of subjective components, making explicit the points of view of the different types of actors involved in the decision-making process. In fact, structured assessment, combining both objective and subjective components, makes it possible to analyse practices, taking into account not only the results obtained, but also how they are perceived by the different actors in the decision-making process. The last two phases of

the methodological approach, related to ex-post evaluation of alternatives and sensitivity analysis, help to understand that decision-making processes are incremental and adaptive, oriented to consolidate flexible and evolving networks of relationships, and are open to a constructive dialogue among the different actors involved.

The three different regeneration processes analysed identify new uses of the existing heritage that try to combine local traditional uses with innovative management models, additionally supported by new technologies. Users are not limited to those who frequent the spaces, but also to the wider virtual community that follows the activities on the network. The selected practices consider the need to build relationships (physical, social, economic) between different uses and see users as essential in order to trigger chains of multidimensional values. Each practice promotes a short chain process, implementing different declinations of the circular economy model, in which agriculture, art, training, research, tourism are the fields of experimentation of a new productive process. The direct participation in the process and the active involvement of the users allow producing new interests and stimulating new energies: new bonds are formed between the different decision-making actors, who recognize in collaboration and cooperation the concrete opportunity to improve their own wellbeing and that of community.

Building complex values networks is, at the same time, a challenge and a goal: the networks of values that are formed intertwine economic, social, cultural, and environmental values, with respect to which the direct interests of users are evident. The way in which communities are activated is often connected to the requests of certain subjects (individuals, groups, institutions, citizens) who recognize the need for change in contexts characterized by high potential. Individual and collective culture, expressed in strategy, actions, and behaviours, becomes the link that feeds itself and regenerates itself, supporting the transformation process and guiding the identification of suitable actions. The “creative communities”, consisting of different skills, complementary and synergistic, develop decision-making processes oriented to conceive and test shared actions, generating complex productive networks among people, values, and space.

## **6 Conclusions**

The components of new forms of local complex values in the regeneration processes, identified through an ex-post evaluation of some selected Italian practices, identify how decision-making processes, their articulation, and their activation have a significant impact on regeneration practices. This allows the identification of more appropriate actions for the regeneration of buildings and urban spaces to be taken. A determined role is played by the quantity and quality of social relations that trigger and allow the development of synergic and symbiotic processes. These processes are capable of supporting and feeding the different types of actions, continuously innovating the initial project through new ideas and resources (Zamagni et al., 2015). They highlight how the participation and active involvement of the various actors can generate different types of values, including the social use and economic value. Above all, they can create enabling environments that are characterized by the bonds that translate themselves into intrinsic values.

The positive externalities deriving from the bottom-up processes of valorization contribute to the regeneration of spaces and buildings, simultaneously producing

employment and increasing the network of relationships in the local community. They contribute both to the economic development of the area and to the social and cultural development, providing services that public administrations can no longer support. This allows generated processes to be consistent with the principles of a circular economy, extracting residual value from existing spaces and promoting their reuse and possible up-cycle. The bottom-up processes of enhancement progress are built over time. The priority in this area aims to research innovative regeneration tools that, on the one hand, define temporal solutions adapted to new uses and, on the other, guarantee reversible and economically sustainable interventions (Henneberry, 2017). The incremental evolution and temporariness of uses are two important issues that are capable of influencing the activation and development of regeneration processes. The practices analysed here point to the possibility of enhancing the public real estate assets and responding to a crucial challenge for both the historic centres and the suburbs. In addition, they highlight how activating projects of cultural and social innovation can generate new economic value in built heritage, promoting both economic development and urban regeneration.

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## Revealing residents' shared values through crowdsourced photography: Experimental approach in participatory urban regeneration

### Abstract

Many cities in the developed world face a need for a regeneration of the aged-up urban quarters. Typical examples are the modernist urban neighbourhoods built in European cities after World War II. At the time of their construction, they represented new living standards but need to be regenerated to be able to cope with the needs and expectations of contemporary residents. These expectations largely depend on the residents' own perceptions and evaluations of the state of the art of their living environments. This paper presents an experimental approach to revealing such perceptions. The approach is based on crowdsourced analytical photography and attached descriptions. It was initially developed as a part of the EU project Human Cities to offer citizens of Ljubljana a tool to express their concerns about their living environments. It is focused on revealing shared values of local communities, which are seen as a starting point for setting up participatory urban regeneration strategies.

**Keywords:** participatory urban design, public space, urban regeneration, residents, shared values, photography

### 1 Introduction

European cities which grew very quickly after the Second World War are faced with a pressing need for urban regeneration of the then new urban quarters. This does not apply solely to abandoned industrial areas but also to the large housing estates that were built to accommodate the workforce. These residential areas are in a need of improvement of urban living conditions in order to be competitive and meet the expectations of contemporary urban dwellers. Residents' notions and expectations will therefore be considered as an important input in preparing participatory regeneration strategies. They are closely related to cultural norms and values and can greatly influence one's notion of (di)satisfaction with the living environments (Križnik, 2018) as well as one's willingness to take on a role of an active citizen in the regeneration process (Dargan, 2009; Denters and Klok, 2010).

Renowned urban anthropologist Lisa Redfield Peattie (1998) points out the importance of common values in communities. She argues that the values of community are of equal or even bigger importance for our happiness than material standards of living. Her observations have been informed by numerous peace actions related to urban planning that sought social change by inclusion of all interests and groups in the planning processes. This is a reminder of the importance of understanding a community's experience with its living environments. In order to do so, it is essential to reveal people's perceptions of their living environments (Sarason, 1974 and 1986; Chavis and Pretty, 1999).

Knowledge of the shared common values of residents of urban environments is important for setting up common visions of the future. Once the collective values of a local community have

been identified, they can be transformed into the backbone for the bottom-up action plans of community improvements with the active participation and involvement of the inhabitants. As Medved observes in his comparative study of various approaches to top-down and bottom-up urban regeneration “the sustainable neighbourhoods implemented with the participatory bottom-up approach generate stronger local governance systems and are more socially sustainable” (Medved, 2017: 120).

Shared visions for future developments are especially important in the field of urban public spaces as these common spaces aim to address the needs of people from all walks of life. The new approaches to participatory redesign of public space have been the focus of the European project Human Cities that has been running in eleven cities under the Creative Europe programme from 2014 to 2018 ([www.humancities.eu](http://www.humancities.eu)). Its main objective was development and testing of new approaches to participatory urban regeneration through experimentation in public space with the participation of residents. One of the experiential urban areas was in the north of Ljubljana, the mid-sized capital city of Slovenia with about 280.000 inhabitants. Ljubljana has a rather large number of aging large-scale housing estates that need comprehensive approach to urban renewal (Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region, 2013; City of Ljubljana, 2014). The city does not possess a strong tradition of bottom-up urban planning. Public participation is largely dealt with in a superficial manner within the formal planning procedures (Nikšič, 2014). The Human Cities experimentation thus tested possible alternative approaches that would help the local residents to have their say in the matter.

The main objective was to develop a new tool that would reveal inhabitants’ values in relation to their living environments. However, since the perception of space is subject to constant change, revealing the values of the users of urban space can become a theoretical and practical challenge (Walter, 1988; Thwaites & Simkins, 2007; Nikšič, 2008; Nikšič & Butina, 2017). The following topics have been highlighted within the theoretical framework:

- How to reveal the common values of the local community in relation to its living environments?
- Should established methodologies (interviewing, perceptual mapping, cognitive mapping, etc.) be upgraded/combined with new technologies and/or social networking media? What is the general usefulness and real value of crowdsourced information in revealing people’s attitudes towards their living environments?
- How to track changes in the value systems and how to integrate them into the urban regeneration process? What kind of urban design solutions are robust enough to stand the changing nature of value systems over time?

These complex issues have been addressed in different ways. This paper will focus on one single approach that aims to develop an innovative tool based on the use of new technologies to reveal residents’ shared values as a part of urban regeneration process. It is based on the new forms of communication used in contemporary society in which photography and short texts play an important role.

## **2 The image and its caption – theoretical background**

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) introduced the concept of photostory as a composition of images and descriptions which form semiotic codes. This forms a multimodal message where images and captions are in an interaction and develop their relation to form a sign. The interpretation of a particular sign depends on both the creator and the reader and is strongly culturally conditioned (Barthes, 1977). Mitchell (2009) argues that the act of reading does not only refer

to the reading of a text, but also of everything that surrounds us, including the signs and phenomena, therefore the receiver of the message can be called the reader. When the image and the word meet in the multimodal message, the reading approach is different from the classical reading. The reader has to set up the meaning (Tominc, 2016). This process depends on the reader's experiences and knowledge, trust in the source of the message, and the influence of social environment. Eco (1979) introduced the term “ideal reader” to stress that the reader is the one that concludes the process of passing the (in this case image creator’s) message to the others – the reader is called ideal as he/she is awaked and aware of the existence of numerous interpretations of the image.

The image and the word are involved in a dynamic process and represent two different ways of visual communication – non-verbal and verbal. A combination of both represents one of the most powerful communication strategies (Kress, 2004; Lester, 2006). The image is an effective way to transfer knowledge and information. Muhovič (1998) points out that images facilitate the flow between empiricism and theory, and increase flexibility when operating with the experience. Using imagery encourages the reader to think and communicate; it motivates him to take a different view. This is an important aspect for the participatory urban planning, too, if we imagine a citizen as an image creator and the urban planner as an image reader. The image generated by a citizen can offer to the planner a new insight into the citizens’ perceptions and interpretations of the environments.

The advantage and communicative power of the image lie in the fact that it can be used on a small area to display a large amount of information that would require much more space if expressed in verbal form. Collection of images is also less time-costly than classical participatory procedures, since they can be crowdsourced by using ICT (See et al., 2016). Due to the numerous possible interpretations of the images, however, the interpretation of the photography-based crowdsourced data seems to be more demanding, therefore the usage of residents-generated photography as a communication channel between the residents and planners in participatory procedures needs to have a firmer framework in order to bring useful information into the planning process.

The images show data at several levels, from a wide view to the fine detail (Tominc, 2016). Decoding the meaning of the image does not require knowledge of writing and understanding of language, as is true for the text, but it does require knowledge of visual language and symbolism (Mancini, 2011), which would not necessarily be a skill of an urban planner. Barthes (1977) points out that the image can easily be detected, while decoding is less straightforward as it can lead to different interpretations, which is especially true for the images without captions. Barthes (1977) also argues that we rarely see the image without a caption, even if it is only the subtitle that denotes very basic information, such as time and location. For Barthes, the importance of the image is always associated with and depending on text, as images by themselves are too polysemic and too open to different interpretations. In his opinion, we need words that supply the image with a definitive meaning. The text accompanying the image can assist in narrowing down the wide spectrum of possible interpretations.

Therefore, in order for the resident-generated image to be useful in the participatory planning process, it needs to be accompanied by a text in the form of captions. There are several reasons for this. It could be that the image is very ambiguous and vague, so its contents cannot be clearly defined. Words can more accurately and clearly explain the content of the image. Captions are essential if we want to make the reader clearly understand the message. Starc (2009) argues that it is sometimes enough to decode the image by a couple of words only, but even if few, they

are indispensable. Another way to avoid the ambiguity is to ask the image producers to link their images with appropriate tags that have been pre-set by the foreseen image reader. This helps to avoid misunderstandings and to set up the common understanding between the producer and the receiver of the message (Fischer, 2011), which is an essential pre-condition for a successful communication between the many actors in the participatory planning processes.

### **3 Revealing shared values of local community through photography, captions and tags**

The theoretical insight into the capacity of photography as a communication tool in participatory processes between the residents on one side and the planners on the other has shown that photography in itself is too polysemic and too open to various interpretations to be used on its own. On the other hand, photography has become a part of everyday social communication and thus form of media, accepted by and practiced among widest public (Zappavigna, 2016; Guerrero et al., 2016). Therefore, it is well-worth experimenting with the other compatible types of information that could supplement photography and turn it into a possible communication channel between the residents and the planners.

With this in mind, we developed a tool called Photostory of our neighbourhood – PON (Sln.: *Fotogodba naše soseske*). In a broader sense, this is a photo contest in the form of a crowdsourced on-line photo album which offers an insight into the current state of the art of living environments, as seen and interpreted by the inhabitants themselves. The album is created by residents and visitors of urban neighbourhoods, thus illustrating the local urban environments and their life through the eyes of the people living or occasionally spending time in such locations.

The Photostory had three main missions. First, to invite citizens to start observing and thinking about their local environments, their assets and problems, and to thus become more conscious of the characteristics of the spaces they inhabit. Secondly, to reveal the citizens' perceptions and interpretations of living environments to urban planners, who often lack this layer of information and thus fail to implement it in their planning strategies. And thirdly, to elicit inhabitants' thinking of their possibly more active role in participatory urban regeneration processes as active citizens with their own contributions, based on their own observations of the living environments and their possible improvements.

Five main thematic categories were set up by the project team to remind the residents of some important aspects of urban life, as well as put attention to some important urban design principles that impact the quality of life in the city. They were described in the form of some lead questions, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Five thematic categories of Photostory of our neighbourhood (PON).

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**Most pleasant place in my neighbourhood**

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We usually spend a major part of our time in our neighbourhood, therefore its arrangements importantly influence the quality of our life. Which are the spaces in the neighbourhood that I like, find interesting and like to spend time in? What makes them pleasant? Activities and people that spend time there, street furniture, presence of natural elements, maybe the light and colours or details on the surrounding buildings? Try to show the places of your neighbourhood that you find pleasant, and explain what makes them attractive, through the photo and its caption.

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**Professions in my neighbourhood**

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Good neighbourhoods are not merely sleeping spaces, but places where different activities and programs take place that cater to the needs of inhabitants of the neighbourhood and the city. The baker at the street corner, the sales person in a local shop, the driver of a bus that stops in the neighbourhood, the local greens care-taker, etc., are only a few more visible professions which importantly contribute to the quality of life in a neighbourhood. At the same time, there are many other professions that are more hidden to our eyes – people with different skills, abilities and knowledge. Present their activities through a photo and its caption.

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**My neighbour**

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Fast rhythm of life and new ways of communication, supported by new communication technologies, are changing and often weakening contacts between people living in the same space. With the help of a photo and its caption catch the moments showing that neighbourhoods are inhabited by social beings who, despite changed ways of life, still gather together, support and help each other. Street play, chatting on a bench in a local park or ringing a neighbour's door because you have run out of flour while baking biscuits: these are all examples of activities that join people in a neighbourhood. Photos with captions in this category should show that lively neighbourhoods are inhabited by people who make good neighbours, instead of complete strangers to each other.

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**Borders of my neighbourhood**

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Where does my neighbourhood spread to? What are its borders and what defines them? Are they physically, functionally or symbolically defined? Borders may sometimes be clear and exact, sometimes blurred and fluid. Getting to know the borders is helpful to someone who tries to reach beyond them. Or strengthen the distinctive identity of the space within. Present the borders of your neighbourhood with the help of a photo and its caption.

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**Shared values in my neighbourhood**

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Which are the values, shared by the inhabitants of my neighbourhood? Which ideals unite us as a community? How are they reflected in space? And can they be a basis for common action of inhabitants trying to improve the living conditions in a neighbourhood? Values are an immaterial category, but are nevertheless often reflected in the physical, real environment. This category collects photos that show the state of the art of the neighbourhoods, reflecting the values of their inhabitants.

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Upon the contribution of their entries to PON, the residents were asked to submit three types of information with each entry: photo as the main information, supplemented by its caption and the selection of any number of tags from a predefined list. The photo and its caption aimed to reflect residents' own observations and notions about their living environments. Meanwhile, the pre-set tags addressed certain particular issues that are of particular interest to the planners. In other words, the list of tags provides the urban planners with an entry point into residents' attitudes, so that a definitive aspect that matters in urban planning terms could be established. To go beyond the existing planning practices, in the scope of the Human Cities project, thirteen shared values were identified, as shown in Table 2. They were gathered through review of more than 170 civil initiatives reclaiming public spaces across Europe (Human Cities, 2018).

Table 2: Human Cities Shared Values (HCSV).

Shared Value	Definition
Empathy	The ability to understand and share the feelings of others, despite different backgrounds and life experiences. Empathy creates a bond between individuals that ends up becoming part of their shared identity.
Wellbeing	A state of feeling healthy and happy. It is a contribution to society through knowledge, culture, design, music, ecology, healthy food or renovation of public spaces. The main goal of wellbeing is to improve living conditions so that people can achieve better physical and mental health.
Sustainability	Sustainability is concerned with meeting the needs of current population without compromising those of future generations. It includes environmental, social and economic aspects.
Intimacy	The possibility of feeling a sense of closeness with people, objects or places.
Conviviality	Live together, share ideas, activities, discussions... Create a common spirit, a sense of belonging around which people can gather and find meaningful.
Mobility	The capacity to make citizens leave their private spaces for public ones.
Accessibility	Being open to everyone and easily reachable. It has both geographic and social meaning.
Imagination	The ability of mind to be creative with new images, ideas, concepts, and the like. Imagination is the main provider of images and dreams of new solutions to our daily problems.
Leisure	Free time, away from demands of work and duty, when one can rest, take it easy and enjoy hobbies or sports.
Aesthetics	A visual attribute aiming at beauty, creativity and innovation, which provides an identity to a place.
Sensoriality	The mobilization of a person's senses, whether hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling or touching.
Solidarity	Solidarity is a unity of people sharing the same interests in order to help each other.
Respect	Respect is showing due regard to people's lives, opinions, wishes and rights. It implies there are no barriers or stereotypes that come between us.

PON is “written” by the residents themselves and thus reveals their own notions of their living environments, as well as their personal values in relation to these environments. Any registered visitor to the web page can submit up to 10 photos, each with attached caption and any number of tags reflecting HCSV. A database that has been formed in this way allows urban planners to get an insight into the concrete places and their characteristics that matter to the local residents in general, and the values that characterize these places through the opinion of the residents in particular. These shared values can become an important stepping stone in preparing shared visions and plans for urban regeneration which would be adopted by the residents and thus more likely implemented with their active participation.

The next section reports the results of the first launch of PON in the 2016–2017 period. It is focused on the analyses of the shared values that were revealed through the photo contest.

#### 4 The results of the first launch of Photostory of our neighbourhood

PON was launched for the first time in autumn 2016 and promoted via website and other info-channels of UIRS and affiliated partners, among others an exhibition held at the Museum of Architecture and Design that presented the legacy of neighbourhoods built in socialist times. This exhibition represented a good momentum and opportunity to encourage the inhabitants to rethink the questions of the qualities of large scale housing estates, as well as open a discussion on maintenance and participatory urban regeneration procedures.

PON was organized as a competition with prizes to attract a large number of residents. The main prize was the exhibition of the winning entries at the travelling European Human Cities exhibition on display in eleven European cities, as well as a print of winning photos in the form of postcards (Nikšič *et al*, 2017). To select the winners, an interdisciplinary international jury was set up, composed of professionals from the fields of architecture, art history, exhibition design, geography, social innovation, urban design and urban planning. The jury selected five winning photos in each of the five thematic categories.

Altogether, 172 entries were submitted (see some examples in Figures 1-5). Ten were submitted without all relevant information (with either caption or attached shared values missing), so 162 entries could be taken into account and analysed.

The collected data offered a wide range of insights that would usually not be accessible to the urban planners:

- It was possible to identify parts of the neighbourhood that most evoked the residents' perceptions (i.e., where most of the photos had been taken). The planners were thus enabled to perform an in-depth study of these places to understand why local people strongly associated with them. Captions to the photos proved to be very helpful in revealing this aspect.
- The distribution of all photos among the five thematic categories showed which of the thematic issues that the planners pre-defined as important for developing the common regeneration strategies were most relevant to the residents.
- The in-depth analysis of the motives that appeared on the photos revealed answers to several questions: the importance of built and natural features in the residents' perceptions, the importance their users gave to the local environments, the relations between the environments and their users in the eyes of the residents, the role of urban design and architectural details in forming the character of the neighbourhood, etc.
- The analysis of the captions revealed most common words and phrases that, in the residents' opinions, characterize the neighbourhood.
- The most often selected shared values revealed possible foundations on which joint actions of the local community could be based in the participatory regeneration endeavours.

The shared values of the inhabitants were central to experimentation and therefore studied into more detail. The material was looked upon from two different angles. First, the most/least often indicated shared values, regardless of their position at the first, second or third place, were identified. Secondly, the most/least often indicated shared values within the range (within the values that were named in the first place, second place, etc.) were revealed. All eligible material, submitted to the contest, was analysed in this fashion. In order to compare the points of view of the participants and the jury, the 25 winning images and their captions were analysed in the same way.

#### **4.1 Shared values indicated in the crowdsourced materials**

The most often mentioned value (with any ranking – first, second or third place – taken into account) was wellbeing (60x), followed by leisure (48x), aesthetics (44x), conviviality (43x) and imagination (42x). The ranking of other categories was as follows: empathy (36x), intimacy (33x), sensoriality (33x), sustainability (32x), respect (30x), accessibility (25x), mobility (20x) and solidarity (10x).

When the number of recalls within each of the five competition categories is taken into account, the results are a bit different. In the category Most pleasant place in my neighbourhood, wellbeing (27x) and leisure (23x) were indicated most often, followed by aesthetics and sustainability (23x). The least often indicated values were mobility (1x), solidarity (2x) and accessibility (4x). In the category Professions in my neighbourhood, the most often indicated shared values were sustainability (9x), conviviality (8x) and respect (8x), while intimacy was indicated most rarely (2x). In the category My neighbour, none of the shared values stood out, since they were all more or less indicated the same number of times. Solidarity was the only shared value that did not get any vote. In the category Borders of my neighbourhood, the two most often indicated shared values were aesthetics (18x) and sensoriality (17x). Solidarity was again the least often mentioned value (1x). Meanwhile, in the category Shared values, leisure (15x) and wellbeing (12x) were indicated the most often, and aesthetics (1x), sensoriality (2x) and solidarity (4x) the least often.

When considering the importance of each value to the participant (first, second or third place on the list of three values that describe the submitted photo best), it becomes clear that in all categories wellbeing got the most attention (53x), followed by empathy (35x) and sustainability (25x). Four shared values were never indicated as most important ones, and never made it into the first place: leisure, respect, sensoriality and solidarity. The values most often named at the second place were conviviality (27x), aesthetics (18x) and imagination (17x). Values that most often made the third place were leisure (36x), respect (30x) and sensoriality (26x).

#### **4.2 Shared values indicated in the jury's selection of crowdsourced materials**

For a comparison between the notion of the residents on one hand and the professionals on the other the same analyses were performed for the 25 winning photos chosen by the jury. The strongest value (first, second or third place) was conviviality (13x), followed by leisure (9x), while solidarity ended up last (1x).

Once more, when the number of recalls within each of the five competition categories is taken into consideration, the results are a bit different. In the category Most pleasant place in my neighbourhood, most often accessibility, intimacy, conviviality and leisure were indicated (all of them 3x). In the category Professions in my neighbourhood, the most often indicated shared values were wellbeing, conviviality and respect (all of them 3x). In the category My neighbour, it is mobility that stands out (6x). In the category Borders of my neighbourhood, the most often indicated shared value was wellbeing (3x), followed by intimacy, sustainability, accessibility and imagination (2x). Meanwhile, conviviality was indicated most often (4x) in the category Shared values.

When considering the importance of each value to the participant (first, second or third place on the list of the three values that describe the submitted photo best), the jury's results differ from those of the participants. In all categories wellbeing is the strongest one (9x), followed by sustainability and conviviality (5x). The value most often named at the second place is conviviality (8x), while leisure takes the third-place (7x). These two values (most often named at the second and third place) overlap with the original indications made by the participants.



Figure 1: Photo submitted to category The nicest place of my neighbourhood: *In a small corner at the edge of the neighbourhood there is a secret place where the whole community gathers, from mothers with babies to competitive youths, to grandmothers who observe their growing grandchildren with an invisible pride. Attached shared values: conviviality, imagination, leisure (author: Urška Podgrajšek).*



Figure 2: Photo submitted to category Professions in my neighbourhood: *Not so long ago, a small centre for the elderly, meant for socializing, exercise and other activities, was opened in our neighbourhood. The lady in the photo was just sweeping autumn leaves in front of the entrance. Attached shared values: wellbeing, leisure, respect (author: Lea Piškur).*



Figure 3: Photo submitted to category My neighbour: *Balcony tales 2015*. Attached shared values: conviviality, imagination, aesthetics (author: Maruša Račič).



Figure 4: Photo submitted to category Borders of my neighbourhood: *The border of my city is the horizon; when I surpass it, the sky becomes the limit*. Attached shared values: wellbeing, accessibility, imagination (author: Tisa Neža Herlec).



Figure 5: Photo submitted to category Shared values of my neighbourhood: *My childhood friend and I, we are but shadows, just memories in the neighbourhood where we grew up. We return sometimes and recall our memories.* Attached shared values: conviviality, imagination, leisure (author: Tisa Neža Herlec).

## 5 Photostory as a tool that reveals residents' perceptions of living environments

The PON experiment showed the potential of revealing residents' shared values through crowdsourced photography with captions. The high response from the residents indicates that this is a tool contemporary urban dwellers can embrace as a channel of communication with planning professionals and authorities. However, such a tool challenges the planners to take a different view and puts them into a new role that may test their current abilities. To be capable to receive the messages communicated by the residents and become, as Eco (1979) put it, "the ideal readers", such a tool has to be put within a strong and pre-defined framework, linking the residents' free expressions to the urban planning objectives and frameworks. PON experimented with thematic categories and tags that were both pre-defined by planning professionals and attached to the submitted materials by residents. These pre-defined categories proved to be successful in translating residents' messages more directly into the urban planning issues.

PON in Ljubljana was based on public spaces as its main theme, a theme that any resident encounters in his/her daily routines. Public space as a common space proved to be a good ground to reveal place attachments and identifications with places. The high number of participants in the contest indicates that residents are ready to contribute to the urban regeneration processes in new, previously unseen ways, provided that the core theme (public space) and communication channel (photos with captions) are appropriately set. Urban planning professions should build on such good examples and develop new well-structured tools to encourage truly participatory involvement of residents and their notions in regeneration

processes in the locally adapted manners. Such tools must not stay at the level of the commonly prevailing social media practices but should be adjusted to the numerous and specific demands and reflect the concrete communities and their environments, while embedded in the complex process of urban regeneration within systems of planning. As PON indicated, certain pre-defined categories and tags can serve as the common ground in order to avoid misunderstandings between producers and receivers of the messages. At the same time, such tools must stay simple and straightforward to use in order not to discourage potential users.

One practical question that stays open is the integration of data, gathered in these new innovative ways, into the existent planning procedures. As cities are getting more dynamic, traditional master plans are becoming less appropriate for the management of the (re)urbanization processes and must be upgraded with new tools. However, despite the existence of certain new tools and approaches, their integration into official planning procedures is lagging behind. This is an issue that must be more thoroughly dealt with in the future.

The experiment with the Photostory of our neighbourhood also shows how subjective the spatial perception is and how it changes through times, reflecting the spirit of current social reality. The 2016 experiment revealed that values such as well-being, leisure, aesthetics and conviviality are currently the most strongly shared among the local residents, while some others, such as solidarity, that were much stressed in the previous socio-economic framework of socialism, end up much lower on the ranking lists. These results remind the professionals that they must not in any sense automatically assume the residents' notions about their own living environments.

The Photostory also opened a number of completely new perspectives of positive aspects of living in suburban neighbourhoods, even if such environments are rather aging. These new perspectives of the neighbourhoods can not only help to strengthen their identity and increase the self-esteem of the residents, but also present new opportunities for development of new niches in the local economy, e. g. in the tourist sector by re-directing the tourist flow from central attractions to more peripheral ones, those that would not be recognized without the expertise of local residents. This approach represents a new window of opportunity for "less attractive" urban areas in the cities that often end up on the losing end of the global race for attention of potential visitors and investors.

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Elena MARCHIGIANI

## Accessibility to welfare spaces in council housing neighbourhoods of Trieste: Research at the interface of public policies and communities

### **Abstract**

After the Second World War, council housing neighbourhoods all over Europe played the role of laboratories where welfare state policies provided large quantities of houses, community spaces, and facilities. Today, their poor spatial quality is coupled to an increasing demand for public social and health assistance. Based on action research carried out in four peripheral neighbourhoods of Trieste (Italy) by the University in collaboration with public and third sector actors, this paper stresses the need to re-orient local welfare from a quantitative and functionalist approach to the concept of welfare spaces and a stronger attention to the qualities of services' physical setting. Starting from the analysis of urban social dynamics, direct observation of everyday use of public spaces in the case study neighbourhoods, assessment of institutional policies and listening to inhabitants' needs, the results from participatory processes of urban redesign are discussed. Working on the accessibility to public facilities invites a reconsideration of spatial solutions in relation to new ways of living common spaces and as a strategic device, both to improve the efficiency of healthcare policies and to strengthen relationships among residents. Conclusions focus on the role of the University as a stimulus to review regeneration processes, design tools and institutional routines.

**Keywords:** council housing, urban regeneration, accessibility, welfare spaces, intermediate actors, public policies

### **1 Introduction: Going back to work on council housing estates**

During the last century, one of the main tasks of public policies in many European countries was providing people suffering from disadvantaged economic conditions with affordable homes and facilities. After a period of shrinking public investments, these issues are once again perceived as strategic within the urban agendas, both on national and international levels (EU Ministers for Urban Matters, 2016; United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2017). This revived attention refers not only to the demand for more social housing, but also to the necessity to adapt existing council estates to new social trends and lifestyles (Pittini et al., 2015; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2015). On the one hand, the housing issue synthesizes the complexity of contemporary living conditions in which financial insecurity is combined with a profound change in demographic and family patterns. On the other hand, the council neighbourhoods that after the Second World War played a major role in the construction of European cities are currently facing significant problems. Here, poor spatial quality and lack of maintenance are coupled with an increasing request for social and health assistance, due to the economic crisis and the proliferation of needs that struggle to find answers in traditional—often sectorial and standardized—public policies.

Nonetheless, if we address this huge public estate of dwellings and equipment with a positive glance, the generally recognized difficult conditions can also be identified as

opportunities for a deeper integration of research and practice in the field of urban regeneration. Council neighbourhoods are complex urban infrastructures, where the performance of built and open spaces intertwines with that of public facilities. Today, given the increase of social demands and the cuts in public expenditure, it is all the more necessary to rethink the physical layout and management of flats, community spaces and services in order to re-build collaboration between public and private/inhabitants' resources. Thanks to the sedimentation of a long history of multi-layered public intervention, the regeneration of existing council neighbourhoods can therefore offer a relevant field for innovation in housing programmes through a tighter connection between urban transformation and welfare policies.

In relation to these topics, Trieste has for some years now been an important laboratory for defining new ways to work on places and with people (Donzelot et al., 2003). The protagonists are the main institutional actors jointly involved in the management of welfare policies (Public Local Health Agency, It. *Azienda Sanitaria Universitaria Integrata di Trieste*, ASUITS; Regional Public Housing Agency, It. *Azienda Territoriale per l'Edilizia Residenziale di Trieste*, ATER; Municipality of Trieste), the third sector (local social cooperatives), and the University. The frame is the programme Habitat-Microareas. Health and Community Development, launched in 2005 with the aim to organize a territorialized system for social and health assistance in many council housing neighbourhoods of Trieste. Today, Microarea offices cover almost all of the urban area, working as the first interface between the inhabitants and the institutions, offering services and organizing community activities.

Based on a long-term dialogue with the programme Habitat-Microareas, the purpose of this paper is to outline a reflection on the ways to reorient welfare policies from a quantitative, functionalist, and abstract attitude to a stronger integration with the qualities of their physical setting (from welfare state to welfare spaces). The focus is on participatory design experiences developed in four council housing neighbourhoods of Trieste in the academic year 2016-2017 by the Atelier of Urban Planning of the Master's Degree in Architecture of the University of Trieste, with the support of Microarea operators (Figure 1). The goal of didactic and action research practices was to explore specific issues:

- How working on spatial accessibility to common services can become a tool to refunctionalize abandoned and poorly designed spaces, upgrade social and health conditions of a growing number of disadvantaged and elderly people, foster collaboration between inhabitants, and break the physical (and mental) barriers that often prevent the use of services within council neighbourhoods by citizens living in other parts of the city;
- How participatory and collaborative design approaches to the regeneration of public spaces can help renovate welfare policies;
- How intermediate subjects (such as the University) can act as enablers of collaboration between citizens and institutions, and as a stimulus to overcome the sectoriality of welfare policies.

In the background of this narrative stands a more general assumption. Today, as in the past, public neighbourhoods are places where impacts of the "new urban question" – social inequalities, lack of mobility and accessibility, bad environmental conditions (Secchi, 2010) – are both anticipated and stressed. Here innovative processes of spatial and social design, empowerment of local communities, forms of public and collective actions can be tried out: policies and actions that, in the near future, will be useful for the

regeneration of other parts of the contemporary city (Laboratoriocittàpubblica, 2009).



Figure 1: Trieste, the studied council housing neighbourhoods of: (a) Ponziana, (b) Valmaura, (c) Altura, (d) Borgo San Sergio-via Grego (source: Public Housing Agency of Trieste, 2002).

## 2 Trieste: A front-line context

### 2.1 The public city: General trends and issues

Housing policies in Trieste have for more than a century been a laboratory for adapting public action to the emergence of social and demographic processes: processes that in the capital of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region – with respect to other national and international contexts – continue to show front-line features. The city was still part of the Habsburg Empire when the first municipal body responsible for housing policies was established in 1902, one year before the Italian law for the creation of Institutes for council houses (Di Biagi et al., 2002; Di Biagi et al., 2004). Today, even though the public city built by council housing neighbourhoods has not quite attained the extreme deprived conditions recognized in many European contexts, the situation of public peripheries in Trieste is more difficult than it may appear at a first sight. Over time, urban growth has embedded them, but in the collective imagination they still belong to the “bad lands” (Dikeç, 2007), to those areas which have acquired a bad reputation for a variety of social, localization and spatial design choices caused by public policies.

The share of the public city in Trieste is among the highest in Italy. ATER is in charge of about 13,000 dwellings (11% of the total number of available flats) with 20,000 inhabitants (9% of the whole resident population), meaning that 41% of families live in rented flats (Public Housing Agency of Trieste, 2017).<sup>1</sup> Despite these numbers, the supply

<sup>1</sup> In contrast with the European framework, the share of council housing in Italy is very modest (4-5%); housing property rises to an average of 71.9%, while families renting to 18% (Censis, Nomisma, 2015).

is unable to match the demand for subsidized housing: presently, ATER is expecting approximately 6,000 new applications. This reaffirms a constant accentuation of poverty situations, with close ties to demographic trends. Trieste is a harbinger of certain soon-to-become mainstream phenomena across Italy and Europe. It is among the Italian cities with the highest proportion of elderly residents, whereas ageing is associated with the growth of chronic diseases, a profound change in family profiles, and the decline of the young and working population. Inhabitants over 65 years of age exceed 28% (data for Italy is 21.7%), but in council housing the average figure is up to 35% (nearly half of whom are older than 74).<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the share of single-parent households is 48% (compared with 32% in the rest of Italy). This means that almost half of the families have only one component and only one possible income (which in 65% of the cases is less than 15,600 euro per year).

Figures clearly show that council estates are currently a ground where public policies are once again confronted with dramatic issues, in Trieste as in other European cities: the re-emergence of a social housing demand; the perpetuation of choices that have led to the concentration of vulnerable groups in the same neighbourhoods; the gap between the characteristics of dwellings and collective spaces on the one hand and family size and inhabitants' needs on the other. Moreover, ensuring the opportunity to age at home here struggles with the difficulty of re-configuring spaces in relation to significant problems of accessibility to flats and services, especially for those suffering from reduced mobility (Huber, 2008). Even though still underestimated, these issues will shortly have serious impacts on spatial design, healthcare and social assistance, and public spending (Maino & Ferrera, 2013). The challenge for welfare policies thus appears to be the definition of innovative and synergic interventions in the residential, social and urban context, capable of dealing with new (and frequently voiceless) forms of discomfort, the often conflicting ways of living in houses and open spaces by different social, economic and age groups, and a growing demand for services that can guarantee autonomy to a larger number of people (Barton et al., 2003). In order to better understand how these dynamics concretely impact people's everyday life and public policies, it is necessary to observe council housing neighbourhoods from an inner perspective. Our research activities started with a walk in the four peripheral sectors of the public city of Trieste chosen as case studies, with the guidance of operators from the programme Habitat-Microareas.

## **2.2 Walking in the neighbourhoods: Accessibility as a recurrent topic**

It is an October afternoon. With a group of students, we leave for a survey of the council housing estate of Ponziana. The neighbourhood is in the vicinity of a historic quarter of Trieste, with a recently refurbished and lively square. But in Ponziana the atmosphere is different. Although we do not perceive a sense of isolation, here we only see bars, open into a mesh of streets without a clear hierarchy or a square where people can meet. The head of the Microarea office – where operators from ASUITS, ATER, the Municipality and social cooperatives jointly work – tells us that the edifices were mostly built in the 1920s and 1930s. They embrace green courtyards, placed at a higher level than the road fronts, with no relations to the nearby context. In the 1980s, another large council housing block cut the district in two, enclosing a sequence of open spaces that are poorly designed and not used due to their steep layout. Everywhere walking from one's flat door to the

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<sup>2</sup> For the EU Member States by 2060, forecasts predict an increase in the share of the population over 65 up to 30% and in the population over 80 to 12,1% (Giannakouris, 2008).

street is very difficult. Few buildings have lifts; the stairs have no ramps; sidewalks are not properly maintained. These are very serious problems for the elderly who live alone. Equally problematic is the composition of the population: many inhabitants are former convicts or users of mental health centres; their incomes are particularly low; there is little willingness to share activities. We leave the district with a doubt: perhaps, if public spaces were more welcoming and connected, life in the neighbourhood would be different. The quantity and potential variety of these spaces, as well as the presence of facilities, are not enough when their use as a system is impossible.

The next day we are in Valmaura. South of the city centre, where Trieste becomes a fragmented periphery, the two tall constructions built in the 1970s and 1980s are the remains of a high-density collective housing model, stressing its divergence from the context. Compressed between a ramp to an urban highway, an ironworks still in operation, and private houses, the two council housing dams enclose courts and covered walks. In this case too, the quantity of collective spaces is generous, but they are poorly furnished, void of people. Entrances to the doors are from the collective walks, often taken as deposits and perceived as unsafe. The same perception comes from the underused parking basement. For the inhabitants of Valmaura, the few spaces of human relationships mostly refer to the provision of services: the health district, the nursery, the Microarea office. For the operators who daily work in the Microarea, the physical separation from the rest of the neighbourhood is one of the main problems, emphasized by the wide road in front of the dams. The complex has been considered to be without architectural barriers (therefore many flats have been assigned to persons with disabilities) but crossing the street to reach the commercial establishments is extremely dangerous. It is evident that obstacles to accessibility need to be tackled at different, both building and urban levels.

In the afternoon we move to Altura, on the edge of the north-eastern suburbs of Trieste, where the city climbs to the hills. The bordering woods and agricultural plots show great environmental quality, but no relationships with the district. The urban bike path passing through its central sector is not integrated into the settlement, either. If reaching the neighbourhood by public transport takes a long time, moving through the public and private housing units that were built since the 1970s is even more complicated. In the upper part, at the entrance of the small supermarket at the core of ATER buildings, we meet our contact person from the Microarea, already set up but still without an office. He tells us that the proportion of the residents over 65 years here reaches 39%; they have always lived and have aged in these houses. Some are still active retired people, but many are prisoners in their own homes and have to pay their neighbours to bring them medicine. There are well-kept flower beds in the open spaces; everything is quiet and clean. Distances are short as the crow flies; nevertheless, jumps of several meters make pedestrian activity limited to small stretches. To reach the school, the church, the park, the large central building that once housed the (now dismissed) mall, the sports fields, one needs to walk up and down many steps and take the bus again.

This is the journey that we make to go down to Borgo San Sergio. Starting from the late 1950s, the construction of several residential nuclei gravitating on a polycentric system of services transformed parts of this neighbourhood into non-communicating islands, where processes of property alienation and the social composition have over time accentuated the condition of periphery-within-the-periphery of the buildings still owned by ATER and the Municipality. Among them, in via Grego, we find the so-called Smurfs' Home: a high-rise building with blue facades, where the poor quality of flats and the lack

of maintenance of external spaces are experienced by the inhabitants at an increasingly bitter cost. Lifts and accessibility are guaranteed, but the barriers between people are very strong because of the acuteness of discomfort (economic, social, cultural, health-related). Even the self-construction of small gardens has fuelled the intolerance towards the forced togetherness, as well as a growing mistrust in the institutions' work. In recent years, upgrading interventions of the public spaces at the back of the building have been implemented, but many areas are still unresolved, and equipment cannot be used for the lack of management. Beyond these spaces, a broad strip of vegetable gardens has been assigned to private citizens: if apparently this is a qualifying factor for the neighbourhood, in fact it is perceived as an autonomous reality where only recently the Municipality has sought to diversify uses and users by promoting the allocation of some plots to third sector associations.

Due to the economic and demographic features of Trieste's public neighbourhoods, as well as to the difficult topography characterizing their setting, a common issue emerges from all these tales. The poor spatial accessibility to community services evidently contributes to a worsening social polarization and exclusion, often preventing mutual help among inhabitants and lowering the effectiveness of healthcare policies. In other words, direct observation strengthens the hypothesis that the review of public policies for community development here has to be deeply intertwined with space-based interventions.

### **3 Towards a different welfare: Spatial demands and practices for policy innovation**

If a different approach to welfare is necessary, talking about "a different welfare" (de Leonardis, 1998) does not mean that the central role of public actors has failed or that less welfare is needed. On the contrary, "public service, public transport, public hospital, public school, etc., all this represents a form of extraordinary civilization that has been difficult to build ... [but] if this process of destruction of all collective structures is prolonged ... we will see still unnoticed and unrevealed consequences, because what you save with one hand you will pay with the other" (Bourdieu, 2005: 43-44). To face the reduction of protection mechanisms and the growth of social insecurity (Castel, 2003), the effort that is now required of public policies is to fight the risk of retraction through a profound re-thinking; moving from a subsidy attitude to a co-generative and proactive approach to the many resources that receivers and contexts can put into play; contrasting the banal provision of sectorial services with an increasing care of people's needs. In this process of renewal, space matters, and matters a great deal. To deal with these questions, a reflection on how and why public space has been the subject of a deep crisis in the public city is therefore of fundamental importance. Although the case study of Trieste shows a highly territorialized dislocation of local welfare services, in council housing estates the lack of spatial connections and of social cohesion is still evident, whereas the words of the Microarea operators highlight the need for further work on integrating all well-being factors (especially the spatial ones).

#### **3.1 Public spaces (and public action): A vicious cycle**

Council housing neighbourhoods are the emblems of the 20th century city ideas, where

the combination of flats, public spaces and equipment was the foundation of the original spatial design solutions. In Ponziana, the ground floors of residential buildings were conceived to host shared services: the function of social aggregators would have to be amplified by their looking onto green courtyards. In Valmaura, services are an integral part of the huge complex: here the density of housing and people was assigned the task of creating a city effect. In the districts of Altura and Borgo San Sergio, the arrangement of buildings on large open surfaces, dotted with a variety of public facilities, theoretically played the role of connecting housing nuclei and inhabitants. Even though these models of living together are different, today their close observation highlights similar problems.

Despite the original intentions, in the public spaces of the public city the concept of liveability finds a reduced translation, whereas the significance of landscape as a social and cultural product (Cosgrove, 1984) is replaced by the negation of constructive interactions among places, those who inhabit them, ways of using them and giving them meaning. If the layout and dimensions of flats are often conceived and measured in reference to a normalized family-type, open spaces are developed as mere equipment of surfaces and functions. In other words, the living environment is deeply marked by an organization that aims at transforming the human multiplicity into a disciplined society (de Certeau, 1980). The conception of neighbourhoods, the rules for the allocation of dwellings, the delivery of services are characterized by a constant attention to classification and hierarchy of all forms of deviance. This attention has led to the use of standard solutions (both of typological and quantitative nature) for the project of spaces and of social-health assistance, as well as to the segregation of the most disadvantaged populations in these parts to the city, without considering the actual spatial accessibility to services that could support them.

In contemporary peripheries, the outcomes of a kind of vicious cycle of public action can therefore be recognized: the choices made over time to deal with the housing issue have contributed to strengthen the disconnection between people (intended as passive recipients) and spaces (reduced to mere consumer goods). Moreover, in recent decades, this cycle has been frequently reinforced by projects that, in a number of cities, have been targeted at neighbourhood regeneration, where the sheer layering of predefined interventions on open spaces, housing, inhabitants, and services has stressed the separation between places and people.

### **3.2 The programme Habitat-Microareas: An open laboratory to take care of people and places**

In Trieste, the intent of developing an integrated approach to well-being as a means to contrast the repetitive application of institutionalized sectorial protocols has specifically characterized the programme Habitat-Microareas since its very beginning. The focus on the living environment as an important setting of social and health intervention has been taken as a major reference, with the aim to provide services alternative to hospitalization and to reactivate the inhabitants' ability to participate in public service delivery.

The preconditions for this innovative impulse can be traced back to the pioneering process led by Franco Basaglia, director of Trieste psychiatric hospital. Started in 1971, the movement for deinstitutionalization succeeded in the closure of the hospital, as well as in the approval of the national reform of mental health (Basaglia, 2005). Over the years, this has implied the activation of alternative territorial services, organizing homes, jobs,

places for social life and healthcare. The involvement of a multiplicity of institutional and non-institutional actors, including the final users, called for intense interdisciplinary work within the city (Breckner & Bricocoli, 2011), among other things through occupation and self-recovery of spaces dedicated to new services. The combined intervention in spatial and social habitat was recognized as a decisive element for creating concrete conditions for the shift from “places of care-taking” to “taking care of places” (de Leonardis & Monteleone, 2007).

Since then, growing demands in the provision of care in council housing estates have been a major responsibility of health services, not only in cases of acuteness and emergency, but mainly for long-term assistance. Nowadays, in combination with high ageing rates, the massive increase of chronic pathologies is evidence of a crisis in terms of economic sustainability and effectiveness of services mostly tuned on medical interventions provided by specialized institutions. For this reason, based on a systematic survey, ASUITS recognized in 2005 that the focus on care had to be reconsidered through an even more significant shift to an integrated approach both to social determinants of health and to their urban dimension (World Health Organization, 2012). In collaboration with ATER and the Municipality of Trieste, the experimental programme Habitat-Microareas was thus launched, widening the perspective of the former institutional agreement, signed in 1998.

The programme first covered ten (now thirteen) micro-areas: parts of the city, each with an average population of 1,000 inhabitants, characterized by a significant presence of council housing estates and by particularly high levels of health and social problems. The decision to combine the work of public institutions, usually in charge of supplying sectorial services, was taken in order to perform a faster and more effective maintenance of buildings and open spaces; optimize measures counteracting the impact of poor social and economic conditions on health; allow people to age at home, thus reducing the costs generated by a prolonged stay in hospitals or care institutions. In this sense, Habitat-Microareas offered the actors involved a relevant opportunity to revise their organizational structure and everyday practices, promoting a reorientation of ordinary local welfare policies. Today, the programme has its own on-site point in each Microarea office, settled in a flat owned by ATER. Here, a referent for ASUITS (usually a nurse), personnel from the third sector (social cooperatives paid by ATER and Municipality), and teams of volunteers collaborate (De Leonardis & De Vidovich, 2017; De Vidovich, 2017).

In this way, Habitat-Microareas has fostered a radical change of perspective: the citizen is no longer seen as a mere passive consumer, but as a carrier of resources that can be activated in the construction of his/her own well-being. Bringing services within the neighbourhoods and near their inhabitants has allowed the unfolding of a capillary work of knowledge of health conditions, needs and potential social networks. It has been possible to articulate different forms of intervention, coordinate various services revolving around the individual, and enable opportunities for socialization. This process has resulted in the construction of highly customized paths that, avoiding universalizing modes of service delivery, primarily focus on increasing the quality of everyday life of people with higher frailty.

For the public actor, positive results are evident not only in terms of improving general health, but also of reorienting the reduction of medical costs towards interventions for

community development. Nonetheless, the improvement of the liveability of public spaces still appears to be a work in progress.

### 3.3 Welfare spaces

Similar to the dynamics of incapacitation that can be found in other highly institutionalized structures, many ordinary living practices in council housing estates are in some way disabled, among other things due to the “misery” of spatial environment (Bourdieu, 1993). If talking about a different welfare means recognizing the production/reproduction of social relations as a central dimension in the provision/management of new services, the physical space hosting these services plays a role that goes far beyond that of a simple function container. Returning to its quality and suitability means promoting a deeper transformation: from inhibitor of collaboration between people to agent of social cohesion. It is through the stages of those practices of interaction that institutional actors and inhabitants build urban commons (Sen, 1987; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Marchigiani, 2015). Moving the focus from the concept of welfare state to that of welfare spaces means driving the attention on the material and spatial features of well-being (Munarin & Tosi, 2014; Caravaggi & Imbroglini, 2016); it means putting at the centre the conditions of social and spatial justice on which the very notion of urbanity is founded, as well as the responsibility that – in ensuring such conditions – urban welfare policies play (Fainstein, 2010; Secchi, 2013).

Nevertheless, in the public city, redesigning and integrating community spaces and services is not an easy task. Here top-down solutions prove to be highly ineffective, due to their short-sightedness to an often hidden (but actually present) social estate. The sensibility of these contexts highlights the need to tackle the reorganization of everyday environments, starting from the activation of a dialogue with those who live and work in the neighbourhoods. In these districts, resources and aspirations struggle to find expression but, once disclosed, they are a valid support to try out unprecedented forms of active local and spatial welfare. In this perspective, the interactive approach that characterizes Habitat-Microareas makes this programme an opportunity to develop further research on the relationships between public intervention, spaces where it unfolds, and people’s empowerment.

### 4 An action research method: A process of slow diving and prolonged listening

In the last years, researchers from the University, institutional and third sector actors working in the programme Habitat-Microareas have jointly organized several action research and participatory design workshops in council housing neighbourhoods of Trieste (Marchigiani, 2008; Bricocoli & Marchigiani, 2012). The most recent design proposals on Ponziana, Valmaura, Altura and Borgo San Sergio-via Grego, developed in 2016 by the Atelier of Urban Planning of the Master’s Degree in Architecture of Trieste<sup>3</sup>, must be therefore read as part of a long-lasting process of collaboration, which gave us relevant inputs and is to continue in the future.

Prior to the establishment of the Atelier of Urban Planning, a reflection on the needs and demands expressed by the inhabitants, and on the presence (or lack) of institutional

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<sup>3</sup> The Atelier was coordinated by the author, with the architects Paola Cigalotto and Lorenzo Pentassuglia.

projects and perspectives of transformation for each neighbourhood was carried out together with ATER, ASUITS and Microarea operators.

In the cases of Valmaura and via Grego, where detachment of spatial configuration from social practices seems stronger and situations of decay are pervasive, the identification of the issues at hand was the outcome of a slow and gradual process. The first workshops organized by the University and Habitat-Microareas (2007, 2008) were important since they started breaking a silence due to the inhabitants' lack of confidence in the institutional will to combat spatial deprivation. In these early experiences, installations of Public Art and the construction of temporary gardens (made by residents, students and teachers of schools from the neighbourhoods) gave expression to local perceptions and helped institutions to recognize the inhabitants' role as commissioners of future interventions. The results from these first explorations have been useful for public actors, who subsequently began to reflect on possible transformations in the light of a better knowledge of space relations perceived as unresolved.<sup>4</sup> The projects sketched in 2016 by the students of the Atelier belong to this more mature phase, and paid a specific attention to the spaces that had already emerged as problematic.

In Ponziana and Altura the situation is different. Ponziana has a well-defined spatial layout; its stronger integration in the urban context, together with the needs collected by the referents of the Microarea, made design issues more explicit. Altura presents similar conditions, although for different reasons. Here, the establishment of the Microarea service has been associated with the participation of ATER and the Municipality in a national funding call for regeneration through social inclusion and urban renewal,<sup>5</sup> which highlighted strategies for the reorganization of open spaces and services that provided a good starting point for the Atelier's design investigations.

These preliminary proposals and reflections were important to orient the most recent University's activities on concrete issues, and to interpret the students' work as part of a flow of projects and policies aimed at building stronger relationships between bottom-up and top-down processes.

The Atelier of Urban Planning lasted one semester (autumn 2016) and was attended by 50 students, divided into groups, one for each urban sector (Ponziana, Valmaura and Altura-Borgo San Sergio). Field work, drawing a masterplan for the larger parts of the city where council housing estates are located, defining specific design solutions for common spaces inside the four neighbourhoods: these were the integrated tasks to be developed. But, apart from the formal scheduling of didactic activities, the Atelier was first of all conceived as a research laboratory, where the direct contact with the neighbourhoods and their inhabitants would provide the opportunity to highlight a variety of requests, spatial resources and potentials. Through prolonged practices of interaction with stakeholders carrying different (expert and non-expert) knowledge, the laboratory was meant as a place where students, professors, Microarea operators, and representatives

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<sup>4</sup> In 2014, the Urban Planning Department of the Municipality of Trieste (whose political addresses were in charge of the author, Deputy mayor for Urban Planning from 2011 to 2016) co-promoted with the University of Trieste the design laboratory *An agricultural park in Trieste?*, aimed at upgrading the area at the back of via Grego.

<sup>5</sup> The call was made in 2015 under the auspices of the National Plan for Social and Cultural Reclamation of Degraded Urban Areas. At the same time, the launch of the new Microarea was accompanied by social mapping activities commissioned by the Municipality of Trieste to a social cooperative.

from ATER and ASUTS could reflect together on the local meanings and forms of public spaces, recognize relevant places to upgrade, and start conceiving the actions necessary to define new relations between open spaces, and health, social and cultural facilities. In this perspective, the walk guided by Habitat-Microareas actors, qualitative interviews with inhabitants, technical surveys, photo reportage and mapping of social uses provided the inputs to planning and design activities. The focus was both on reinforcing urban connections (among functions and centralities, landscapes, infrastructures), and on re-designing open spaces to support new types of services. The draft concepts prepared by the students were repeatedly discussed with institutional partners, who provided advice for the development of the final proposals. At the end of the Atelier, public exhibitions presented design solutions to the local communities, in order to foster debate and collect further reactions.

Each step of the Atelier was organized as an opportunity to dive into the contexts, to share and challenge perceptions, to activate reflection and discussion. The purpose of this enterprise was to slow down our judgment through listening to the voices of those who daily live and work in the neighbourhoods, the continuous observation of social practices and of the spaces where they take place.

## **5 Results: Rethinking welfare spaces through the lens of accessibility**

The design explorations developed in Ponziana, Valmaura, Altura and via Grego have produced interesting suggestions for a review of technical approaches and spatial devices for the regeneration of the public city.

Field work paid great attention to the minutest clues of spatial and social re-appropriation. The general objective was to recognize sites of intervention capable of rebuilding widespread and ordinary conditions of communal use of space, comfort and well-being, overcoming a functionalist approach that – for too long – has referred technical spatial solutions to specific individuals whose variety of needs, desires, pathologies, fears and actions were read and classified as coded sets. Such solutions presently seem completely inadequate to social practices that are increasingly marked by contradictions, continuous and unpredictable changes in uses and times of use, molecular dynamics of sharing and, more often, of conflict (Bianchetti, 2016). In the public city, collaborative practices often find opposition in the concentration of many forms of deprivation, breeding defence mechanisms that often translate into self-closure (Sennett, 2012). To counteract the loss of the skills for collaboration – which are a strategic ingredient for new forms of welfare – the creation and interconnection of communal spaces, recognized by the inhabitants, more flexible and open to the dialogue between people driven by different interests and needs, was taken by the students as a fundamental move.

Coherently, design proposals showed respect to the sensitivity of the different contexts, not imagining great interventions but projects whose physical and social impacts derive from small actions, their mutual consistency and the plurality of ambitions they can simultaneously put into play. In particular, design work focused on the multiple dimensions and scales that the term accessibility can assume, highlighting its capacity to foster more inclusive solutions, and to re-activate the usability and connectivity potentials of a large social and territorial fixed capital of spatial infrastructures, equipment and services.

In Ponziana, accessibility was intended as the result of a set of measures aimed at creating a new system of spaces dedicated to soft mobility. Its spine is given by the pedestrianization of a stretch of the road that spreads on one side of the courts where the Microarea is located, and connects commercial activities, the school and a large parking area. From a space dedicated to the almost exclusive use of cars, the road turns into a linear square, attracting new business, hosting playgrounds and benches, prolonging its design in the nearby courtyards. The road-piazza finds its extension in the green spaces between the most recent buildings, where a park is dedicated to leisure, sports and to the artistic expression of young people. The pedestrian route ends in another wider green area, where spaces for outdoor teaching activities border a new entrance to the bike track passing through this part of the city, reaching up to Altura and beyond (Figure 2).

In Altura and via Grego, the issue of walkability proved to be strategic as well. However, the proximity to important environmental resources brought its redefinition within a more articulated strategy of economic and spatial valorization of peri-urban landscapes. Altura district on the one side and the building along via Grego on the other are reconceived as the gates to a new agricultural park, accommodating spaces for production and social farming, open to the use of inhabitants and of all citizens. The park is seen as an opportunity both to pull these settlements out of their isolation, and to draw within them a network of paths better connecting building blocks to bus stops (re-equipped to host small services). In order to make these paths more alive and interesting, the proposal is to establish along them gardens, spaces for zero-mile food market, and sport facilities, complementary to those already existing. Working on different scales, the theme of urban porosity thus finds a specific declination in the creation of a weave of interconnected public and private services and economic activities the two neighbourhoods are now dramatically lacking. In this process, spaces inbetween buildings are also dedicated to the production, sale and shared consumption of food, providing the opportunity to enrich the actions promoted by the Microarea and to offer an important service to the elderly people who are unable to leave their homes (Figure 3).

In Valmaura, finally, the landmark effect of the two tall buildings fed the inspiration to re-imagine them as a condenser of new functions of strong urban value, capable of attracting numbers of users from other parts of the city. By working on their vertical sections and by inserting new lifts connecting the road to the courts on the higher level, the proposals focus on the settlement – along the covered walks and inside the parking basement – of commercial activities managed by private actors who, in return for the use of these public spaces, provide the inhabitants with new types of services. The establishment of a gym centre offers the opportunity to coordinate with health facilities already run by the health district; the creation of co-working spaces combines with the organization of training courses for the inhabitants of the neighbourhood; the courts are re-read as outdoor extensions of these activities and as places offered to the free use by residents. In this case as well, the interventions on the buildings belong to a wider frame of actions aimed at establishing new crossings within the urban area. The conversion of Valmaura from a periphery to a new urban centrality finds support in the proposal of turning the street in front into a comfortable walking and cycling urban avenue, as well as in a longer-term scenario establishing a park along the track system, where the recently approved Town Plan (2016) envisages the activation of a metropolitan railway line (Figures 4, 5).

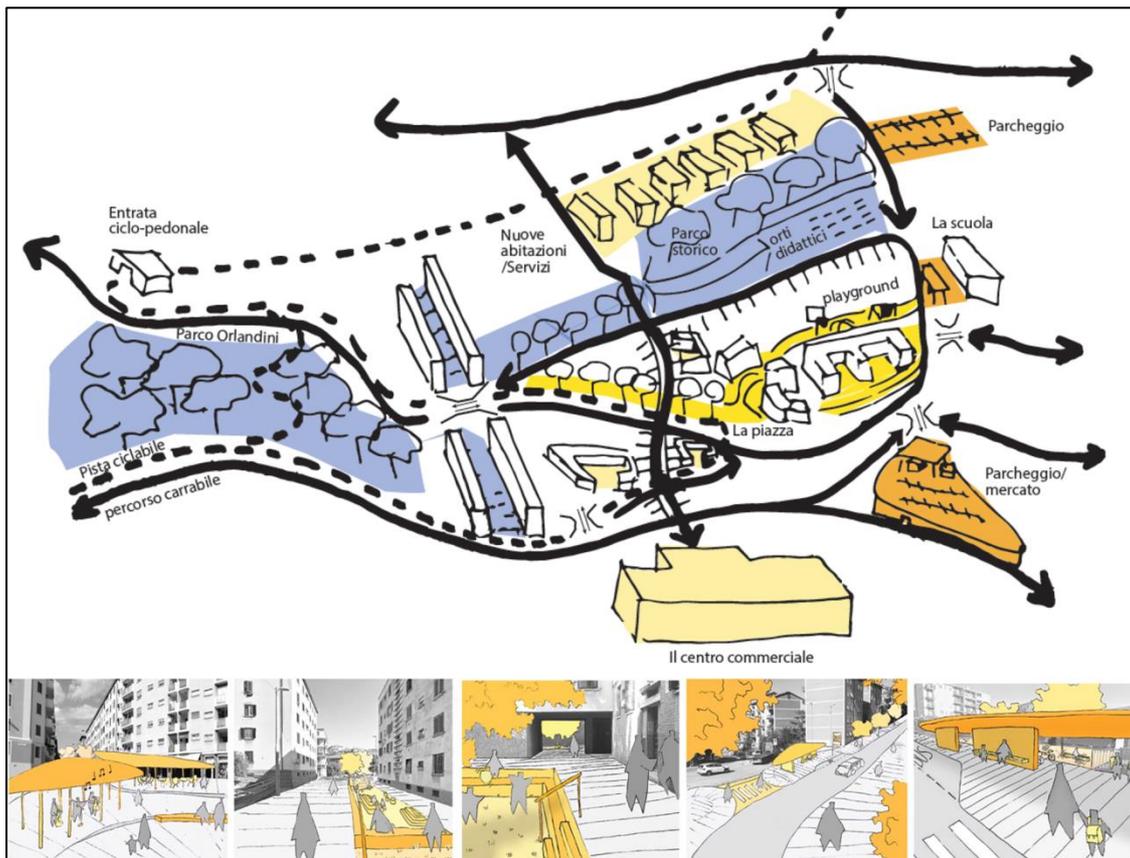


Figure 2: Masterplan and design proposals for Ponziana neighbourhood (illustration: V. Fusaro, A. Pacor, E. Trombetta).

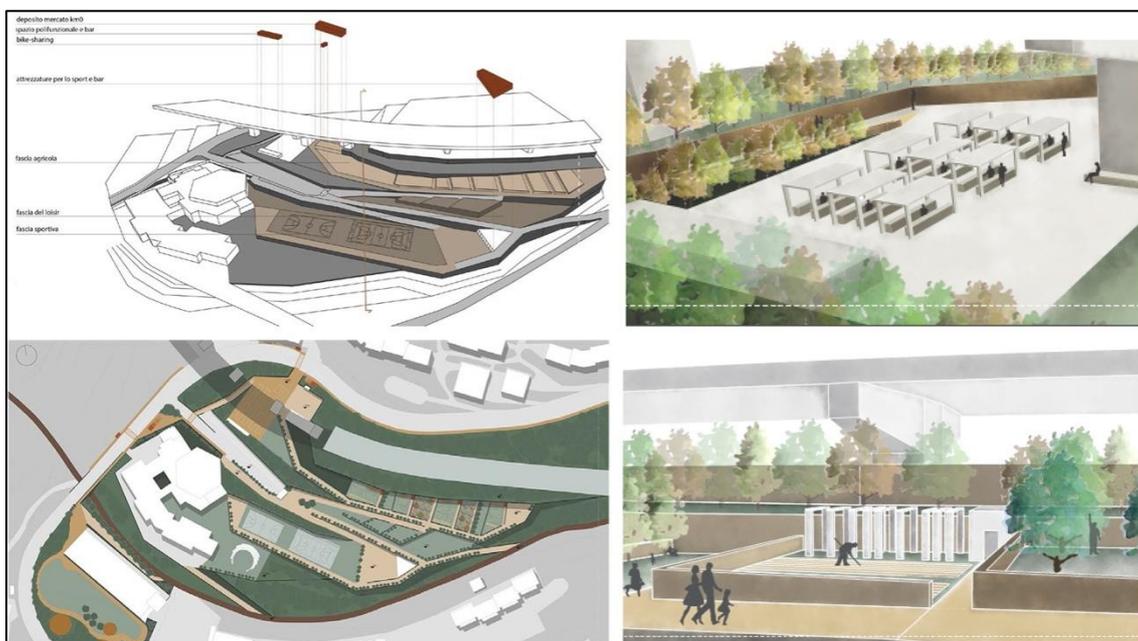


Figure 3: Design proposals for Altura neighbourhood (illustration: R. Lena, S. Strabace).



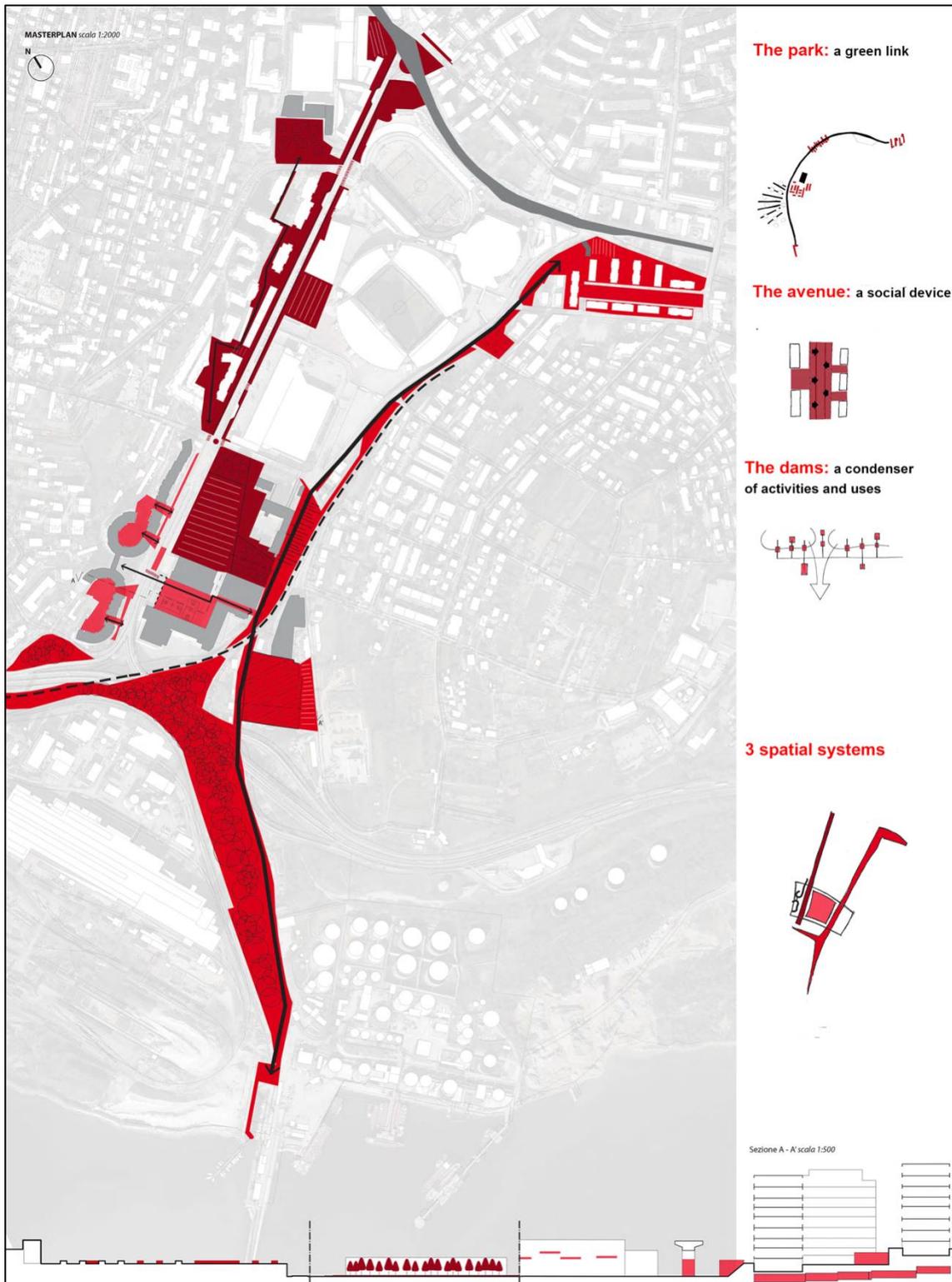


Figure 5: Masterplan for Valmaura neighbourhood (illustration: S. Culot, G. Milani, A. Perissuti, A. Pockay, F. Polvi, V. Riponti, G. Stefanachi, G. Zamò).

## 6 From an intermediate design perspective: Prompts to reflect

The results from the activities developed during the University Atelier do not only provide innovative solutions for spatial regeneration. They also highlight important

aspects in the role that design research can play in helping to investigate the interactions between welfare spaces, communities and public policies.

### **6.1 Breaking stereotypes by listening to the people**

Changing perspective, in order to look closely and listen directly to people's expectations can help avoid stereotypes, figure out solutions that are not stiffened into pre-established models and focus on places and interventions that are different from those usually recognized as strategic by traditional welfare policies.

During the field work, direct contact with the inhabitants stressed the necessity to revise certain cultural clichés based on rigid categorizations of needs and solutions: first and foremost, those hidden behind the standard use of the category elderly. The probability of reaching the end of the phase of active and self-sufficient life cannot be simplistically reduced to a generalized age line. Instead, it must be seen in the biography of each person and be contextualized. While the elderly did express some specific needs, the discussion with other inhabitants and with Microarea operators insisted on the design of spaces able to accommodate people of different ages, physical and mental health conditions, gender, life styles, and income levels. In other words, focusing the attention on the multiple relations between space and people invites to plan for all and for the many and different "phases of life" (Mumford, 1949).

### **6.2 Building upon the existing social interactions**

In peripheral neighbourhoods, where the risk of further depletion is high, the project should express empathy and an obstinately positive attitude, discovering opportunities and taking as a starting point the minimal traces of social interaction already embedded in space.

Our proposals did not intend to solve problems through general and top-down recipes. We rather decided to focus on the recognition and redesign of those minimal sequences of places that connect the houses to their surrounding environment and facilities. As emphasized by the actors involved in the programme Habitat-Microareas, people are more vulnerable when living in a situation where their autonomy and self-determination are threatened (Ranci, 2002): that is, in spatial contexts that make it hard to deal with critical conditions, either because of the difficulty of moving to reach services or for the lack of outdoor meeting places to share social practices and help. These spatial shortcomings make people increasingly dependent on social and healthcare assistance. Moreover, the mapping of social practices made by the students showed that, even when open spaces theoretically devoted to collective activities are available, the rigidity of the solutions adopted to draw and equip them, their being fenced and managed according to rules conceived without public consultation, often makes the activation of inhabitants' practices of manipulation and co-management more difficult. Combining the interviews with the reading of existing uses and micro-transformations directly performed by the residents in order to overcome these limitations enabled the students to identify places of a soft and daily communal living, providing important insights to improve spatial quality through small interventions to be built/managed with the inhabitants' help. At the same time, the dialogue with the referents of Habitat-Microareas was forced to take into account current and potential partnerships between actors and activities, both within the

neighbourhoods and in the wider urban context, as a resource to imagine new types of service solutions.

### **6.3 Spatial design as a stimulus for critical thinking**

Spatial design can be used as a tool not only to produce solutions, but also to stimulate critical thinking.

Accompanying and supporting territorial actors and projects is the role that the University, as an intermediate actor, can actively play while performing its so-called cultural and social mission. This is a role whose importance is increasing, due to the short time for project elaboration that the participation in national and European funding today imposes on public institutions.

The strategic value of the process of collaboration between the University of Trieste and the programme Habitat-Microareas can be recognized in the early construction of a set of innovative design proposals for integrating the work of healthcare services and the upgrading of collective areas. From the point of view of institutional policy makers, the aim is to gain time to promote public debate, refine and review proposals before requesting funds and proceeding to their executive translation. For the University, the main issues are those of commitment and responsibility. In the frame of this process, didactic activities both enrich their inputs through confrontation with specific and real needs, and help to collect requests and to return solutions for a more appropriate connection between spaces and people. At the same time, the project strengthens its critical ability, as a device for viewing, comparing and reflecting on possible and alternative scenarios; triggers and nurtures public discussion as part of a civic re-education path involving both society and institutions. A path that is aimed at activating new questions and images, first of all among the inhabitants, helping them to set aside the commonplace and to consciously exercise that "aspiration to the future" which is a key for expressing citizenship rights (Appadurai, 2004, 2013).

## **7 Conclusions: A fertile ground for scientific and civic engagement in city re-making**

Nowadays, there is a strong awareness among the actors working in the council housing estates of Trieste that true inclusion processes can reach their goal only if they focus on places that – also thanks to their spatial layout – are able to communicate the willingness to welcome, integrate and restore dignity to people. In these places, space can become public again, both as the setting of policies that see the public actor as a (even if not unique) protagonist, and for the faculty of its physical configuration to foster practices of capacitation and collaboration between inhabitants and services operators. The results from the design activities performed by the University of Trieste offer concrete inputs to innovation on these issues. On the one hand, these activities highlight specific project themes and sites where the notion of welfare space can find translation. On the other hand, the interactive process that led to their definition shows how an intermediate actor can help to strengthen the dialogue between institutions and citizens, to re-think public policies, to define more spatialized approaches to welfare and to deal with the multidimensional features of social disadvantage from a different point of view.

As the design proposals showed, contemporary making (or, better, re-making) cities

means not only going back to work on a rich equipment of spaces and services, but also changing perspective and revising technical attitudes. In Trieste, didactic and research activities highlighted the need to take space rehabilitation as a tool to ensure a precautionary and enabling qualification of welfare, through promotion of positive lifestyles and support to the development of human, economic and social resources. These are in fact among the challenges that the public actors involved in the programme Habitat-Microareas are now faced with: by leaving the experimental phase for a more stable integration of the available personnel and funds and by trying to re-orient their work to a more significant role in the construction of innovative regeneration and well-being projects. In particular, the different operational meanings given to the accessibility issue by the students' proposals opened up new perspectives on the integration of fields of intervention that, too often, institutions still deal with in a sectorial manner. Public works and mobility; management of health, social and school services; actions for economic development; strategies for landscape and environment enhancement: the synergies among these ingredients offer relevant suggestions to think about new types of services and new spatial configurations for best accommodating them and promoting their efficiency.

Within this process of profound cultural change, the participation of intermediate players (such as the University) is strategic. The benefits of a social-oriented teaching and research activity are many, involving different actors:

- Civic engagement, interaction with public policies and construction of integrated bottom-up and top-down processes. It is precisely because of their third position between citizens and institutions that students and researchers can more freely focus on intermediate spaces and actions, with the aim to give expression to the needs of people who live and work in urban peripheries and to those weak interests that generally struggle to find a voice;
- The rethinking of urban design theory and techniques. Thanks to the direct contact with spatial and social contexts, teaching and research have the opportunity to actualize their tools and to reflect on the various dimensions that the design of public space is today called to deal with in an integrated manner, opening up to new synergies with many resources and subjects;
- The re-orienting of ordinary public action. No less important is the support that the University can give to public actors, helping them to break the institutional routines that frequently make public policies inertial with respect to the emergence of new issues. An intermediate perspective forces a more creative, out-of-the-box thinking: it thus allows seeing unprecedented possibilities, identifying and managing innovative and long-term cooperative games.

But playing an intermediate role in policy making processes is not easy at all. It requires serious and constant work from all parties involved (academy, institutional action, civil society), readiness for mutual learning and review of consolidated positions (Cognetti, 2016). It requires the hard practice of seeking, from time to time and in respect to specific situations, the right distance that allows collaboration while respecting and enhancing different points of view. Without this critical and reflective distance our ability to effectively deal with the complexity of contemporary urban challenges is likely to be undermined.

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Tomaž PIPAN

## Interactive tangible planning support systems and politics of public participation

### Abstract

The complexity of the contemporary city stems from the numerous positions of its interpretation. The two most relevant to this paper are the augmentations of cities through digital technology and the ever-more-present participation requirement in the urban planning process. On one hand, digital technologies are promising efficient running of cities and better decision-making through a larger volume and better detail of information. On the other hand, the participatory agenda suggests a more levelled playing field for different stakeholders and a wider consensus. Both positions have limits—the first in the myriad of data produced that makes the digital city unreadable to the public and decision-makers without the help of specialized professionals, and the second in forming and keeping a consensus between stakeholders in the planning process. This paper explores how these limits can be addressed. Recently, interactive tangible planning support systems (PSSs) have been promoted to improve the established urban planning and participation methodologies. They promise to make digital spatial data more accessible in the decision-making process and to establish a better consensus amongst stakeholders. This paper will compare two examples of the interactive tangible PSSs in order to illuminate how the interactive environments increase the usability of professional spatial information on one hand and how they contribute toward consensus-making on the other.

**Keywords:** interactive tangible planning support systems, public participation, planning process, politics

### 1 Introduction

Contemporary cities are becoming ever more complex and increasingly difficult to manage. This is creating a multifaceted urban environment that is claimed by an ever-larger number of diverse stakeholders. Developers, multinational firms, entrepreneurs, investors, economic experts, the local public, engineers, architects, artists, etc.: all these different groups are claiming the right to define, organize and voice their opinions about what, how and in what way their cities should be shaped. Their claims are more often than not in stark contradiction; for example, the wishes and demands of the local public are usually diametrically opposed to the wishes and demands of the developers.

Latour (2004) refers to this problem as “the matters of concern”, where every claim can be contested and should be part of an open discussion in which all constituencies, human and non-human, have a voice and an equal right of representation. In other words, reality in contemporary culture has different manifestations—from scientific, economic and technical descriptions of material processes with an emphasis on efficiency; to political and moral concerns for sustainability; to sentimental attachments to places, animals, and holidays. The fast-changing, fragmented reality of late capitalism promotes multiple interpretations, all apparently of equal value. Therefore, matters of scientific fact and matters of personal concern create a field of truths, each from a specific point of view and with a specific agenda. There are no more “risk-free objects” that exist free of judgment (Latour, 2004: 25).

Within this framework, the present paper will discuss two topics: first, the digitization of urban governance and planning through the arrival of information technologies into the city debate and, second, the plurality of contemporary planning processes and the way consensus is being shaped by information technology.

### 1.1 Information technologies and urban governance

The problem of use of information technologies (IT) in urban planning and management can be explained by examples of intrusion of companies such as Siemens or IBM, which has created a new city market, connected to urban governance and planning. One of the more significant changes indicating this shift can be traced to technology fairs such as the CeBit in Hanover, Germany. Ten years ago, the fair was mainly focused on consumer electronics boasting new processors and digital gadgets; nowadays however, IBM and other technological giants are mainly focusing on the “soft part” of digital production, such as Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions for the city market. One such example is IBM’s SaaS called “Intelligent Operations Center” (IOC) (Internet 1). Rio de Janeiro is using the IOC platform to create the operations centre for the Prefecture of Rio, bringing all of its utility services under one roof (Figure 1). According to IBM, IOC technologies and services such as “integrated data visualization, real-time collaboration, and deep analytics help city agencies prepare for problems, plan for growth, and coordinate and manage response efforts” (Internet 1).



Figure 1: IBM Intelligent Operations Center: an IBM solution for the Prefecture of Rio bringing all utility services under one roof (source: Internet 2).

This development is commonly presented as the “smart city” trend in contemporary urban planning and governance. In recent popular discourse, the word “smartness” has been used to describe a cybernetic system through which nature and culture are converted into digital information, and managed as such. The tendency to approach urban and cultural phenomena by raising them to ever more abstract levels of conceptualization makes their management appear easier (and more profitable for IBM), but it is achieved at the cost of reducing cultural and ethical issues to a managed system of figures, depriving them of all substantial content. Due to the need for economic efficiency and the persistent lobbying of the digital technology giants in the urban development sector, cities incorporate the digital solutions in order to stay current (Pipan, 2014: 158). In addition, this practice is perpetuated for political reasons to demonstrate to citizens and the public that the city administration is capable of proficient city management by increasing the wellbeing of individuals—the most important value indicator of a successful city.

The term smart city is heavily contested within the academic literature, from urban geographical definitions linking it to the knowledge economy (Caragliu et al., 2011) to humanities definitions referring to its ethics and meaning (Kitchin, 2016). However, a review of city literature shows a distinctive rise of the smart city debate from 2009 onwards as the field around smart city topics “constitutes a new collection of keywords and related concepts” (de Jong et al., 2015: 34). As there might never emerge a single smart city definition, we will be using the broader philosophical idea of Bunschoten (2018:774), who states that the “essence of the Smart City is the ability to control interactions between a user, a system, and the environment”. To this we might add that the purpose of such control is economic gains, something that IT multinationals like IBM, Google, and Siemens have achieved by establishing a new city market. The digital giants are additionally supported by large engineering firms since the smart city offers “concrete innovation and investment opportunities for physical urban and infrastructure development” (de Jong et al., 2015: 34).

Within this heavily contested environment, saturated with information, the geographic information system (GIS) has been a classical solution leading the standard approach of spatial management, analysis, and planning. With new solutions and an ever increasing amount of data, it is becoming necessary for municipalities to “foster GIS specialists who can select GIS software and hardware suitable for individual local government, prepare appropriate spatial data, and master them” (Kohsaka, 2000: 279) and that “experts and individuals who are comfortable with GIS and spatial reasoning are focused to a greater extent on data creation and visualization using technology rather than decision-making processes” (Kar et al., 2016: 297). This leads us to the conclusion that in the contemporary information-saturated age, data cannot be accessed or viewed without an expert-technician, which consequently makes the process of decision-making slower. It is worth noting that the decision-makers and GIS professionals are two separate occupations. As Campagna and Deplano conclude, “GISs are farther away from being used in planning than one would expect and [the reason that] GISs are persistently underutilized [...] might be that GIS packages never satisfy the planner’s need for flexibility” (Campagna & Deplano, 2004: 23). Attempts to address this problem have given rise to a new direction in digital tools called planning support systems (PSSs). PSSs “bring together the functionalities of geographical information systems (GIS), models, and visualization, to gather, structure, analyse, and communicate information in planning” (Vonk et al., 2007: 1699). These promise to help make the utilization of spatial data simpler and more accessible to non-professionals such as decision-makers and public participants. The interactive tangible PPSs presented in this paper focus on the visualization and communication segment, as their main goal is to make access to professional GIS information easier for non-professionals.

## **1.2 Information technologies and public participation**

To outline the background of the second problem related to public participation we have to consider the question of the plurality of contemporary politics. Latour (2004) talks about a shift from “matters of fact” to “matters of concern” as a consequence of the post-modern condition, where the truths defined through the sciences of the last enlightenment (modernity) are not the only undisputed ones. In such an environment, the most proactive socially oriented governments open up the negotiation to a wider public.

The idea of broader public participation is not a novelty of the contemporary urban planning process. In favour of civic practices in the West, it is worth mentioning a brief moment in history when something similar had been attempted in the newly developing cities in the United

States of America at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. John Dewey (1927) was a strong supporter of the right to the city, understood as civic and political participation. The concept of civic clubs was developed during the Progressive Era (from the end of the 1890s to the 1920s) in order to put “pressure on the state and other institutions [to create] democracy from below” (Amin & Thrift, 2002: 133). These clubs were supposed to foster public deliberation, conversation, and education and thus to become models for politically engaged and productive citizens. However, the bottom-up organization of civic societies quickly gave way to a representative system and the “professionalization” of civic rights. In addition, the interest in politics was substituted with a much more “rewarding” yet complacent consumerism (Amin & Thrift, 2002: 134).

Currently the participation of the public is policy-regulated by the planning practices of EU countries. Public participation is mandatory on the level of the EU, as instructed by the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) directive (85/337/EEC) as well as the Aarhus Convention on “Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters”. Amongst other things, the convention specifically defines public participation as mandatory “during the preparation of executive regulations and/or generally applicable legally binding normative instruments” (UNECE, 1998).

In the same manner, for example, German planning and building policies rely heavily on an environmental basis, making it mandatory to have at least two public participation debates: first at the “preparatory land use planning level” (Flächennutzungsplan) and second at the “binding land use planning” (Bebauungsplan). These are “early public participation” and “formal public participation”, respectfully, mandatory and rigorously regulated by the National Building Code (Pahl-Weber et al., 2008). In addition to these, there is a standing practice of informal planning instruments: from masterplans to participatory workshops (Beckmann & Wiegandt, 2000). The practice in Slovenia is similar.

However, as the methods, approaches, rules of engagement and level of public engagement are not defined by EU conventions, the participation practices are very diverse. They can turn into an administrative exercise to facilitate the letter of the law rather than its spirit. Here the German best practice should serve as an example. One of the more recent confirmations of the ethical dimension in German planning practice was the non-binding “Tempelhofer Feld Referendum” in Berlin, where 64% of participants voted against the new developments. The result, in connection with the other public pressures, made the local administration decide to hold off on the private development due to strong public opposition (Hilbrandt, 2017). Even though Hilbrandt is critical of the aims and motivations behind public participation, it is evident that due to a long tradition of public participation and strong civic communities, such as the “100% Tempelhofer Feld” ([www.thf100.de](http://www.thf100.de)), public participation is planned for and considered seriously by the municipalities and districts.

Public participation efforts and the inclusion of stakeholders have become a significant part of municipality politics and urban planning, not just in theory but also in actual engagement. This is corroborated by a large consultancy market for mediation in the form of agencies dealing specifically with public engagement, such as Zebralog GmbH & Co KG (Internet 3), IFOK GmbH (Internet 4) or Polidia GmbH (Internet 5). Whether these serve the administration in order to satisfy the legal requirements or whether they actually serve the public interest is a topic for a separate discussion. These examples show an emerging city administration practice, designed to both facilitate stakeholder engagement and manage public participation in order to reconcile urban conflicts.

With these two issues in mind, the increasing digitization and complexification of urban governance, due to ever-larger volumes of spatial data on one side and the growing demand for public participation in the planning process on the other, we set up the following two questions in order to test how two suggested interactive tangible PSSs help with the two problems:

- Do the interactive PSSs offer easier access to professional spatial information to non-professionals?
- What is the functionality that interactive tangible PSSs contribute to public participation?

## 2 Methodology

We use a comparative method, an approach widely practiced in the humanities as well as the social sciences. First, we describe each technology separately, and, secondly, in the discussion section, we bring together their identified features to reveal the positive and negative sides of each. On the basis of this description, we then, thirdly, conclude by answering the questions set out in the introduction.

The article employs a humanities approach rather than a quantitative social sciences one. This means performing a narrative comparison, where we do not raise all of urban life to the level of quantification and abstraction but instead examine examples concretely—descriptively. In this way, the two posed questions are addressed. Two research-by-practice examples are descriptively compared, where “human understanding arises from a process of inquiry that involves creative action and critical reflection” (Sullivan, 2009: 51). This is similar to the anthropological research method of “thick description” as defined by Geertz (1973), where through a narrative description of a situation the meaning of the situation is qualified even for those who do not understand its cultural context.

The present paper descriptively compares two interactive tangible PSSs, based upon the author’s personal experience in developing the Technical University Berlin’s Digital Scenario Game and the journal papers and online accounts released by the authors of the MIT CityScope tool and its use at the HafenCity University (HCU). When appropriate, the paper refers to the existing academic literature, mainly in the form of review articles and theoretical and philosophical texts where more fundamental topics are concerned.

## 3 Description of the two tangible PSSs

GISs are specialized tools and are therefore technically complex, requiring specialist knowledge in order to produce results. O’Brien and Cheshire argue that “the creation of maps from demographic data sets was undertaken by geographic information systems (GIS) specialists who had access to complex software packages” (2016: 676). A new generation of online GIS platforms, such as the DataShine project visualising the UK 2011 census information (Internet 6), is making GIS data readily available for viewing to non-professionals. It enables a lay public “without previous GIS training to produce detailed maps from a huge number of data sets” (ibid.). However, the data are not open to manipulation or used as part of an interactive digital tool where users can manipulate the digital information freely and on the spot. Furthermore, regarding Campagna and Deplano’s (2004) argument on the non-flexibility of GISs for decision-makers discussed earlier, we can add that in terms of the effort needed to

carry out professional analysis and simulation, the classical GIS will never be used where “on the fly” decisions, that need instantaneous feedback and information, are being made. “On the fly” decisions refer to the kind of work that is carried out daily by decision-makers, developers and managers or in public participation workshops. For these users and urban stakeholders, a classical visualization of data from GIS information systems is a very limited use of digital technologies. There is ample room to expand the use of computers and GIS tools (Pipan, 2005).

The fast pace of development and an increased amount of spatial information coming from various sources (professional GIS datasets as well as social media sources like Facebook and harnessing smartphone usage statistics like the Google Traffic function in Google Maps) requires a new generation of digital tools that are tailor-made for stakeholder participation in the urban development sphere. In recent years, IT companies as well as university departments, concerned with planning, spatial informatics and design, have initiated “city labs” in order to develop interactive tangible PSSs—fast and responsive tools that enable the kind of strategic decision-making that employs real-time data. The aim of these tools is to be interactive through tangible objects to make spatial information more accessible to various professions and publics.

The present paper will discuss two such interactive examples. The first is the Digital Scenario Game, developed at the Chair for Sustainable Planning and Urban Design, Technical University Berlin, as part of the Modelling City Systems (MCS), Climate KIC research. The second example is the CityScope interactive tool, developed by the Changing Places group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

### 3.1 Digital Scenario Game

Digital Scenario Game is based on the methodology of Scenario Games.<sup>1</sup> The theoretical source here is provided by Urban Flotsam (Bunschoten et al., 2001) which defines the urban practice “in collaboration with other practices, inhabitants, users, clients, decision makers, producers and investors.” According to this text, it is role of “Urban Curators” to “orchestrate this shift in practice, detect emergent phenomena, designate cities as metaspaces, form galleries, and curate their contents” (Bunschoten et al., 2001: 447). Corner comments on the approach as a “projection of ‘game-board’ structures. These are conceived as shared working surfaces upon which various competing constituencies are invited to meet to work out differences” (Corner, 2011: 239).

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<sup>1</sup> Scenario Games is a practical implementation of urban gallery methodology (Bunschoten et al., 2001). The following description is based on the document “Urban Gallery Reader”, authored by Tomaž Pipan as part of the PhD research at the London Metropolitan University, partly funded by the Slovenian Human Resources Development and Scholarship Fund.



Figure 2: Students playing a classical (analogue) Scenario Game. A negotiation workshop at the El Gouna TU Berlin Campus, Egypt, 2014 (photo: Tomaž Pipan).

An “analogue” Scenario Game creates an environment where different claims on the territory can be confronted and reconciled. “A game reflects reality in that it models its conflicts, but also its dynamics and its ability to construct and develop strategies and pursue them” (Bunschoten 2018). It is a classic example of design thinking methodology working with open-ended questions implemented in the urban planning environment to settle claims on a territory and adapt them to function together. Scenario Games are played with playing cards on a playing board. The playing cards hold spatial or stakeholder information, problems and opportunities. These can be used for a discussion of the issues at hand which can then be drawn on a map with crayons. The playing board is an actual location, an urban territory (Figure 2). As Corner sums it up, “the graphic map provides the game-board for playing out a range of urban futures. Identified players and actors are brought together to try to work out complex urban issues within an open-ended generative structure” (Corner, 2011: 243).



Figure 3: An example of Digital Scenario Game with drawing capabilities where cards trigger spatial information to discuss possible scenarios. (photo: Tomaž Pipan)

Digital Scenario Game<sup>2</sup> is a translation and an upgrade of the described concept. It uses industry standard interactive digital table and computers (Figure 3). The playful moment of the classical Scenario Game is maintained by retaining the playing cards and equipping them with QR codes through which the cards are dynamically linked to a digital database. The placement of cards onto the interactive table at the time of negotiation dynamically triggers and displays digital content, from images and maps to movies, graphs, and GIS information (through WMS service). The information needs to be prepared beforehand by the participants through the online web service. Digital Scenario Game can be expanded with additional projections to dynamically show varied information (triggered by the cards) at the time of negotiation on different outputs such as screens, wall projections and the like.

Digital Scenario Game is a real-time dynamic scenario tool that enables different stakeholders to co-develop scenarios for a particular area in real time. The scenarios are developed by direct visual interaction between the stakeholders and a spatial information database. By placing cards on the interactive table, GIS and other information are displayed dynamically, to which the participants can react by drawing and thereby conducting a structured discussion (Gauglitz, 2015). The final product of this negotiation is a Scenario Game Report—a step-by-step record of the process with final conclusions and suggested actions (Figure 4). By comparing different scenarios, the stakeholders can decide which scenario(s) should be retained, changed or further explored.

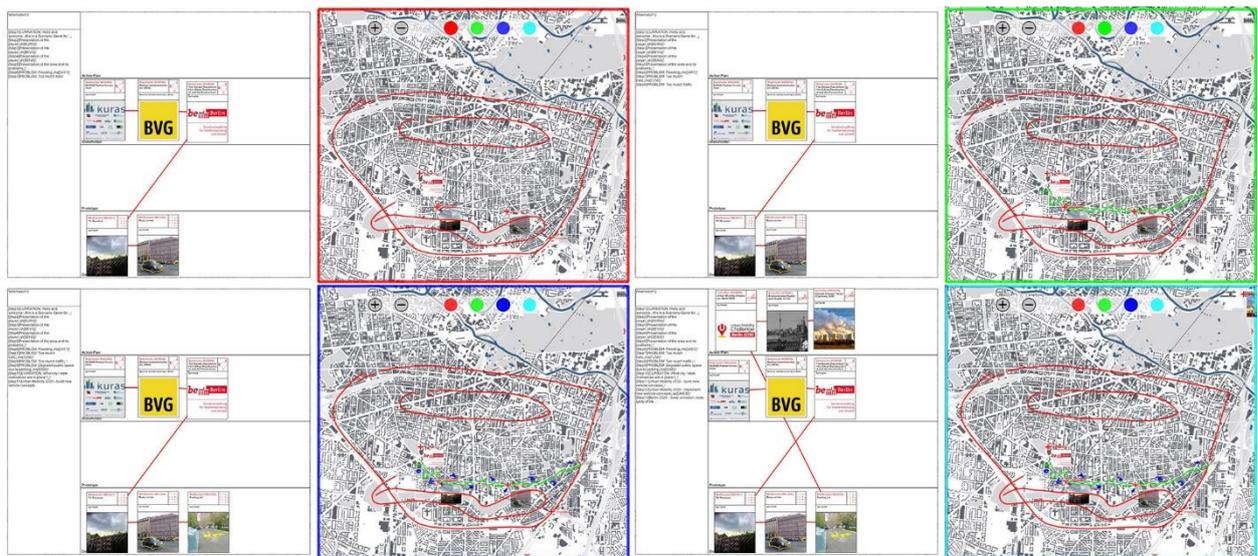


Figure 4: A sequence of print screens (simulation) – a product of negotiation in the Digital Scenario Game. The sequences form a basis for final reporting (illustration: Tomaž Pipan).

The Digital Scenario Game proof of concept was first showcased at the 2015 Metropolitan Solutions fair in Berlin as part of the “TU Berlin BrainBox: Smart City Berlin 2030” exhibition (Ledwig & Asualyuk, 2015: 76). Under the direction of the present author and with the help of TU Berlin students, we additionally developed a simulation of a negotiation to test the functionality and capability of the Digital Scenario Game at the “Lange Nacht der Wissenschaften 2015” exhibition in Berlin (Gauglitz, 2015). A later version without the recording functions and with a detailed, on-screen presentation of local GIS information was

<sup>2</sup> The Digital Scenario Game is one part of a larger concept developed at the Technical University Berlin, called the Conscious-City-Lab, formerly BrainBox (Internet 7).

used in Utrecht as part of the Smart Sustainable District (SSD) Climate KIC project (USIUrban, 2016).

### 3.2 CityScope

CityScope technology was developed by the Changing Places group of the MIT Media Lab. The initial technology disclosure paper is titled “System for Real-time Digital Reconstruction and 3D Projection-Mapping of Arbitrarily Many Tagged Physical Objects” (Winder, 2015). “CityScope is an integrated hardware and software platform that merges parametric, voxelized simulations with user-friendly interactive tangible interfaces” (Winder, 2014). It uses an interactive tangible Lego-based interface to create scenarios of urban development based on predefined algorithms, using GIS information for the calculation of new spatial information in real time. By placing the Lego bricks, which act as parameters, the algorithms recalculate the spatial information and show the new results as maps (Figure 5). Noyman et al. (2017: 2465) tie the CityScope technology to a long tradition of research into the interactive tangible-computational platforms at MIT; however, CityScope was built specifically to make “complex urban questions accessible and tangible to various audiences”.



Figure 5: CityScope technology presented by Ira Winder on the walkability example (source: CentreforLiveableCities, 2016).

The system is a combination of technologies: 3D-tagged objects (Lego bricks), projector, computer, sensor, and display (Winder, 2015). It encompasses many different software module functionalities, from using the tactile interface of Lego bricks as buttons and switches to using them as tagged elements in a scenario. A highly didactic example is a walkability simulation (Figure 5) presented in the product video for the World City Summit 2016 in Singapore in collaboration with the Centre for Liveable Cities and Urban Redevelopment Authority Singapore (CentreforLiveableCities, 2016).

CityScope as a commercial service needs additional bespoke programming to solve a specific task. It requires preparation of spatial information and integration with specific algorithms that calculate a spatial solution. For example, CityScope can be made to solve a question of walkability in an area where walkability is presented as a “function of the amenity and their placement” (CentreforLiveableCities, 2016). By placing new amenities, such as shopping areas or hospitals, walkability increases. By placing different type of amenities in different locations, scenarios of different walkability capacities can be compared and the most optimal one chosen. In other words, by direct tangible interaction with the Lego blocks, users can change scenarios of development in real time. Through algorithms, actions change spatial data and trigger

instantaneous recalculations of values, which are then projected as results back to users. This feedback of action can be a calculated result in the form of the influences, impacts and performance of the current urban setup.

CityScope has been tested and commercially implemented in numerous situations. The HCU CityScienceLab in collaboration with city of Hamburg has implemented a series of stakeholder engagement workshops (Internet 8) where the CityScope technology is used in public workshops as a tool to dissipate tensions, connected to the topic of refugee accommodation: “The goal was to incorporate the citizens’ personal experience and local knowledge into the political and administrative evaluation of potential locations” (Noyman et al., 2017: 2465). Between May and July 2016, the HCU held 34 two-hour workshops for the seven districts of Hamburg with a total of 400 participants. With the help of CityScope technology, the participants were able to identify 44 prospective sites for accommodation out of the initial 161 (Noyman et al., 2017: 2469-70). The participatory framework enabled the stakeholders to dynamically act upon GIS data, such as plot programs and ownership, as well as act upon their own understanding and local experiences. As reported by the team, the citizens “felt as partners in an ‘eye-level’ dialogue with [the] policy makers and city administration” (Noyman et al., 2017: 2471).

## 4 Discussion

When it comes to the two questions posed regarding the interactive tangible PSSs, four main topics were identified, which will be discussed here. In terms of access to professional spatial information for non-professionals, (1) tangible interface and physical setup, and (2) data provision and workshop accessibility are discussed. In terms of PSSs’ role in augmenting public participation, (3) augmenting the public knowledge and (4) unique functionality are addressed.

### 4.1 Tangible interface and physical setup

The tangible interface (playing cards in the Digital Scenario Game and Lego bricks in CityScope) creates easier access to professional information. Instinctive physical gestures are used to trigger complex functions or reveal spatial information that would otherwise require computer peripherals. However, one technical limitation of both systems is the size of the technology. When facilitating public participation, it is important to accommodate the workshops locally, in a public hall or administrative office. This means moving the setup around to different places. Due to the tangible functionality, both technologies are large physical setups. The industry standard interactive table used in the Digital Scenario Game is approximately 1.6 m × 1 m in size. The interactive tables at the HCU are bespoke tables 2 m × 2 m large. Combined with the need for a good Internet connection, dedicated computers, screens and projections, these are physical and technical limitations that require significant time and effort for transport and setup. The FindingPlaces workshops in Hamburg using the CityScope technology solved the problem by hosting all workshops at the HCU in the CityScienceLab, which the participants found inconvenient (Noyman et al., 2017: 2471). Public participation can be very sensitive, and such reasons can affect the number of participants and their mood, biases and willingness to give relevant feedback. The same problem was faced by the Digital Scenario Game technology when a workshop required its transportation. Due to all the complications, we decided to do a classical “analogue” scenario game without the digital table.

## 4.2 Data provision and workshop outreach

The preparation of the data for the Digital Scenario Game can be done by all the participants prior to or during the workshop. Through an online interface, participants can upload images, texts, locations, problems and ideas. This contributes to a more informed participation environment and ensures better participant turnout. When it comes to professional information, GIS data can be uploaded via a web map service, for which GIS knowledge is already required. Integration of existing GIS databases is also possible but requires geoinformatics and programming skills, usually supplied by the developers. Similar limitations are observed with the CityScope technology. As it works on the basis of GIS information, the data have to be properly formatted and connected to the interactive environment. For special types of interactions (like the HCU FindingPlaces workshops), bespoke algorithms have to be created (Noyman et al., 2017: 2468-9).

In terms of workshop outreach, the specificity of such intense participatory workshop formats is that the participation is considered successful when the number of participants per curator falls within a certain boundary. Only then can the decision-making process be well-informed. This largely depends on the method of the design thinking process applied. For the Digital Scenario Game, this is on the order of four to eight people per curator. Larger groups do not achieve the desired effect due to constant deliberations instead of a proactive solving of the problems. In the case of FindingPlaces, the workshops accommodated at most 20 people per session (Noyman et al., 2017: 2469). To accommodate a larger number of participants, the workshop group would need to be multiplied. This also means multiplying the number of interactive tools per individual workshop, a limitation for formats where public opinion needs to be gathered on a massive scale. For such formats, companies like ZebraLog use proprietary online solutions. For example, the “Dialogzentrale, the ‘mother of all dialogues’, offers a platform with participation infrastructure and various modules” (Internet 9).

## 4.3 Types of participation augmentation

The two examples described above show two different approaches to using digital interactive technology in terms of augmenting public participation. We could classify them as passive and active planning support augmentations.

The Digital Scenario Game is of the passive kind. It is a solution that uses digital technology in order to represent the gathered information in a faster, more convenient and dynamic way, giving access to spatial data “on the fly”. In addition, it can record the process of negotiation to review and improve the scenarios. It does not create additional spatial data: all of the creation and speculation is done based on the participants’ knowledge and experience. In this sense, it is also a tool for capturing professional knowledge on one side and public opinion and suggestions on the other. This augmentation significantly enhances participation because it automates certain parts of negotiation and makes it run more smoothly.

The CityScope technology is an active kind, with simulation capabilities based on pre-implemented algorithms that generate new spatial data in real time. The algorithms extrapolate the most likely solution and offer it as a given to the users of the negotiation process. The CityScope technology actively changes the negotiation process by suggesting simulated results. The results in turn largely depend on the analytical expertise and technical skills of the

programmers. This is a very advanced type of participation augmentation and a unique functionality, whose problems and limitations are addressed below and in the conclusion.

#### **4.4 Unique functionality**

The passive Digital Scenario Game is able to present spatial information in a more convenient way than classic GIS can; however, it cannot offer a synthesis. The interpretation of spatial data, from understanding the maps to reading the graphs, is still largely dependent upon the participants' skill and experience, which suggests that the reaction of the lay public might be limited. It is, however, a good tool to trace and record public "mood", bring experts and the local public together, and gather local spatial information that otherwise might not be available to the professionals..

The active CityScope offers synthesis and interpretation of spatial information in the form of speculated simulated results, such as the dynamically changing walkability maps that respond to users' interactions. This means that the lay public can act on information that is more complex and devise a solution which is a product of the professional knowledge imbedded in the algorithms. However, one of the more serious limitations we have to consider is the method through which the simulated spatial information is produced. Just as the lay public is perhaps unable to mentally work out and project the walkability, it is equally difficult to understand the simulated result in its entirety. This must be taken into account when using and interpreting such participatory results.

### **5 Conclusion**

The paper discusses two examples of interactive tangible PSSs to illuminate how PSSs increase the usability of professional spatial information on one hand and how they contribute to consensus-making on the other. It investigates the ways in which to bring different stakeholders together in a structured way to manage the process of urbanization and to ensure better usability of digital spatial information in the participatory planning process, specifically:

1. Do the interactive PSSs offer easier access to professional spatial information to non-professionals?

In terms of "tangible interface and physical setup" (see 4.1), the tangible aspect helps with the access to the information; however, the physical size and difficulties with the transportation of interactive PSSs are a big hindrance to scaling the services. This also presents a limitation to the inclusion of a wider public in the negotiation process, subsequently lowering the access to spatial information for non-professionals. We considered turning the Digital Scenario Game into an online solution (SaaS), thus losing the tactile moment of physical cards. This would make it more portable; however, the tactile moment is very important to design thinking methods for public participation as it gives people control and authority. We have to conclude that size and technical complexity are limitations of the interactive tactile PSSs that will be hard to overcome. If the tactile moment makes access to the professional spatial information easier for participants, it is the physical setup that limits the scalability and wider public outreach of such systems.

In terms of "data preparation and workshop outreach" (see 4.2), we can conclude that the preparation of information by users for the Digital Scenario Game is fairly easy when considering uploading information prior to the workshop. However, the main hurdle of having

to prepare the GIS information by GIS experts and make it product-ready remains unresolved. CityScope's problems are even more pronounced as it cannot be used without the serious preparation of information for every specific problem. In terms of workshop outreach, the workshops can accommodate only a rather small number of stakeholders. This is a serious hindrance, especially when it is important to gather a huge amount of information. In this regard, online digital participation solutions offered by existing participation providers such as Zebralog, IFOK or Polidia make more sense. This also shows an inherent limitation of interactive digital tools for public participation. Online digital tools can cover relatively large public samples, which in turn limits the capacity of individuals to significantly contribute to urban decisions. On the other hand, the interactive tangible PSSs can cover a focus group that can make concrete suggestions but might not be representative of a larger public sample.

2. What is the functionality that interactive tangible PSSs contribute to public participation? In reference to "unique functionality" (see 4.4), both technologies show significant promise when it comes to raising the quality of public participation.

Digital Scenario Game enables the participants to adduce and refer to classical spatial information in real time during the process of negotiation—something that the classical GIS solutions cannot. It can be seen as the next step to online user-friendly GIS services such as DataShine. The capacity to show dynamically different spatial information and other visual information helps curators of the scenario to better inform the participants and to achieve a better output. On the other hand, the limitation—as well as the advantage—of such solution is that the technology represents only the spatial information and makes no judgment upon it.

The CityScope technology enables decision-making and negotiation on the basis of synthesis and spatial information generated in real time. This allows the lay public to make decisions on the basis of the expert knowledge imbedded in the algorithms. CityScope can be understood as a next-generation digital support tool that actively engages in the participation process. However, this does not make moot the point of required spatial literacy, such as understanding geographic maps. It was reported that the "non-expert participants had trouble understanding the professional planning content" (Noyman et al., 2017: 2471).

In reference to the "types of participation augmentation" (see 4.3) in the active CityScope example, we have to consider that the public's decisions are dependent upon the results generated by an algorithm whose logic is dependent upon the programmer. If instead the algorithm was replaced by a dynamic process curated and moderated by an expert (for example, an urban planner explaining, commenting and showing possibilities for better walkability), the participants' decisions might be different. The simulated solutions presented by the computer are rendered as undisputed truths with a single presentation of a solution, circumventing Latour's "matters of concern" and painting them as "matters of fact".

The matter-of-fact character of results generated by digital technologies is useful for planning administrations as it gives concrete answers where otherwise there are none. The solutions miraculously appear and are taken as "scientific fact", releasing individuals (city officials and scientists alike) from responsibility on one hand and making the process seem objective, transparent and convincing on the other. This needs to be taken into account when analysing and using results of such type. Noyman et al. also cautions that "the approach runs danger of becoming instrumentalized by political forces or interest groups" (2017: 2472). This suggests that it is of paramount importance to put in charge of such negotiations a professional who can interpret both the data and visual results as well as the stakeholders' input. The idea of a new

profession, a curator-designer, is emerging as a new type of expertise that would also need fostering in architectural and planning schools (Pipan, 2014: 162).

In conclusion, we need to consider the popular belief that general public participation brings about wider public acceptance and better public consensus. Hillier (2003) traces the deeply rooted cultural belief that consensus is synonymous with good social ethics to Habermas's "theory of communicative action", in which "reciprocal understanding" presupposes humans as explicitly rational beings. However, Hillier (2003: 41) argues that "the ideals of communicative rationality and consensus-formation are rarely achieved". In a similar manner, in reference to practical examples, Hilbrandt (2017: 546) clearly points out that "planners willingly admitted that participation was suspended at crucial moments [...] in order to circumvent a broader public debate". This alludes to the fact that public consensus is a cultural bias and a (mis)interpretation of the plural right to the city and is not necessarily achievable. One of the pragmatic reasons we can single out is the sheer number of people living in contemporary cities, rendering direct democracy unfit for consensus. Even Arendt, an avid supporter of the political civic city, acknowledges the problem of size and scope in achieving consensus. We can see the "civic city" being forfeited to the "social city", especially because "the larger the population in any given body politic, the more likely it will be the social rather than the political that constitutes the public realm" (Arendt, 1985: 43).

In final conclusion, it is the opinion of the author that, first, the lay public can take more informed decisions through public participation by having the digital information ready at hand in real time during the participation event. However, whether their suggestions and input meaningfully contribute to the planning process is not dependent upon the sophistication of the digital technologies employed but upon the city administration and the ethics of governance. Secondly, the urban planning solutions that go through the process of public participation with interactive tangible PSSs will benefit from local knowledge that otherwise cannot be obtained. However, it is of paramount importance that the professional—the curator-designer—curates and manages the process. Such a professional has unique knowledge to interpret spatial information on one side and manage the diverse intentions of the participants on the other. This is even more important for the active tangible interactive PSSs like CityScope, where the results generated need context that only a professional can provide. Yet, the need for the reconciliation of large numbers of people and the inherent need for direct democracy in larger cities is a cultural bias, and will thus not be solved through an implementation of new technologies but rather needs an understanding of what public participation means and can achieve in combination with a high level of ethical responsibility that should be fostered within urban culture.

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Zeynep TURAN

## Finding the “local green voice”? Waterfront development, environmental justice, and participatory planning in Gowanus, NY

### Abstract

The Gowanus neighbourhood, like many other New York City waterfronts, is facing a crossroads: how to promote development in a polluted landscape vulnerable to climate-induced sea-level rise that is inhabited by low-income populations and coveted by wealthy new arrivals for its waterfront property? For many years, toxic contamination and a combined sewer overflow problem inhibited new development in the neighbourhood. But in recent years, particularly beginning in 2010, after the Environmental Protection Agency designated the Canal and surrounding areas a Superfund site targeted for clean-up, developers have sought to shed Gowanus’s industrial identity and recast it as a prime up-and-coming residential locale. Although the community celebrates environmental restoration and protection, there is also a sense of foreboding that clean-up is paving the way for high-end development projects. This article charts the progress of neoliberal urban development in Gowanus through the lens of critical urban theory, identifying stakeholders and power dynamics. It looks at rezoning/revitalization as a tool of the municipality to transform an industrial business zone and low-income neighbourhood, ostensibly to foster development and cope with climate change and sea-level rise, but, in fact, cultivates socio-political exclusion and gentrification while ignoring concerns over the long-term environmental viability of new development.

**Keywords:** participatory planning, waterfronts, critical urban theory, rezoning, gentrification

### 1 Introduction

As premium areas for neoliberal urban development, debates habitually unfold over the re-development plans for city waterfronts. These sites are valuable for commercial, industrial, residential and recreational uses, even if they become significantly polluted. Contestation hinges on the nature of development and decision-making; the question is often portrayed as “what to build?” but given the socio-economic consequences, implicitly it is “who to build for?” Traditionally business interests and government have negotiated, often in secret, to determine waterfront development, but the public has increasingly demanded a role in making decisions. Local communities have been especially active in this regard as they usually have the most at stake: development will affect everything from housing to employment, from access to services to traffic, from the character of the neighbourhood to the quality of life. Moreover, the central concern is whether re-development will benefit the public, including preventing the displacement of locals. Furthermore, the presence of significant pollution in the areas targeted for redevelopment complicates the calculus as the costs of cleanup require sufficient political will to find the requisite financial resources, and this usually entails a discussion of who benefits from such efforts. This contentious situation has also been exacerbated by the growing impacts of climate change which necessitates adapting to sea level rise. To address the ecological afflictions as well as the political-economic challenges, the “local green voice” must be heard. It is, therefore, crucial to develop a method for distilling the views of communities on issues of development in the context of environmental clean-up, to promote ecological and social-political sustainability.

This article provides a model for participatory planning as a vehicle for reconciling environmental protection with the views of local communities. The first section defines the key concepts through a lens of critical urban theory and problematizes spatial transformation propelled by profit-driven urbanization. The second section unpacks the case study of Gowanus, a neighbourhood in Brooklyn featuring a waterway that had infamously been subject to voluminous dumping and is undergoing intensive re-development. The third section examines the engagement of locals in re-development decision-making. It is based on the author's ongoing involvement in the participatory planning process of rezoning Gowanus organized by New York City's Department of City Planning as a member of the public and, also, a member of one of the smaller workshops which ran from October 2016 to June 2017. The active participation in this process provided the author with firsthand information into the actors and stakeholders, the relationship between them, their interests and values, and local knowledge systems. The fourth section analyzes the merits and limits of participatory planning in development. The final section postulates ideas for bolstering local participation and promoting sustainability.

## **2 Waterfront development, critical urban theory, and the local green voice: Premise and perspective**

Waterfronts are vital spaces for development, they have unique features that make them desirable for a variety of uses, and this makes them the subject of disputes between different interests. The modern history of waterfront development showcases the evolution of forces that drive decision-making. Early on these areas were primarily governed and developed for economic and security reasons as places that might serve as ports or defensible positions against naval assault. However, as fears over invasion receded and other security concerns abated, commercial interests gained ascendance. This is most prominently seen with the spread and deepening of neoliberalism starting in the late 1970s. Neoliberalism argues that the market is the most efficient means for allocating resources, and promotes and normalizes a "growth-first" approach to urban development. Concerns about social welfare or distribution of services are only secondary to wealth creation and to be addressed subsequently (Peck & Tickell, 2012: 394). In brief, the neoliberal perspective looks upon waterfronts as prime real estate and pushes for the privatization of these public assets.

Critical urban theory is a useful approach for apprehending the meaning and ramifications of waterfront development by situating it within a specific social, economic, political, and cultural context. This framework parses the values and relationships embedded in the transformation of neighbourhoods along the shore. Thus, urbanization is not a process that is politically neutral or inevitable; indeed, an urban form is shaped by politics and power (Whitehead, 2013: 1348). As Neil Brenner (2009: 198) explains: "Rather than affirming the current condition of cities as the expression of transhistorical laws of social organization, bureaucratic rationality or economic efficiency, critical urban theory emphasizes the politically and ideologically mediated, socially contested and therefore malleable character of urban space – that is, its continual (re)construction as a site, medium and outcome of historically specific relations of social power." He further argues that socially and environmentally just, sustainable, participatory forms of urbanization are possible but overpowered by the current dominant institutional arrangements, practices and ideologies. The critical urban theory tradition informs this analysis of Gowanus, in order to expose the power dynamics, inequality, and injustice intrinsic to and nurtured by the neoliberalization of the city.

A related conceptual and historical backdrop to this study can be found in Henri Lefebvre's (1996) idea of the "right to the city". Originally coined in the late 1960s as a response to pressures eroding urban social life (from a lack of transportation networks to connect poor neighborhoods to the slashing of social services, from underfunding the maintenance of parks to middle class flight to the suburbs, from closing hospitals to structuring school districts that effectively segregate by economic class), it crystalized the demand of neglected urban populations to partake in city governance. The "right to the city" is not just about access to resources, services, and spaces, but a demand to participate in decisions regarding resources, services, and spaces. The snowballing of neoliberalism in the 1980s would reinvigorate calls to establish and defend the "right to the city", as taken up by the writings of David Harvey (2008) and Peter Marcuse (2012).

Neoliberal urban space is shaped and reshaped by a continuous interplay of "implosion and explosion" and "creative destruction". As such, capital transforms the urban fabric to maximize profitability and at the same time it further exacerbates socio-spatial exclusion and inequity (Brenner et al, 2012). Gentrifying neighbourhoods exemplify "urban implosion and explosion" because they engender unpredictable spatial temporal growth in neoliberal cities that no longer follow the logic or theory traditionally used to explain the morphology of cities, such as the Chicago School's concentric circles. As David Harvey (2004, 2007) observes, neoliberalism operates with increasing volatility: periods of growth, followed by recession and collapse. In this cycle, economic blight undermines previous development that was predicated on continued economic expansion and demands a new round of investment and re-development, i.e., a process that political economist Joseph Schumpeter (1942) famously termed "creative destruction". This pattern is evident in gentrification waves in New York City that destroyed older, impoverished neighbourhoods to make way for new developments that cater to the wealthy as typified by what has happened in Harlem (in Upper Manhattan) and Williamsburg (northern Brooklyn). In this way, redevelopment means, in effect, a reallocation of properties from the poor to the rich.

The first wave of waterfront "revitalization" projects in North America started in the 1960s in cities such as Baltimore, Boston, and San Francisco (Schubert, 2008). These were projects mostly to transform old and derelict port areas that had been previously abandoned or closed off. Enhancement through commercialization of the waterfront prompted a range of new developments, such as convention centers, hotels, sports facilities, marketplaces, etc., to produce wealth for the private sector and tax revenues to fund the public sector.

This, however, was just the beginning as both business and government sectors reaped benefits, and in the 1990s and 2000s private-public partnerships for waterfront development became prevalent. This model represented a strategic alliance of local interests that recognized that cities were in a worldwide competition to attract tourists and multinational capital. The resulting waterfront projects were used to brand cities, thereby increasing their respective competitiveness in the global marketplace. Waterfronts became places of spectacle on two levels, as both platforms for attention, cultural production and recognition, but also to create paths for national/local/metropolitan narrative construction in such a way that a developing country could use a manicured, sleek waterfront development to present a different facade to the world, investors, and consumers. However, in contrast to the previous types of developments and projects built, the new constructions featured in this wave were foremost luxury housing and mixed-use development. In New York City, neighbourhood redevelopment plans are designed to establish the metropolis's place as a global financial capital and service

centre in a contemporary division of labour. Margit Mayer (2012) rightfully argues that this approach triggered a spatial transformation that intensified “social fragmentation, erosion of public space, and exclusion of disadvantages places, milieus, and social groups.” As will be seen, the case of Gowanus is a microcosm of this phenomenon: capital is transforming an area that exhibits economic and racial diversity, but is contaminated due to bearing the burden of the industrial wastes generated while producing profits, and that now routinely faces the risk of climate change-fuelled flooding, which is also attributable to both past and current industrial economic activity.

Whereas the context of 1990s and early 2000s neoliberalism suggests that waterfront development and redevelopment can be understood solely through the pursuit of profit, the circumstances have become far more complex in recent years. Economic actors still maintain a premier role, but other influences, both material and social, are looming. First, it has become apparent at the material level that waterfront areas are increasingly vulnerable to climate change and the consequent rising sea levels pose perils. These threats include “inundation, enhanced storm surges, infrastructure damage, erosion, destruction of wetlands and beaches, and increased risks for public health and safety” (Grannis, 2011).

Secondly, the human factor is of growing prominence through political processes and practices that have turned their attention to coastal land use planning and invoke issues of environmental justice and local participation. The environmental justice cause demands not only a clean environment and infrastructure, but stresses that access to these resources should not be dictated by race, class, or discrimination of any kind. Indeed, much grassroots environmental justice activism points to how environmental threats disproportionately affect low-income neighbourhoods and people of color (Agyeman, 2005). Additionally, there is the angle of local self-determination: those who live in the community that is to be redeveloped seek to participate in decision-making on development. This is where the “justice” component to “environmental justice” is most meaningful because a clean-up that results in soaring property values and prices locals out of the area ultimately means that environmental rehabilitation and protection only benefits affluent new arrivals.

Local participation is crucial to averting redevelopment with an ostensible ecological rationale from becoming a form of population management or instigating displacement. To that end, abiding the “local green voice,” that is expressing the environmental justice perspective of a community on development projects, is imperative for promoting environmental sustainability (the long-term viability of ecosystems) as well as cultivating social-political sustainability (routine civic engagement and belief in the legitimacy of governance institutions). However, upon closer examination, the extent to which the environmental agenda is served is questionable. Moreover, there are structural impediments to participatory planning processes and methods. There is a growing mistrust and resentment of government at all levels (from municipal to national) given it has traditionally favored private interests and not been accountable to the public. The following sections take up the dynamics of participatory planning in the case of Gowanus to help understand what works and what does not. This sets up a focus on tools for public participation that considers issues of diversity, equality, and justice: it presents means for refining, enhancing, and amplifying the local green voice.



Figure 1: Map of New York City (source: ArcGIS Online, 2018).

Starting in the 1800s, Gowanus, a neighbourhood in south Brooklyn, New York, was developed around a canal to serve burgeoning industrial and commercial enterprises that benefited from access to water resources and passage to New York harbor. This 1.8-mile long waterway was created by dredging and connecting a network of creeks and marshlands into a 100-foot wide channel that terminates inland (Internet 1). In the mid-1900s, the canal was heavily contaminated with “PCBs, heavy metals, pesticides, volatile organic compounds, sewage solids from combined sewer overflows, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)”, turning it into one of the most polluted waterways in the United States (Riverkeeper, 2018). Furthermore, the engineering of the infrastructure produces massive combined sewer overflows (CSOs) in Gowanus: waste-water run-off into the canal worsens environmental conditions.

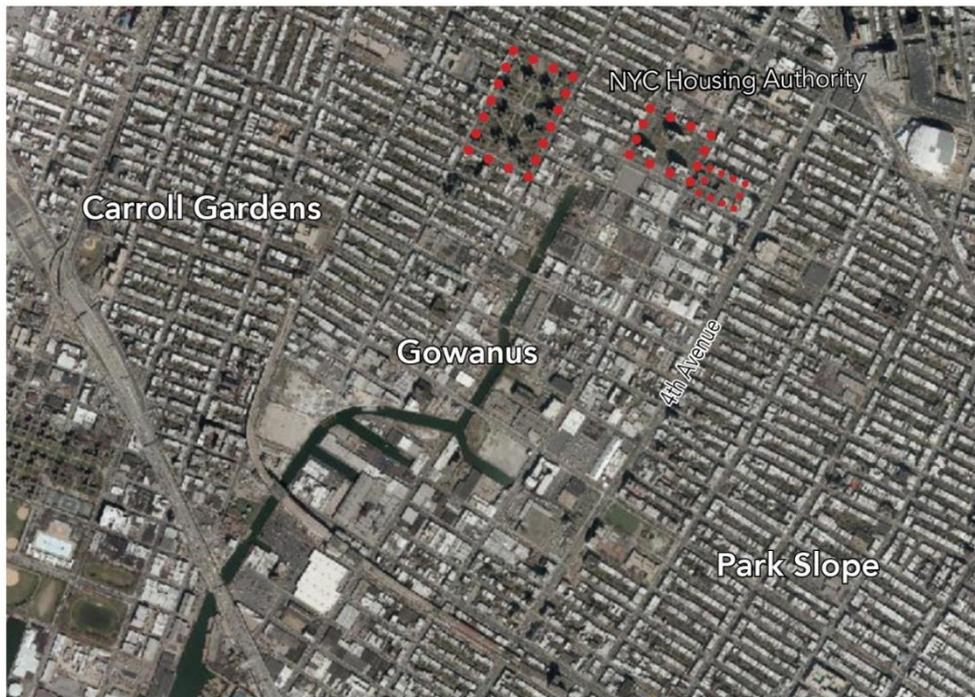


Figure 2: Map of Gowanus Canal and New York City Housing Authority housing (source: NYS Ortho, 2012; ArcGIS Online, 2018).

In the late 1990s, economic growth and gentrification throughout New York City sparked renewed interest in Gowanus: its relatively inexpensive property prices coupled with a location offering easy access to other areas of the city made the area desirable. The prospect of economic renewal caused the neighbourhood's real estate prices to climb during the 2000s, and despite the housing bubble associated with the 2008 financial crisis, developers continued to show interest. This was given an additional boost in 2010 when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that the Canal was to be a Superfund site resulting in sizable economic resources directed to cleaning up the pollution.<sup>1</sup> Although recognition of the significance of the environmental problem led some development to stall, it also sent a message that the hazard would be addressed. Thus, within a few years after the EPA's designation and the initiation of clean-up activities, a wave of redevelopment hit Gowanus. The neighbourhood is currently being reconceived as a new residential quarter; however, the consequent development projects take away public space (including open space) from the low-income residents in the area (there are three large housing projects on the north side of the canal: Gowanus Houses, Wyckoff Gardens, and Warren Houses) and jeopardizes the affordability of rents. Beyond its residential impact, commercially, it is attracting higher-end boutique stores, but undermining the "mom-and-pop" stores that traditionally populated the area.

<sup>1</sup> This \$500 million clean-up project is in the design phase and dredging is expected to start. Trump administration budget cuts might impact the process of the Gowanus Superfund project; however, city officials claim that the city is prepared to underwrite the clean-up.



Figure 3: View of Gowanus Canal, looking north (photo: author).

Gowanus is currently a socio-economically and racially diverse neighbourhood but is on the cusp of change. “Today it is also home to incubators, offices, small commercial businesses, an artist enclave, and a growing nightlife and indoor recreation destination. The neighbourhood is also home to a vibrant residential community dominated by three New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) public housing campuses north and west of the canal, and residents living in rent-stabilized housing concentrated between Union and Carroll Streets, between Nevins Street and 4th Avenue” (Gowanus Neighbourhood Coalition for Justice, 2017). There are four census tracts immediately surrounding the Canal above the Gowanus Expressway (which is the area of rezoning). Median household annual income ranges in this part of the neighbourhood vary from \$38,000 to \$135,000, which signals considerable disparity.<sup>2</sup> The lowest median income tracts are primarily populated with people of color.

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<sup>2</sup> Median household income for Census tracts 71, 75, 77, 119 vary respectively: \$36.890, \$135.697, \$123.592, \$82.969 (American Fact Finder, 2018).



Figure 4: View of Fourth Avenue looking south. On the left the new high-end residential buildings, on the right, older mixed-use buildings can be seen (small businesses on the ground level and apartments on the upper floors) (photo: author).

In the past decade, gentrification has become far more pronounced in Gowanus. A study conducted by the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice, a not-for-profit community development corporation, states that the median rent in the neighbourhood increased from \$1,900 in 2010 to \$2,900 in 2015. From 2015 to 2016 alone, the median home sales prices increased by 68%. The process of gentrification replaced affordable stores low-income residents rely on (fast food restaurants, pharmacies, 99-cent stores, locksmiths, etc.) with upscale stores that serve higher-income customers. The closing of family-operated stores, steep home prices and skyrocketing rents inevitably impacted the economic class as well as the racial breakdown of the community. In 2000, 16% of the population was Black and 35% Hispanic/Latino, but by 2015, only 12% were Black and 25% Hispanic/Latino. The southern part of Gowanus is an Industrial Business Zone and rezoning it into a residential mixed-use area also will translate into a loss of manufacturing jobs in the community, while many of these businesses employ those with limited education or have other barriers to employment (Gowanus Neighbourhood Coalition for Justice, 2017: 29).

According to the report, the rezoning also threatens the existing character of neighbourhood and prioritizes corporate interests. It states, “An aggressive real estate market threatens to displace longtime residents and businesses alike while further segregating the predominately low- and moderate-income NYCHA residents from their neighbors.” The Coalition acknowledges the planning efforts as an opportunity to improve the already existing mixed-use community but urges stopping “destructive real estate forces” from further displacing middle and low-income residents and eliminating manufacturing and small business jobs. Hence, this coalition insists the city must stop gentrification of the neighbourhood and halt the dislocation of low income communities. They have put forward a five-part agenda:

1. Advance racial and economic justice;
2. Create real affordable housing and protect tenants from displacement;
3. Promote environmental justice;
4. Protect local businesses where we work and shop;
5. Uplift the culture and community of long-time residents.

However, this is clearly not a stand against skewed redevelopment, but rather settles for “flanking mechanisms such as local economic development policies and community-based programs to alleviate the problems.” In other words, it addresses the symptoms of neoliberal

governance, such as gentrification, loss of jobs, segregation, dispossession, but does not challenge its premise, goals, or methods (Mayer, 2012: 67).

In short, the pressures of development that will potentially transform Gowanus into an exclusive neighbourhood have also given rise to a local green voice. But, this voice does not unequivocally oppose rezoning, it accepts it as a given. This is exemplified by the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition, which in the end works within the framework of rezoning.

### **3 The Local green voice speaks: Public participation in the Gowanus planning process**

In the face of contaminated environs and gentrification schemes, it is critical for local communities to assert and actualize agency. Citizen participation in urban planning emerged as a widespread practice starting in the 1960s (mostly in Western countries) as part of a larger groundswell in social activism and a push towards more transparent forms of governance (McGovern, 2013). The current version of this in New York City is an initiative of Mayor Bill de Blasio, who was elected in 2014 after a campaign based on uplifting the disenfranchised and making the city more livable for all New Yorkers. This approach to rezoning is called *PLACES* (Planning for Livability, Affordability, Community, Economic Opportunity, and Sustainability) and is “a collaborative approach to planning for diverse, livable neighbourhoods”.<sup>3</sup> *PLACES* examines land use and zoning issues in neighbourhoods as well as identifies community needs.

Although Gowanus has been the focal point for waterfront development by business, it has also been associated with the de Blasio's administration's “affordable housing strategy”. In 2016, the New York City Department of City Planning launched a study of the neighbourhood with the intention of rezoning it into residential and mixed-use areas. The result was *Bridging Gowanus*, a community planning process to shape “a sustainable, livable, and inclusive future for the Gowanus neighbourhood” with the following principles:

- A sustainable, resilient, environmentally healthy community;
- Invest in parks, schools, transit, and waterfront;
- Strengthen the manufacturing sector and create good jobs;
- Keep Gowanus creative and mixed-use;
- Preserve and create affordable housing for an inclusive community;
- Secure a pathway for responsible growth.

In summer 2016, a survey was distributed to which over five hundred people responded, and four public events to gather input were held in the neighbourhood. The survey questions used a ranking system to build support for the City's paramount goal to rezone the area, asking respondents to prioritize interests such as “invest in our parks,” “keep Gowanus mixed”, and “secure a pathway for responsible growth”; and each goal was measured with a “satisfaction index”, which refers to the percentage of voters who voted for the overall winning option. In addition, the Department of City Planning (DCP) held two public meetings in October and December 2016, and also organized a workshop in March 2017 (see NYC Department of City Planning, 2017). In these meetings, different city agencies (such as Parks and Recreation, the Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Department of Environmental Protection) set up tables with promotional materials. The DCP made formal presentations and officials were present. Members of the public were given the opportunity to ask questions and to provide

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<sup>3</sup> For a current list of participatory planning projects, see NYC Department of City Planning's website (Internet 5).

feedback with regards to what they needed from rezoning. However, there was no room (figuratively or literally) in the hearings to decry the rudimentary premise, to oppose the proposition of rezoning: it only allowed tinkering at the edges of a preconceived plan.

In January 2017, DCP announced the Gowanus Neighborhood Planning Study, a focus study with five groups: Housing, Arts and Culture, Public Realm, Industry and Economic Development, Resiliency and Sustainability.<sup>4</sup> The study is set to

Examine ways to balance a range of issues and needs in Gowanus by seeking to support existing and future resiliency and sustainability efforts; encourage and expand neighbourhood services and amenities, like supermarkets; improve streetscapes and pedestrian safety, and access along the Canal for all people; explore ways to support and develop space for job-generating uses, including industrial, arts and cultural uses; promote opportunities for new housing with affordable housing and protect residential tenants against harassment and displacement; and coordinate necessary infrastructure improvements throughout the area to support the continued cleanup of the Gowanus Canal and to accommodate existing and future needs.<sup>5</sup>

This five-month long process started in February 2017 and lasted through June. The outcome of these focus groups was that each group will make recommendations to help planners decide the parameters of rezoning, which is to be completed by Fall 2017 or Winter 2018. The sub-committees met in July 2017 to share, discuss, and prioritize each group's outcomes and draft recommendations.

In March 2017, DCP also initiated Plan Gowanus, a digital platform to engage the community (Internet 2). This website basically solicits residents' ideas and suggestions about the built environment on a map of the neighbourhood. The range of comments left on the map runs a broad gamut: safety issues (like street lights), adaptive reuse of historic landmarks, the creation of bike lanes, turning a closed street into a dog run, greenscaping, addressing the foul odor of the Canal, daylighting one arm of the creek, etc. The suggestions left on this platform will complement DCP's other outreach efforts as part of the neighbourhood study with input from public events and workshops in drafting a land use framework. The feedback from Plan Gowanus in conjunction with the Gowanus Neighborhood Planning Study along with the results from the public events and workshops will inform the development of a neighbourhood plan. However, the note on Plan Gowanus states that "the input collected through this site is not considered official public comment on a city proposal. It is separate from the public scoping, public review and comment that occurs in the context of the Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP)." Therefore, the city is under no obligation to limit redevelopment by the outcome of the public recommendations through this channel. The local green voice is speaking, but whether it will be listened to is another matter.

#### **4 Evaluating the local green voice: Contributions and critiques of participatory planning**

How has participatory planning performed in Gowanus? Given it has been simultaneously beneficial and detrimental, it is impossible to generalize. Nevertheless, this case study spotlights

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<sup>4</sup> The author was invited to work on the Resiliency and Sustainability group after attending the public meeting in Dec. 2016.

<sup>5</sup> New housing with affordable housing, also known as "Mandatory Inclusionary Housing" refers to this recent "solution" to deal with affordable housing crisis in NYC in which Department of Housing Preservation & Development makes a deal with real estate developers. The city provides the land, which is public property. The developer builds market rate apartments of which 20% of the total units are affordable. For more information, see NYC Department City Planning (2016).

the specific experience in Gowanus to illuminate key outcomes that speak to the nature of participatory planning. To begin with the positive side of the ledger, the process has facilitated a greater exchange of information between those who make decisions about development and those who are most affected by development. The studies produced by the Gowanus focus groups work as a bridge connecting the way planners see the place versus the way residents do. As far as residents are concerned, especially those who may not possess technical knowledge regarding public administration, civil engineering and hydrology, they gain a window into the factors that shape planning decisions. For planners, these sessions are chances to understand how residents live in and value a neighbourhood, and how rezoning decisions impact their lives; they glean invaluable knowledge about the streetscape, character of the neighbourhood, social life, as well as practical knowledge on locations of street flooding and what happens during an emergency as was the case for Superstorm Sandy in October 2012. Simple infrastructural, aesthetic interpretations of the neighbourhood tend to leave out the people who live in it, their experiences, and the significance of the area in their everyday lives. A second advantage is seen in increasing engagement. The process of public input and deliberation tends to generate greater political buy-in by local communities who seek a say in the future of their neighbourhood.

However, in moving beyond the theory of participatory planning, there are two overarching structural realities that subvert the model: power and position. First, in terms of power, it is invariably skewed: not all locals participate equally, and, in fact, some of those who do participate may be doing so at the behest of outside actors, including business interests. An important motivation behind the participation of locals in public consultations is becoming part of decision-making processes governing their neighbourhoods. However, it is often the case that community outreach practices do not fundamentally change anything in terms of spatial planning. Indeed, town hall meetings and the use of social media are, in fact, only “fashionable participatory techniques that are considered politically palatable forms of community engagement by the political elite” (Legacy, 2016: 3-4). In this regard, it is not apparent that these government-led participatory planning processes serve communities, but instead are often merely masking “pro-growth” logic. Furthermore, as one participant in a Gowanus workshop observed, it would be difficult for some people to take the requisite hours off from their job on a weekday because it would mean a loss of desperately needed income. In other words, the timing and time commitment necessary to participate prevents low-income residents from joining in the process.

While the underprivileged are less likely to participate, the wealthy are more likely to do so and in more substantial roles—not directly through participatory planning but instead by means of influencing the structures and institutions that constrain participatory planning. For example, the chairman and CEO of Lightstone, the developer of “365 Bond”, a 430-unit market rate apartment complex that was built in 2016 right on the Canal at 1<sup>st</sup> Street, has been appointed by Mayor de Blasio to the NYC Economic Development Corporation’s Board of Directors, a body charged with promoting growth and jobs (Internet 3).<sup>6</sup> The placing of elites in such roles is redolent of a neoliberal urbanism that protects the privilege and reiterates inequity (Kratke, 2012).

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<sup>6</sup> According to Internet 3, Lightstone’s \$2 billion portfolio includes over 6 million square feet of office, retail and industrial commercial properties, 11,000 residential units and 3,200 hotel keys. The company owns over 12,000 land lots across the United States with a headquarters in New York City. It has over \$2.5 billion worth of projects currently under development in the residential, hospitality, and retail sectors.



Figure 5: Privatised public space, Gowanus Waterfront Park, in front of the developments 363-365 Bond Street, looking north (photo: author).

In fact, in assessing the relative power of different sectors and actors in these so-called participatory frameworks, there are important qualifications in terms of the degree of participation: it is often only about providing input, it is not about decision-making. As Seitz (2001: 9) notes: “Current approaches for development and growth management tend to be one dimensional. They address only one step of the decision process, such as visioning or provide tools for information gathering but not for decision-making, such as indicators. These approaches also tend to minimize the differences among community stakeholders in access to and control of resources for effective decision-making, as well as the place-based and social variables that affect decision-making.” These drawbacks corrupt the participatory planning process and reduce it to essentially theater. It may make locals feel better and create an air of engagement and contribution, but the reality is that the community’s avenues of engagement are appropriated and their views effectively marginalized.

To return to critical urban theory, neoliberal power co-opts community activism into settling for mitigation of redevelopment impacts rather than contesting the nature and agenda of structural transformation. The “right to the city” is surrendered to the market that purchases assent for a pittance. Furthermore, in the name of freedom, the neoliberal city may seemingly devolve authority to more local levels, such as neighbourhoods, but this has the effect of pushing them to compete for resources. Consequently, respective neighbourhood initiatives render piecemeal participatory planning and ultimately hinder the possibility of a larger mobilization opposing neoliberalism.

The second structural hindrance to a local green voice relates to position. Most of the Gowanus neighbourhood lies in the “hundred-year flood plain” as deemed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), i.e., the area is likely to experience a flood that statistically has a one-percent chance of occurring in any given year. However, according to the NYC Planning, this definition is misleading and “in the 1% annual chance floodplain, there is a 26% chance of flooding over the life of a 30-year mortgage” (Internet 4). Furthermore, the probability is almost

certainly higher with sea-level rise, which according to NY State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) could increase as high as 75 inches (183 cm) by 2100.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 6: Sea level rise projections for 2100. NYC Flood Risk 2100-NPCC2 SLR Scenarios (source: ArcGIS Online, 2018; NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, 2018).

Additionally, Gowanus is an already polluted environment, and the Canal has become the receiving body for a six-square mile watershed area, which includes the adjacent neighbourhoods of Carroll Gardens and Park Slope. As a result, the Gowanus sewer-shed is the point where all the neighbourhood sewers combine and either flow to the Red Hook Wastewater Treatment Plant or overflow into the Canal (Spector, 2014). New development will even further distress the existing infrastructure and exacerbate the CSO problem. Therefore, the geography of Gowanus places it at risk for flooding. Although rezoning is presented as the only way to bring the economic revitalization required to pay for indispensable improvements in infrastructure, this logic presumes that Gowanus is fundamentally suitable for more development.

The problem, however, is that no amount of development and infrastructure can change the physical (topographical, geological, hydrological) properties of the area. The fight over what to build obscures that whatever is built will frequently be at risk of being, or actually be, under water. Gowanus is part of a larger ecological/urban system and subject to political decisions made at levels beyond community. At the state level, New York responds to a wider aggregate constituency. Moreover, governments at the municipal, state, and federal level tend to plan in limited increments as leaders eye the next election in a few years more than speculate about a problem that may not manifest itself as problematic for decades. The local green voice wants

<sup>7</sup> Sea level rise projections reflect a range of possibility starting from 18 inches (46cm) (NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, 2018)

to protect itself from the afflictions of development, but the problem is far greater and complicated than fending off real estate speculators and gentrification: climate change is making Gowanus itself untenable as a residential, let alone commercial or industrial area. Political and economic factors do not compel addressing these problems, and in truth often contribute to compounding them.

The need for more housing, especially for low-income households, is acute and obvious, but building in Gowanus will not address that problem. In fact, it will create other problems. It will displace existing local populations and absorb investment and resources that could be dedicated to development in more environmentally sustainable locales. Moreover, participatory planning is being used as a smokescreen to justify rezoning that benefits the wealthy and businesses. In the case of Gowanus, the local green voice has become a tragic paradox: its heart is in the right place but its head is misguided. The call for environmental cleansing of a polluted area has become a proxy for class cleansing of a neighbourhood coveted by elite interests, and participatory planning obscures this dynamic.

## **5 Conclusion: Saving the local green voice: An informed dialogue on self-determination and sustainability**

While harmonizing the environmental justice agenda with the circumstances of participatory planning in Gowanus is challenging, there is nonetheless something tremendously valuable in the concept and practice of the local green voice. The issue is how to reclaim this agenda, to ensure it embodies the local as well as reconciles with ecological necessities. I conclude with ideas to facilitate self-determination and sustainability through greater knowledge of areas being considered for rezoning and to improve participatory processes.

At the outset, a structural revolution in orientation is required: the motives behind the driving force of development should be exposed and the right to the city should be acknowledged. As Peter Marcuse states, profit should be eliminated as the primary means and motivation in the political sector and planning, and the role of the elite should not overshadow the public decision making (Marcuse, 2012: 39). In terms of the nuts-and-bolts of deliberating and determining development, the first step is to gather more information on a neighbourhood. Beyond data collection, this involves an approach that understands that a neighbourhood is not merely the sum of housing, water, sewer infrastructure, and power grid, but also a different kind of infrastructures that are critical to residents (especially those on low incomes), namely affordable shopping, as well as parks, recreational space, and other places for socializing and building community. In this way, measures of priorities of rezoning must include community well-being by setting “indicators as barometers of community well-being” (English et al., 2004: 194).

One important method for gleaning this knowledge are “sitewalks,” guided tours organized to bring together designers/planners and locals before the actual design process starts, which was employed in Waterfront Toronto project’s participatory strategies. Locals can highlight significant places and attachments. Other interactive methods include “neighbourhood use maps, transect walk maps, timelines, resource flow charts, daily routine graphs, and role playing” and photographic documentation done by residents (Seitz, 2001: 10). Participatory mapping such as on OpenStreetMap (an open source model) can be used to map essential community resources by the users themselves. NYC Planning’s tool Plan Gowanus is an important asset and should weigh heavily on the rezoning plans. Additionally, it is important to develop channels for participation that are not so constrained by time-specific, time-intensive,

cost-inducing conditions. One possibility are surveys. Online questionnaires can be developed to collect data on users, their behaviors, preferences, and problems with the existing community resources, open spaces, public spaces, and to also evaluate the potential of these places. A second option is to enable the participation of low-income families at public consultations by providing childcare, other social services, or compensation. These alternatives advance equity; the local green voice will then not only be sensitive to neighbourhood concerns and sustainability but also contribute to equality. These learning practices play a social-political role in cementing the utility and popularity of development projects. As Seitz (2001: 10) points out, interactive “methods are best learned by doing; the greatest benefit comes from their practice and analysis within the group. The sharing of knowledge and discussion that takes place is of greater value than the finished product.”

To validate the process of civic participation, planning must produce development that reflects neighbourhood knowledge, experience, and engagement. Neighbourhoods are not objects around which development is built, but subjects to be involved in determining development. The hand of public participation must be seen in planning and development; the process must drive the outcome. It is only when the local green voice is discernibly heard that any development has a chance to be environmentally and social-politically sustainable.

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Boštjan BUGARIČ

## Urban acupuncture treatment: Implementing communication tools with youth in Ljubljana suburbs

### Abstract

Urban acupuncture actions are small-scale, bottom-up projects that foster community building. The approach provides an alternative to investor urbanism and motivates residents of neglected neighbourhoods to engage in place-making. The playground in Ljubljana's suburb of Zalog is a perfect example of an intervention that converted a neglected site into a main meeting point of the neighbourhood. The needs of youngsters were inquired about and considered; they became active partners in the transformation of public space. Urban acupuncture is a valuable tool for place-making in locations where market forces overshadow the residents' ability to make decisions about their own right to the city.

**Keywords:** urban acupuncture, place-making, investor urbanism, neighbourhoods, participation

### 1 Introduction

In the suburbs of Central European cities we are witness to a lack of activities available to youngsters in spite of the fact that public spaces have been reclaimed for mixed use. The capacity of young people to participate in the public life of their neighbourhood is diminishing. New forms of social structures and relationships among city dwellers have produced an unequal distribution of political power, which is not indicative of a promising future for European cities. Smith (2002) argues that gentrification has become a global urban strategy, influencing local urban environments around the world. Global capital accumulates in urban centres and accelerates the speed and scale of gentrification in large cities. In contrast to large-scale investment projects, urban acupuncture is a small-scale practice applied in micro urban environments, intended to engage local residents in the creation of their public space. It is a strategy for approaching urban renewal or development projects that acknowledges the needs of locals and other stakeholders and puts an emphasis on creating shared common spaces, accessible to the local population. Application of urban acupuncture includes research into local residents' needs and consideration of their perspectives in the planning process. Targeted actions are then carried out to change public space and improve the residents' quality of life. This paper presents an example of urban acupuncture, implemented in the Zalog suburb of Ljubljana which was specifically articulated to meet the needs of youngsters.

A lack of communication among stakeholders in urban environment can cause a disconnection between suburbs and the city centre. Marginalized suburban neighbourhoods become abandoned, vandalized, and neglected, lacking all appropriate programmes. Neglect is connected with unmitigated urban sprawl. Investor urbanism mode of operation is currently one of the most prominent reasons for weak local communities. Direct implementation of investment capital interests leaves little room for communication. Urban acupuncture is a method of intervention and resistance that can disrupt and influence profit-driven investor urbanism in action and, through the

participation of the public, tip the scale in favour of public interest. It influences community building by inspiring residents to acknowledge common ownership of a particular public space and use it to express and reinforce their local identity. Insisting on discussion and creating concrete urban interventions in neglected spaces is an important aspect of community building.

The focus in Ljubljana was on youth, defined here as the generational group between 8 and 25 years old. The use of new communication tools and methods made distribution within a wider group of users easy. Different new methods were used to involve the youth in collaboration as the approaches previously used to attract their participation had failed.

In a top-down setting of the power city, contents are dictated by investors or developers, and urban dwellers are not considered important as the capital reshapes the city in pursuit of profit. Investor urbanism represents a form of spatial development in which investors and/or politicians make decisions about a city's development without giving residents or other community representatives any opportunity to provide their input. The only objective is to maximize profit through the implementation of corporate design that invariably affects the community. Investor urbanism has been especially prevalent in countries undergoing transition between different political regimes, where urban development is subject to corruption and real estate manipulation.

The rise of investor urbanism, as described by Lefebvre and Harvey in the 1970s, laid the fundamentals for the expansion of the capitalist system. According to Lefebvre, the development of the contemporary city is a product of the capitalist system, where the state uses space for social control (Patel, 2015). Investor urbanism is part of capital accumulation and class relations. As the capital accumulation strategies moved away from productive sectors in the late 1970s and 1980s, the production of built environment emerged as a viable alternative to mop up surplus capital. Governments in cooperation with the private sector passed business-friendly laws and regulations, turning profit-driven urbanism into the main site of capital accumulation. This sort of top-down projects usually results in privatization of urban commons and disregard for public interest in favour of private gains.

According to Harvey (2008), since the 1970s the solution to the issue of surplus capital has been solved by urbanization, absorbing capital by restructuring, renovation, expansion, and speculation. Harvey (2008) argues that the city and the real estate market are produced by capital accumulation governing present-day economy. Vives Miro (2010) describes how "since the nineties, the expansion of neoliberalism has involved the entrepreneurial turn of local governments, by playing a new role in the urban governance. Local governments, in conjunction with private agents and urban elites, have turned into promoters of developments, producing the city based on competitive logics, in order to scale positions in the global urban hierarchy. In this sense, gentrification policies have been one of the main urban strategies that have driven cities towards success in the global market." The rise of investor urbanism causes the adaption of space to gentrification policies, as already described by Florida (2003) in *The rise of the creative class*. His theory is based on the notion that attracting creative people to a city will strengthen its economic performance. Riegler (2013) states that, instead, gentrification is sugar coated in terms like urban renewal or urban regeneration. Policy makers can hide behind Florida's theory and promote an environment in neighbourhoods favourable to the young urban creative elite but completely bypassing all consideration of the current residents'

needs. In a recent podcast (Chamberlain, 2017) Florida expresses a concern, discussed in his new book, of a new urban crisis concerning the growing poverty in the suburbs. The reason for this crisis lies in the fact that people who move to the suburbs are nowadays often the disadvantaged that have been pushed out from the city centre. This is a new facet of the growing spatial inequality. The new urban crisis is a term describing the growing spatial inequality and a simultaneous decline of the middle class in city neighbourhoods.

An alternative possible approach to improvement of a certain neighbourhood, city or region involves the process of place-making where dwellers become involved in all aspects of projects that reinvent public space as the centre of their community (White, 2001). In a collaborative process public space can be shaped in such a way as to maximize its shared value. It is not the urban design, its products or authors, but the use of specific action patterns to create spatial, cultural, and social identities that define a place. However, when place-making is shaping public spaces through a participatory process, it is important to increase the values attached to those spaces by citizens. “Keeping the high quality of places over time can be a real challenge, especially in times of austerity. Place-keeping offers some solutions for local authorities to face these challenges” (Schmoch, 2017).

To understand fully the difference between the top-down approaches and urban acupuncture, we shall examine concrete examples from two former Yugoslavian cities: Koper and Belgrade. Both cases demonstrate how city dwellers cannot participate in top-down projects. Czepczyński (2008) states that socialistic urban typologies and strategies defined the space of the former communist cities in central Europe in a way that is difficult to react to. In Koper, Slovenia, a project was started in 2007 when municipal councillors approved the construction of a building that would house an Olympic centre, including a swimming pool, wellness and conference centres, offices, and municipal administration, in a central location near the historical city centre. More than ten years later the construction remains unfinished. When the construction company went bankrupt, work in this prominent location was discontinued, and the unfinished shell still stands there after a decade of decay (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The unfinished construction at the entrance of the historical city of Koper (photo: Boštjan Bugarič).



Figure 2: Shopping mall in Koper shares its parking lot with the city prison (photo: Domen Grögl).

As a case in point, the Koper municipality councillors also approved the construction of the shopping mall right next to the city prison, which is isolated from its surroundings. The prison planned in the 1980s thus shares a parking lot with a commercial area constructed after the lot was sold to private investors in the 2000s (Figure 2). In Koper, inclusive design of public spaces that takes the needs of residents' into account is severely limited and municipality politics plays the decisive role in urban planning. The public is disempowered and does not express disagreement with the city's investments in public space or architecture. A public primary school, for example, was equipped with a plaque that celebrates the political victory of the mayor (Bugarič, 2010). There has not been any public reaction to the plaque since the school was built (Figure 3).



Figure 3: The inscription "63.3 hvala" on the facade of the Koper primary school refers to the support (in percentage points) that the mayor's side received in the referendum on the construction of the school (photo: Boštjan Bugarič).

A very similar process on a much larger scale is happening in Belgrade, where an urban design for Waterfront was proposed during the 2012 municipal election. During the 2014 parliamentary election cycle, the project was promoted as a way to improve city life. However, the public was not informed about the fact that the Waterfront project was subject to foreign capital investment and primarily a profit-making venture, not a city improvement scheme. The project includes plans for the construction of 6,178 housing units that will bring anticipated revenue of approximately EUR 2.5 billion.

Vilenica, Sekulić, and Čukić (2015: 5) describe how “urban planners started looking at the space owned by the city not as a resource and a control mechanism to sustain equality in future development, but as a source of fast profit.” In 1985 the planning legislation was modified to simplify granting approval to profitable development projects. In this way urban planners catered to investors’ wishes. Investor urbanism is taking place on different scales. The sites of urban renewals are presented as future attractive locations that promise to attract further investments in line with the Bilbao effect. Namely, in Bilbao, popularity and financial growth were brought to a rundown city area in economic decline with the construction of an architectural landmark, the Guggenheim Museum.

The reaction of civil society to large-scale projects is protest. In Belgrade, 20,000 people gathered in the streets. In Koper, people express disagreement with discussions in daily and social media, through art, and activist actions such as VIVAT LOGGIA! The two examples show a similar reaction of the local population to a top-down approach. We employed a bottom-up approach and small-scale urbanism, following the methodology described below.

## **2 Methodology**

### **2.1 Cultural Acupuncture Treatment for Suburbs project**

European suburbia develops in borderless landscapes on the outskirts of historical centres. Kádár (2012) outlines how neighbourhoods are considered suburban in their given socio-cultural environments. Different extra-urban typologies, such as favelas in South America, high-rise housing estates in Russia and Hong Kong, and the sprawl of detached houses for the upper classes in the United States are becoming new ways of suburban living for the lower social classes. Central European cities annexed suburban villages during the 20th century and started the process of suburbanization, which “lead to the formation of the first upper-class suburbs, where the rich escaped to from the centres and their noise, pollution and the more and more visible working class. These first suburban areas were originally characterized by mono-functional living environments” (Kádár, 2012). But a long-lasting mono-functionality of these areas and the absence of diversity produced deserted suburbs lacking any identity.

In the scope of the project Cultural Acupuncture Treatment for Suburbs (Culurb), financed by the Education and Culture DG - Culture Programme with the support of the European Commission, six cities were involved in the implementation of urban acupuncture interventions. The project was organized and coordinated by the main coordinator, the Centre for Central European Architecture (CCEA) in Prague and co-organized in Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, Warsaw and Ljubljana. Between 2010 and 2013, a suburb area in each of these cities was identified and targeted with urban acupuncture strategies by local coordinators. The selected locations were associated with problems such as economic hardship/shortage of jobs, commuter areas with people commuting to the city centres for work (byproduct of mono-functional environment), tensions with immigrants, and growing anti-immigrant and nationalist sentiments that disrupt the harmony in local communities.

Growing anti-immigrant and nationalist sentiment is the most common cause of disruption of the harmony of suburban communities with their development. This

problem was tackled in suburbs, including Ljubljana. Zalog is located at the east end of Ljubljana. While part of Yugoslavia, the area experienced a high rate of immigration from other parts of the common state. In consequence, the present-day generation of youngsters has a very diverse mix of cultural backgrounds. Slovene population is in minority and it has proven difficult to integrate youngsters into the city. Instead, the youth have developed their own urban identity. Zalog is located outside the Ljubljana ring road, which makes the area feel remote in comparison to other parts of the city. Due to the collapse of industry in the area, there is a serious shortage of jobs, so many people commute to work to the centre.

## **2.2 Urban acupuncture: A case study in Zalog, Ljubljana**

Urban acupuncture fosters interactions among inhabitants of a neighbourhood to cultivate community life (Culburb, 2013). Gruber (2012) talks about urban acupuncture as “a set of actions based on an inductive reading and physiological understanding of an urban milieu. It identifies neuralgic points for focused interventions that promise to add-up to more than the mere sum of their parts. Only then urban plans might be implemented also bottom-up and incrementally through constant feed-back and re-adjustments.” Urban acupuncture evokes the points of engagement of dwellers within a local community in small actions in micro urban environment, with the purpose of creating diversity of content in public spaces. Understanding the residents’ needs is important; they must be studied before starting any urban acupuncture action. Implementation requires continuity; only continued feedback loops allow the necessary readjustments and building of trust within the community. The process of urban acupuncture implementation is structured in three phases: research, content observation, and action planning. Generally, an independent stakeholder (most often an NGO, in this case KUD C3) connects dwellers’ (in this case the youngsters’) perception of space with stakeholders. Over the course of a long-term process, a methodology based on solidarity values and collaboration was developed. The result of this process was renovation of a public space – the playground Plata – and the creation of a new meeting point of the neighbourhood (Figure 4).

The Zalog case study was focused on possible changes to the local landscape that could be made without large investments and without relying on the city government or municipality. The youngsters in Zalog were invited to communicate their needs in relation to their direct surroundings. The goal of the community building was to actively involve them in the shaping of their environment according to their needs in order to overcome their usual passive critical attitude towards public projects that often undervalue their creative potential. The reconstruction of the vandalized sports-field in Zalog emerged as an opportunity for a common project initiated directly by the local youth and affecting their immediate environment. This location had been a favourite meeting place for the young people of Zalog. It had a long-standing problem of weathered and destroyed benches, no access to drinking water, and inadequate lighting for playing sports in the evenings. Ljubljana, in particular its suburbs, is characterized by a relatively large population of second-generation immigrants, descendants of newcomers from other cultures (Džokić et al., 2011). Most of Zalog youth are descendants of immigrant parents from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Urban acupuncture implementation was developed in the four-year process with participation of the Zalog community. The Zalog project involved the collaboration of the City Municipality of Ljubljana, the Youth Centre Zalog Čamac, a neighbourhood retirement home, the local community of Polje and the Zalog primary school, and was coordinated by the cultural association KUD C3.



Figure 4: Action planning – renovation of the water well on the playground in Zalog as part of urban acupuncture process (photo: Domen Grögl).

### 2.3 Project implementation

Project implementation started in April 2010 and concluded in June 2013. KUD C3 association took on the leading role in the project, establishing communication between different parties. During the first phase – research –, KUD C3 initiated the partnership with a local stakeholder, the Zalog youth centre. Working together and gradually building trust yielded the basic concept of spatial development in the selected micro location (Plata playground), developed together with the city municipality and the local primary school. The renovation began in 2010 as a cooperation between the local youth and STEALTH.unlimited, brought together by KUD C3. In parallel, research started and continued throughout the implementation of the project; results were presented in a manual “This place exist only while we are here” (Džokić et al., 2011), an attempt towards creating effective means of involving young dwellers in the shape of their local built environment through diverse forms of engagement. On December 2011, the Building Public-ness festival was organized at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, at the Zalog primary school, and in several other public venues in Ljubljana. The event brought together architects, artists, designers, sociologists, cultural anthropologists, writers and curators. Through lectures, discussions, art interventions, exhibitions and workshops the participants encouraged the users of public space to start actively participating in the shaping of the environment they live in and to define its contents. Local and international institutions took part in the festival, including Centre for Central European Architecture (Prague, Czech Republic), University of Primorska (Koper, Slovenia), Academy of Design (Ljubljana, Slovenia), Academy of Fine Arts (Vienna, Austria), Parsons New School for Design (New York, USA), Association for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Research (Zagreb, Croatia), Soho in Ottakring (Vienna, Austria), STEALTH.unlimited (Belgrade/Rotterdam, Serbia/The Netherlands), and Press to Exit Project Space (Skopje, FYROM).

The second phase focused on observations of space content. Youngsters communicated directly with experts at the youth centre and through social media channels. In this way the new content was defined according to the needs expressed by the target group, youngsters aged between 8 and 25 years. This phase took place during the first year of project implementation: KUD C3 established a connection with the youth centre in Zalog and other potential partners (City Municipality of Ljubljana, Local Community Polje, community centre, primary school, neighbourhood retirement home). KUD C3 conducted

weekly meetings with different stakeholders and observed the needs of the young people over an extended period of time. Approximately 85 youth were involved in the project, as well as around 700 other people from the Zalog neighbourhood. The project was presented at other institutions and in other cities, among them the Parsons New School for Design in New York, the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade, the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Ljubljana, the Deutsche Architektur Zentrum in Berlin, and the Architekturzentrum in Vienna. Observing the suburb content included feedback from social media, weekly interviews and hangouts at the playground, together with observations of the behaviour of youth gathering in the neighbourhood. Conclusions of our observations were distributed via social media, live conferences and different platforms, with the aim of attracting as many individuals as possible from the local community and informing the largest possible audience. Communication with youth and collaborative work with the Zalog community was always in the forefront of the working process. Distribution of information via social media assured that the youth were continuously involved in the process in real time.

The third phase focused on the development of the action plan. The regeneration of Zalog public space put its main focus on Plata, the local playground that was –at the start of the renovation–mainly used by local drug dealers. During the following five years, between 2011 and 2013, Plata was transformed into a community meeting spot. The playground was outfitted with lights, new benches and water fountains. In addition to young people, the space eventually attracted the elderly and mothers with children. They all played a role in transforming a once-vandalized area into a community gathering space. During this time, five artist residency programmes, coordinated by KUD C3, were conducted in the Zalog neighbourhood.

### **3 Results**

The final results of urban acupuncture strategies implemented in the scope of Culburb were presented and evaluated at the Forum Acupuncture Conference in Ljubljana in April 2013. Six local coordinators and authors presented their projects from six different cities. In Zalog, urban acupuncture was used to engage local youth in the urban design of their neighbourhood.

The first urban acupuncture intervention was designed as a cooperation between youngsters and experts (Figure 5). Collaborating in the renovation of the abandoned playground by using recycled materials gave the local youth a larger sense of responsibility towards their environment. The young people's attitudes changed from those characteristic of a consumer society to those marking a society with a higher awareness of spatial, ethical and ecological aspects of their environment. During collaborative work carried out by the KUD C3 expert team and youth from Zalog in 2011 and 2012, the participating youngsters gained experience and knowledge on the subject of water recuperation.



Figure 5: Urban Acupuncture - Down by the Water (photo: Domen Grögl).

The second urban acupuncture intervention was organized in December 2012 in collaboration with the architect Daniel Diaz Vidaurri from Mexico City (Figure 6). The organized workshop stimulated communication among the youth and encouraged them to design their ideal city, while simultaneously illustrating the way they perceive public space and the way they would like to break down the social and physical barriers between their neighbourhood and city areas they do not usually frequent.



Figure 6: Urban Acupuncture - Design Your City (photo: Domen Grögl).

The third urban acupuncture intervention was carried out by artists Yane Calovski and Hristina Ivanoska with the creative collaboration of Anette Lundebj, designer and researcher from London. The artists engaged locals in a dialogue about their personal and collective expectations regarding public space through a collective performance entitled Stone Soup. The performance was a participatory action designed to draw out the youth's opinions on public space. This intervention was conducted in March 2012 at the Zalog primary school (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Urban Acupuncture - Conversation (photo: Domen Grögl).

The fourth urban acupuncture intervention was carried out between November 2012 and June 2013. The site of the intervention was a grass patch next to the playground where a meeting place for the local youngsters was constructed (Figure 8). The youth were partners in the creation process; they became proud owners of a new public area that they could take care of. During the workshops they were encouraged to talk about the area needs, construct models and make good choices, which gradually lead to concrete formal decisions. The intervention included the collaboration of local artisans and businesses that sourced the necessary materials and showed the young the way to initiate other processes in turn and source the materials themselves.



Figure 8: Urban Acupuncture - The Meeting Stripe (photo: Domen Grögl).

The fifth urban acupuncture intervention in Zalog took place between January and April 2013. Organization Womenspace executed the intervention in different public spaces; asking different questions about the relationship of women towards public space in Zalog (Figure 9). Within a series of workshops, women of different ages and backgrounds talked about their involvement in public space, their experiences, and the accommodations they need and wish for in public space. The workshop coordinators assembled their input in

the form of stories, drawings, and maps into a mental map of the suburb. Such maps can serve as tools for improvement of public space for women.



Figure 9: Urban Acupuncture Womenspace (photo: Domen Grögl).

Yet another activity was related to the local youth centre. It took place in the centre of the neighbourhood where a former neighbourhood community centre had been demolished to make room for a new commercial building. The construction of a new shopping mall on the site and the incompatibility of the programme forced the youth centre to move out and look for another seat. It is now located in the building previously used as a library, situated on the fringes of the neighbourhood.



Figure 10: The new commercial building in Zalog in oversized format (photo: Domen Grögl).

For a better understanding of how urban acupuncture affected the Zalog community, the neighbourhood, and public space, we summarize the most important results in Table 1. The communication development, impact on public space, and investment of residents have been mapped and evaluated.

Table 1: Urban acupuncture in Zalog and its impact on the community (2011 - 2013).

	Communication development	Impact on public space	Involvement of local residents
Down by the Water	Excellent: connection of youth centre and stakeholders	Excellent: reconstruction of the playground	Youth, age 11-25 Elderly, age 60-70
Design Your City	Very good: connection of youth centre, stakeholders and international institutions	Very good: definition of dangerous spaces and spaces related to identity of the neighbourhood	Youth, age 15-20
Conversations	Very good: connection of youth centre and primary school	Good: educational impact	Children, age 8-11
The Meeting Stripe	Excellent: connection of youth centre, primary school, and local stakeholders-craftsmen	Excellent: definition of the meeting point for dwellers	Teenagers, age 11-18
Womenspace	Excellent: connection of youth centre with local activists	Excellent: definition of safe spaces for women in the neighbourhood	Women, age 10-60

Note: Users' needs were studied between 2010 and 2013.

#### 4 Conclusion

The nature and dynamics of urban sprawl in Central Europe take on different dimensions: infrastructure-related sprawl can be observed around Athens (Salvati & Zitti, 2017); post-socialist city sprawl is taking place in Warsaw and Ljubljana; sprawl based on second homes can be encountered in Austria (Couch, 2008). Many needs of Central European suburban residents, ranging from infrastructural to cultural and communal, remain unfulfilled. "To start with, a unique yet common relation with their living environment would be needed to define in a steady way the notion of 'home'. Some qualities of these undefined, transitional landscapes should be discovered, and reformulated to give a new sense of place to these often non-places. The traditional urban planning policies will not work here. The efforts to tie these areas to the cities are too big and expensive to be feasible; while the population migrating to the suburbs will probably create new ones if these areas will become neatly urban" (Kádár, 2012). Development of neighbourhoods in post-transition Eastern European countries is strongly influenced by neoliberal distribution of capital. Investor urbanism disregards content diversity and promotes one-way communication of interests from the political elite and capital investors to the developers. Combatting investor urbanism is not constructive; rather, we should work towards improving the communication within the community, and thus create a self-sufficient micro urbanism. There is a necessity for civil society organizations to amplify the voices of the community, lobby against investor urbanism interests, and counteract some of its destructive effects.

The article presents urban acupuncture, a bottom-up method of urban intervention that represents an alternative to profit-driven, investor urbanism projects. The concept of urban acupuncture is an alternative form of small-scale “place-making” that is based on human relations and prioritizes public interest. Urban acupuncture influences community building by providing the residents with a sense of common ownership of a particular space and promotes the use of this space to express and reinforce local identity. An important aspect of community building is enforcing the discussion and creating concrete urban actions in neglected spaces. Using urban acupuncture at the level of a neighbourhood enables resistance to capital investments and relies on emotional investment of residents of neglected areas into public space. Resilience projects are based on community needs; they simultaneously create new forms of active participation and open possibilities for intergenerational collaboration in the neighbourhood. The diverse contents included in the Zalog urban acupuncture implementation clearly show that it is possible to build a community and develop intergenerational relations but only over a longer period of time, and with experts working in close association with the community. The open public space of the Zalog playground is an example *par excellence* of the potential of such interventions – it transformed a neglected and dangerous space into a neighbourhood community meeting point.

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Sara BASSO

## Rethinking public space through food processes: Research proposal for a “public city”

### **Abstract**

Wide areas in urban peripheries are made up of the council housing, i.e., neighbourhoods provided by public authorities. Diverse in building forms and types, these areas are frequently equipped with large open spaces: their “public” dimension, in physical and social terms, which is currently in crisis. The aim of this article is to discuss two issues arising from this fact: how the sharing of food-related processes can have a strategic role in the redevelopment of the “public city”, and how the “implicit planning” of these processes may provide useful insights to update planning tools and define new types of public spaces. A multiplicity of reflections leads to the conclusion that public spaces have declined, primarily, due to their inability to represent an increasingly fragmented and diverse society. In this respect, food recreates the *primaevae* sense of sharing, which encourages new forms of self-promoted public spaces. An innovation of these spaces can be found in the ability to activate or enhance not only social but also economic and cohesive social relationship networks that can break down the mechanisms leading to isolation, closures and marginality often affecting peripheral council housing neighbourhoods.

**Keywords:** food spaces, food providing & distribution, open spaces, urban design, “public city”, creative practices.

### **1 Food and the cities: An urban question**

For some time now, the relationship between food and city has been at the centre of research and investigations promoted by organizations, government agencies, non-profit associations and the like. Most importantly, it has been the core interest of different disciplines, not least architecture and urban planning. Since the mid-1990s, with the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Istanbul, Turkey, June 1996), scientists have become aware of how intense phenomena of global urbanization are closely related to an increasingly unsustainable agricultural production. Many studies have essentially shown the relationship between urban population growth and soil depletion, resource consumption and desertification phenomena. More generally, the significant role of cities has emerged in the intensification of climate change issues, food poverty, human safety and health, etc.

The argument that these researches contribute to, outline and support is clear: sustainability and urban spaces survival are strongly linked to food production and distribution cycles (Cheema et al., 1996; Mougeot, 2005, 2006; Morgan, 2009; Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 2009, 2011; Steel, 2013; de Zeeuw & Dreschel, 2015). The “food system”—understood here as both the processes related to its production and distribution, and the practices related to food knowledge, accessibility and consumption—is therefore considered as a major urban issue intertwining with problems related to mobility, social inequalities and the environment (Secchi, 2010, 2013; Calori & Magarini, 2015). The premise on which the different positions in a broad and disciplinarily heterogeneous debate converge is clear: if the current food production system cannot guarantee the future sustainability of urban populations, it is obvious that cities should begin to deal with agriculture, at different scales and at different levels (Cheema et al., 2001; Morgan, 2009). In recent years, the relationship between food and

city has been dealt with across general and global issues. Ultimately, we could say that this question has polarized around three major lines of reflection and research, including different variants.

The first line focuses on food security issues. Powerfully emerged in the international debate since the 2008 global economic crisis, this strand has brought the focus back to the urban problems associated with the increasing social inequalities and poverty in cities (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 2004). The investigations and studies spurred by these issues are rooted in the hypothesis that integrating the food system into the urban processes can contribute in various ways to counteract poverty and food insecurity phenomena (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 1996). Having access to proper and healthy nutrition is not only a way to improve people's lifestyles, but can also offer job opportunities, social emancipation and the establishing or strengthening of collective collaboration and social support networks.

The second strand which the food-city relationship can be traced back to refers to environmental issues and climate change: in this case, the attention focuses on the soil as a resource and the problems linked to desertification processes, fertile land reduction, and land-grabbing phenomena (Fiamingo et al., 2016). Emphasis is generally put on the critical issues connected to the industrialization of the agricultural sector, not least those of landscape simplification and impoverishment. These affect many territories, including Italy, and carry cultural and identity questions with them, together with the more obvious environmental ones (e.g., Baccichet, 2016). Local cultural traditions, in fact, can help preserve and defend the environmental quality and ecological wealth of territories. The studies that investigate this field draw on the hypothesis that rethinking agricultural production cycles, even when they are close to the city, can be a way to safeguard and enhance the agricultural landscape, restore its peculiar traits and make our territories more resilient to climate change (de Zeeuw et al., 2011; ICLEI, 2013).

The third line, closely connected to the previous ones, reinterprets and rethinks cities from an agricultural perspective. This field has to date produced the most stimulated proposals and design themes, starting with the definition of "urban countryside" (Donadieu, 1998) and recovering those approaches in the history of architecture and urbanism which have imagined the rural dimension as an integral part of cities. Among them, let us mention Ebenezer Howard's Garden city (1898), F. L. Wright's Broadacre city (1934-35), and, more recently, Andrea Branzi's Agronica (1993-94) or Aldo Cibic's proposals presented at the 2010 Venice Biennale (Cibic, 2010). In other words, the relationship between food and city in the urban planning domain has brought renewed attention to "city design", including new landscape utopias such as the urban countryside itself, endorsed by the desires and needs of diversified and cross-cultural social groups pushing for a country's return into the city (Donadieu, 2005). The most recent and well-known projects for Le Grand Pari(s) (2007), Agropolis München by Jorge Schröder and Kerstin Hartig (2009), as well as Active Nature by Soa Architects and Agence Babylone (2007), all envisage future cities as places where agricultural areas and built spaces are reassembled into new urban forms, even if they are perhaps too easily pictured in a peaceful and "natural" coexistence (Pellegrini, 2015).

It goes without saying that these thematic fields can help us rethink the relationship between food and city only if taken together. On the other hand, thus distinguished, they are a way to focus on some key issues integrating the "food system" and the "urban system". In addition, the very attention paid by some big cities' administrations (in the global North and South) to these issues has contributed to the achievement of Urban Food Planning, an opportunity to

integrate food-related policies with other urban policies in the sector (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999; Ferrario, 2013; Calori & Magarini, 2015; Dansero & Nicolarea 2016). Only recently, however, the way in which food-related policies and strategies could renew the themes and tools of public space design and, more generally, of open spaces, has been questioned. From this point of view, is it possible for us to put forward another research question: can the “food system” help define new fields for urban design? Some scholars have already pointed out that, since 2005, urban agriculture has progressively shifted from being only a policy subject to being a design subject, too (Viljoenet et al., 2015). There are many instances confirming this trend. To date, for example, the Carrot City website (Internet 1) has collected more than 100 design experiences related to urban agriculture, highlighting the wide variety of proposed solutions: from community initiatives, housing, and rooftops up to the designing of individual “components” that can enrich and diversify open space configurations and uses.

We need to consider the food system as a “device” to rethink collective spaces in ways that are innovative and different from the well-known “urban gardens”. Food can be recognized as an opportunity to rediscover the value of public space in cities and to start positive processes for the reactivation and regeneration of larger urban areas.

## **2 Some research issues: Food as a regeneration instrument**

From this premise, the purpose of this article is to formulate and discuss two hypotheses:

(1) The first hypothesis is that the processes linked to food production and consumption can contribute to the requalification of council housing neighbourhoods and restart a reflection on the transformation of their open and built spaces, in order to enhance their inhabitability. The food system can help reconfigure the relationships that exist between residents and property management boards, as well as social and health services and “third parties” often involved in the management and administration processes of the same districts.

(2) The second issue deals with the possibility that the relationship between council housing neighbourhoods and food-related processes can contribute to enrich the contemporary city public space debate as well. The “food system” can, in fact, have interesting spatial repercussions, and can offer a chance to rethink the forms of public space sharing, as well as its design.

### **2.1 Field definition: Some premises**

In this reflection, references will be made to specific areas of urban peripheries, namely those shaped by the “public city” in the Italian context (Di Biagi, 1986; Di Biagi, 2001). This phrase refers to the urban areas created by the public operator to meet residential needs of individuals who cannot access the private home market. The building interventions that make up the “public city” emerge today in the urban continuum as morphologically and typologically connoted “parts”. Together, they offer a wide and diversified repertoire of urban forms: from organic neighbourhoods (e.g., Borgo San Sergio in Trieste, Falchera in Turin) to large single compounds (e.g., Corviale in Rome, Rozzol Melara in Trieste). These forms translate different ideas of inhabitable space and its relations with the city on the ground, exemplifying different planning seasons and approaches (Di Biagi, 2001; LaboratorioCittàPubblica, 2009). In the variety of these cases, what unites these parts is generally the wide endowment of open and collective spaces, today often marked by a spatially and symbolically “promiscuous” nature: their “public” side is deeply in crisis. Here, as elsewhere, this contributes to turning these blocks—especially in big cities—into difficult contexts where social problems are accompanied

by problems related to the very open space and building degradation. These problems have only fostered different types of stigma and prejudice towards the public city, exacerbating its separation from the city and the exclusion from the city's dynamics.

In recent years, however, studies and research conducted on some Italian cities (including Milan, Rome, Bari, Trieste, Naples, and others) have started to show how these urban parts are not only critical places but also spaces rich in resources, especially social and environmental ones (Laboratorio CittàPubblica, 2009; Infussi, 2011). These surveys have reconsidered public peripheries, seeing them as creative workshops for inserting innovative retraining paths and testing new forms of design (Infussi, 2007). Since then, many investigations have explored the possibility of promoting “research-action” lines in those districts (Cognetti, 2016; Cognetti & Ranzini, 2017), involving not only residents, administrations and public bodies, but also cooperatives, non-profit associations, etc. On aggregate, the coordinated actions of these subjects have favoured not only renewed regeneration processes but also required completely new design tools: for example, guidelines, metaprojects and scenarios (Laboratorio Città Pubblica, 2009; Lambertini, Metta & Olivetti, 2014; De Matteis, 2015).

It is within the limits defined by these investigations that we will try to relate food and neighbourhoods in the public city. More precisely, our focus will be on how the reorganization of food-related processes can contribute to renewing the meanings and values of the open and public spaces in neighbourhoods. First, by considering how the spaces of food and the food-related practices (linked to food production, preparation, consumption, education, etc.) can favour the processes of rooting, affection and care of the inhabitants in relation to the places in which they live. The public value of the food spaces is therefore recognizable, in the first place, in the capacity they have to renew shared forms of use of open spaces in the public city, contributing to their redevelopment. These are forms of sharing that take place mostly in everyday life (Di Biagi, 2013; Basso, Di Biagi, 2016), linked to rituals that, even if they are limited to a restricted sphere of intimacy (Bianchetti, 2015), can nonetheless promote paths of awareness and autonomy in weak and disadvantaged subjects.

This aspect reinforces and strengthens the hypothesis that the public value of food spaces can be recognized also and above all in their social usefulness (Caravaggi & Imbroglini, 2016), where it is precisely through these spaces that conditions can occur for affirming fundamental rights and reducing inequalities and social distance. Finally, it is not to underestimate a more widely held public function of these spaces, that is, the value that they have in affecting the broader sustainable suburb management cycles, bringing benefits that the entire community can enjoy in terms of health, informed use of resources, strengthening of ecological and environmental networks and systems, etc. (Mininni, 2012, 2017).

## **2.2 “Public city” and food safety: Spaces, rights and justice**

Observing public peripheries through the “food” lens could help us bring unexpected potentials of original and innovative projects to the surface. Neighbourhoods can be seen as the areas in which to recombine the city-food relationship while fighting for social justice and urban democracy within them and together with their residents. Food spaces and processes can work as devices to redesign and reinforce relationship networks, even economic ones, both at a large and a small scale. They can reconfigure and reactivate forsaken places. They can also modify people's routines while driving them to an awareness of the use or re-use of their living spaces, ecologically re-adapting them and increasing their resilience.

The relation between food and council housing areas in Italy seems to be in need of thorough exploration. However, clues from a variety of spheres seem to indicate that an attention to food can be a way to activate shared processes of physical, social and urban re-qualification of these urban areas. Small yet significant experiences recorded through surveys in Italian “public city” neighbourhoods (LaboratorioCittàPubblica, 2009; Lambertini, Metta & Olivetti, 2013; Lambertini, Metta & Olivetti, 2014) show us how food can foster human rapprochement, soften diffidence and promote conversation and exchange. Food can become a way of undoing the established mechanisms of isolation and closures, be they internal to a neighbourhood or related to the prejudices about its spaces and inhabitants.

For quite some time, in other contexts, “food security” and “affordable housing” have been two areas where public institutions, associations and dwellers collaborated in synergy towards initiatives aiming at re-qualification of their neighbourhoods. Great Britain, the United States and Canada, with a heavier presence of eating habits problems (with serious consequences on public health and economy), identify in the food concept one of the levers for improvement of living conditions in low-cost dwellings. Some of the good practices put in place in the cities of these three countries, which have been for some time successfully promoting their food policies, show how much potential there is in strengthening the relations between food and the “public city”. Even though these experiences have been conducted in culturally far apart contexts, they nonetheless suggest useful indications to initiate a regeneration process in the suburbia of our cities. In New York and London, as well as in Vancouver and Toronto, research reports, investigations, surveys and guidelines (e.g., The Food Commission, Sustain, 2005; Ostry, 2012; Population Health, 2013; Meisenheimer & Emerson, 2015) have highlighted a close interdependence between food insecurity and council housing neighbourhoods, where people with a low income end up cutting down on food expenses in their monthly budgets. The urban issue that ties food and low-cost dwellings can be reconstructed through the relations existing between security (food and social), justice (social and health) and public health (prevention and reduction of risks in elderly people, children and poor families). Reading these documents can provide us with enough elements to reassemble the terms and suggest, in addition, possible solutions towards shared paths of social and urban re-qualification, starting from the food question.

Food insecurity (Ostry, 2012; Population Health, 2013; Meisenheimer & Emerson, 2015) is here reduced to only two types of factors. One is individual, i.e., insufficient background knowledge and competence in order to adopt correct eating habits. The other is environmental: for example, lack of money, absence of shops selling fresh food in the area (as in the food deserts), physical impossibility of reaching a point of sale due to the lack of public transport, or, more generally, physical barriers that make it impossible for people to travel every day to buy their food. These elements, defining a socially, physically and economically precise disadvantaged condition, are then compared to a more general framework, where the risks of climate change and scarcity of resources (energy, water, etc.) urge us even more to recognize food as a field where we can intervene to increase the sustainability and quality of urban spaces, as well as improve living conditions in cities. The problem can be then described as part of a more complex urban question: “Now, more than ever, we need to grow more food, closer to where we live, that is tasty, wholesome and nutritious, than enhances rather than destroys the environment we depend on, and that satisfies people’s needs for a secure and trusted food supply” (Sustain, 2008:1).

If we accept these premises, accessing wholesome and quality food should be recognized as a right that compels us to put food security and food justice on a par, and consequently, to

consider food as an implement to obtain some forms of social justice. Community-based food initiatives can therefore help reduce exclusion and inequality (The Food Commission, 2005). What appears relevant is how these initiatives, more or less directly, act upon the many spaces in the different neighbourhoods and cities: from the big open spaces to the small ones, from the empty shells of buildings to the roofs and our everyday life vicinities, such as balconies and windowsills. Thus, the interlacing food and physical transformation practices can converge in the bigger and more integrated neighbourhood regeneration processes. Public bodies and institutions, associations, cooperatives and, more importantly, dwellers can participate in these processes involving actions influencing their daily lives at home, and find in these rituals and the other food sharing opportunities the most important success factor to their initiatives.

### **2.3 Community food projects: Spaces and procedures**

Different “Community food projects” (The Food Commission, 2005; Sustain, 2008) promoted in urban neighbourhoods have been structured principally in order to configure inclusive regeneration procedures, open to the whole city. In detail, initiatives have hinged on various actions such as physical space transformation, involvement in the food-supply processes, activities for the spreading of good practices, integration of disadvantaged people and reassessment of scale economies.

Physical space transformation initiatives had a double goal. The first is the re-qualification of the abandoned public spaces within council housing neighbourhoods that were physically and socially degraded. The second is the implementation of different strategies to involve inhabitants in the transformation of these spaces, in order to spark off a process of identification together with an “appropriation” and care of the spaces themselves.

They acted on different scales and aimed to reconfigure spaces as collective meeting or public spaces. They included city farms, intended as places with a strong educational mandate translated into a variety of events, such as volunteers’ welcome celebrations, school trips, etc. The traditional allotments, on the other hand, are small cultivable patches set in urban contexts, which were rented out by the council authorities to residents with the objective of improving the access to fruit and vegetables and satisfying even less common tastes determined by different ethnic origins. Garden plots and edible landscaping required less extensive areas and could be managed by nearby residents both individually and in association (e.g., Figure 1). Finally, there are the smaller and more common ornamental borders, “left-over” edges where it is possible to cultivate edible or ornamental plants. In many cases, the transformation of a neighbourhood’s open spaces became an opportunity to open up its borders and find new (social) relations with the urban context into they are set.



Figure 1: Brookwood Edible Garden, London (source: Internet 2).

As an example, let us take the Brixton Abundance project in London. The vague land surrounding the buildings has been used as a space to plant vegetable gardens for local citizens. The success and the wide interest raised by this initiative have opened the question of the involvement of non-residents, too, and of how to manage and distribute the produce (e.g., Figure 2).



Figure 2: Abundance project: urban agriculture demonstration plot on social housing estate maps the way forward for community food. Brixton, London (source: Internet 3).

On a smaller scale, together with the more popular roof gardens and window boxes, there were other colonization actions of domestic spaces closer to houses. The London Food Up Front initiative has helped the residents of a council housing area cultivate lettuce and other edible plants on their balconies and terraces, as well as on the front steps of the houses. Each family enrolled in the programme received a cultivation box including compost, seeds and a how-to guide, while street volunteers gave support with their expertise and advice on sowing and harvesting (Internet 4).

The Vacant-Land project, active in London since 2007, has transformed 21 sites in the British capital's peripheries. Here the re-use of bin-lining bags, normally employed for the collection of masonry waste, has allowed colonizing empty spaces in the city's suburban areas, transforming them into socialization, playground, cultivation and collective barbecue areas (Internet 5, Internet 6). In sum, these initiatives also appertain to the notion of "accessible

health”: many of the activities involving regular outdoor physical activity can, in fact, improve the health conditions of the residents.



Figure 3a, 3b: Vacant Lot: Construction waste sacks used as containers for vegetable gardens and gardens in the Samuel Lewis Trust Estate district, Amhurst Park Road, Hackney, London (3a). They are modular elements used to make seats, containers for water collection and distribution, huts for tools, platform roofs, basins for ornamental plants and composting, etc. These elements redefine empty interstitial spaces in public housing neighborhoods (3b) (source: Internet 7).

The initiatives for the involvement in the food processes aimed to affect food distribution, access and selling cycles in a way that could favour the people. For example, they intended to constitute new groups, either self-organized or associated with existing circuits, to reduce the commercial brokerage between producers and consumers. This was in order to favour the access of poor and disadvantaged consumers to quality food. These projects included food co-operatives and share-a-car and food delivery schemes, all oriented to process involvement activities like cooperatives to buy wholesale fruit, vegetables and food; shared transports to reach marketplaces; food distribution, including the delivery of vegetable boxes and fresh food with lorries adapted for mobile food service (Internet 8).

Other initiatives were applied for a more equitable and efficient functioning of food production, distribution and access cycles. In this case, the initiatives aimed at disseminating the background knowledge and awareness of food consumption and distribution processes and of their environmental relevance, as well as opening up new job opportunities for unprivileged subjects through actual educational activity. In many cases, these initiatives have created opportunities to recover empty or under-used spaces in council housing buildings that could be then fully accessible also to non-residents and be turned into venues where likewise different distribution (lunch club) and education activities could take place. Such open activities can assume the form of breakfast clubs, cook-and-eat demonstrations and share-a-recipe meetings, as well as training meetings on the waste reduction of low-cost or given-for-free food. Breakfast club is a programme involving the distribution of low-cost breakfasts for school-age children to improve their health, reduce delays, prevent absenteeism and provide a basic, low-cost health care. Cook-and-eat demonstrations are generally led by nutritionists and their aim is to enhance competences and ensure healthy nutrition, that is, actions that can eventually lead to vocational training and occupation. Together with the exchange/sharing of recipes, they can help people share and partake in experiences (Meisenheimer & Emerson, 2015). Other examples of the kind are the community cafés, started by social businesses and managed by charity organizations, where it is sometimes possible to organize food service training courses.

Inclusion strategies have been oriented, on the other hand, to facilitate the inclusion of disadvantaged people (unemployed, immigrants, disabled people, etc.) in the community through the sharing of food production, distribution and consumption experiences. In other cases, their goal was to promote the integration of people of different ethnic origins, food handling being a possible common ground for mutual exchange and even friendship. The Bolton at Home association and the Social Housing Arts Network have started their Growing – Cooking – Sharing project, focussed on social housing. Artist Sarah Butler engaged the inhabitants and new residents (especially those from immigrant backgrounds) of Brightmet, Bolton, in a “getting to know your neighbour” experience through activities like cultivation of vegetables and cooking of traditional dishes belonging to the various national cuisines (e.g., Figure 4a, 4b). An exchange of experiences and contextual knowledge has promoted social closeness and reduced the distance among cultures, even those very distant from each other (Internet 9).



Figure 4a, 4b: In the Growing | Cooking | Sharing project, the exchange of recipes (4a), the cultivation of vegetables (4b) and the preparation of ethnic dishes become a way to encourage the inhabitants of different ethnic groups to get to know each other (source: Internet 9).

The activities for the reassessment of scale economies helped to activate collaboration networks and “economic solidarity”. These networks can become a potential support for innovative business projects based on ethical micro-economies linked to their contexts, the same food production, processing and distribution cycles and other food-related products. Many of the previously analysed documents concerning the relationship between food and council housing neighbourhoods strongly underline the importance of the weaving of relations between public subjects and associations, since this improves their ability to attract funding and start new economies. Additionally, they consider the ethical background of many of these initiatives, which pressed companies to take on increased social responsibilities and offer real opportunities for the regeneration of local economies through new jobs and education (The Food Commission, 2005). Of course, these documents very often also highlight that efficient projects require an integrated approach where different actions converge in order to raise the simultaneous interest of the different actors involved (The Food Commission, 2005).

### 3 Food and suburbia: What spaces?

What can we learn from these experiences and what do they imply? Firstly, these “public city” spaces should be looked at from a new perspective. Seen through the food filter, these spaces reveal new potentials and opportunities for original and innovative projects that can in turn

reshape the places to be shared by the people, and render them potentially eligible as new public spaces for the whole city to enjoy.

The first perspective brings food preparation and consumption, intended as practices building relations among the inhabitants, and between the residents and the environment, close to the many empty spaces characteristic of today's neighbourhoods. Originally destined for public services and facilities, they should have secured the habitability of the new city areas as well as their necessary urbanity: places where social interactions among inhabitants should have taken place. Currently, collective spaces are actually even more of a problem in many neighbourhoods, either because they were never realized or were left unfinished, or because they were run down by the passing of time, the social evolution of the residents or the shifting of their needs and expectations. Pulled down shutters and barred or walled up doors are the signs of the emptiness and neglect following changes of populations and conventions, as well as of the progressive physical and social degradation of such places. In many cases, we talk about ground floors where the proximity services that should have made these neighbourhoods vital formerly existed. Furthermore, there are interior spaces originally destined for a shared use, today the symbol of an inevitable decline. The idea of reusing them is by no means a new one: in many instances, these spaces are already being reused by house assistance services for elderly people who are lonely or sick. In Trieste, for example, the experience of the "Habitat-Microarea programme", started in 1998 through a partnership between Trieste City Council, ASL (the local health authority) and Ater (the local social housing authority), is significant. Among the many services running, a "social concierge" hosted in the neighbourhoods' communal spaces offers help and support to citizens (Internet 10).

Correspondingly, why not rethink these spaces as aggregation places where people invited may rediscover food as a trigger for education and socialization? They could become spaces where people from different classes and ethnic origins can mutually learn to know one another through the cooking and preparation of food, or where children can discover and handle it in full awareness. Why not rethink them as spaces where the elders can give new value to their traditional food culture while passing it down to the younger generations? These closed up and forsaken places can then potentially turn into generators of a new urbanism, diluting the rigid borders between the inside and the outside, the public and the private, the individual and the collective; thus expanding domesticity into the external space.

The second perspective creates a dialogue between food spaces and mediation, in-between neighbourhood spaces. They often have neither a role nor a name, are inactive and neglected, and quite often misappropriated or misused by residents (Di Biagi, 2013; Basso, 2015). However, it is in their informality (also intended as "absence of form") that we can see their potential modification, even if a transient one, able to graft ideas of possible alternative and shared uses. Here we do not mean only the "in-between spaces" made available for virtuous uses by environmental permeability (the most frequent case in point being land destined for vegetable gardens), but also the materially hostile, non-ecological spaces like hard concrete surfaces that could host practices linked to food consumption or communication. These surfaces can turn into a support for playful and creative activities hinging on food and its sharing.

The third, final perspective interprets food spaces as devices for rebuilding the relationship between neighbourhoods and city, as well as between neighbourhoods and large natural areas. Today, agricultural practices can redesign and liven up the torn edges of towns. Urban vegetable gardens, as well as other local traditional forms of cultivation, offer themselves as opportunities to redesign relations of proximity with the natural systems often lying close to town quarters.

Food production spaces would thus earn a chance to become the devices for a “social approximation”, but also for an approximation to a natural dimension, mostly dormant or denied. This could be the cue to reflect on the constitution of territory-wide, ecological-environmental, even production networks: an invitation to imagine the neighbourhoods of a “public city” as “markets” where to rediscover local produce.

An additional perspective, intersecting the previous ones, suggests the possibility of considering food places as fields for conquering (or re-conquering) “spaces of rights”, in both the “public city” areas and elsewhere. We are referring to a right not only to dwell in a place but a more general right to the city (and to citizenship), here intended as the possibility of sharing spaces and resources, the access to their fair use and the ability to act upon them with responsible use, care and management.

#### **4 By way of conclusion: A reflection on design for a new idea of public space**

Observing council housing neighbourhoods and their spaces through the “food lens” is also an opportunity to articulate another, more general reflection on the form and nature of public spaces in contemporary cities. The examples and hypotheses put forward so far agree in acknowledging a “public” character to the spaces where practices and processes connected with food (production, processing, education, consumption, sale, etc.) take place, here interpreted as being potential “accessibility devices”. Thinking about the public space in these terms means to appreciate its meaning and value as a place offering opportunities to share:

- Practices (collective or individual), here intended as practical ways for the recovery, transformation and maintenance of different inhabitable places: from residential threshold spaces to peripheral spaces located between neighbourhoods and urban countryside;
- Forms of knowledge about food and food-related processes. “Food system” education can offer a chance to obtain individual or collective emancipation, which can develop into the affirmation or widening of the rule of law, starting from the right to a healthy and balanced diet, and expanding into the rights to dwell, to work, etc.;
- Resources, that is, the creation of an opportunity of managing and using landscape, environmental, cultural and food resources for various ends linked to, for example, the economy, free time, individual subsistence, etc.;
- Construction of (social and economic) innovation paths, able to positively affect new economies: for example, through the setting up of short economic chains configuring peripheral neighbourhoods and their related spaces as nodes in “zero-km” food production and sale networks, involving citizens, non-profit organizations, social cooperatives and public and private subjects.

However, how can these varieties of public space interpreted in terms of “accessibility devices” interface with innovative design forms? Our first move may be to try to outline some potential design research topics in the form of provisional conclusions.

##### **4.1 Three possible design research fields**

A cross-reading of reference cases, experiences and literature requires the translation of the relationship between food and public city spaces into a first, provisional definition of some design fields (Infussi, 2009).

A first design field can be identified considering food spaces as an opportunity for constructing a *complex urban welfare infrastructure* (Calori & Magarini, 2015; Dansero & Nicolarea, 2016), where policies and projects focussed on the “food system” are mixed in a new perspective of social sustainability. As we have seen, food can become in effect a device to start or strengthen active, rather than passive, welfare networks in marginal areas often burdened by problems affecting spaces and citizens, the latter often belonging to weak social categories (elderly, unemployed, occasional workers, families on the poverty threshold, etc.). A likely solution can be a “proximity welfare”, where inhabitants play an active role in the enhancement of their living and environmental conditions, and where they directly concur in the definition of mutual support networks. The welfare infrastructure here referred to can find its concrete translation in a set of different spaces able to shape systems that can be read on different scales. In the planning of these systems, the open spaces of council housing neighbourhoods can carry out an important and strategic role exactly because of their accessibility potential. Concretely, such systems can be designed as:

- open spaces networks and sustainable transport networks, linking the neighbourhoods to the city, its surroundings, centricities of interest, etc.,
- productive agricultural spaces networks ranging from urban vegetable gardens to wider urban agricultural systems,
- networks, spaces and devices for a sustainable use of resources (e.g., collection and recycling of water, recycling of waste, etc.),
- “microcentres” networks, such as markets, community cafés, etc., where people can meet and share their food-related experiences.

A second design field regards the relations between open and built spaces and considers food spaces as an opportunity to reconfigure the composition schemes of “public city” areas. Among other problems, many neighbourhoods face the buildings’ indifference to the surrounding environment. The missing relationship with their contexts can be noticed in their shells, flat and lacking definitions not only of orientation but also of configuration and possible uses of the nearby open spaces. This design theme connects to a question that Kevin Lynch had already raised in his last reflection on the environmental problems posed by the rears of buildings (Lynch, 1991). Even before Lynch, the German architect Leberecht Migge (1881-1935), a landscape architect ahead of his time, considered the vegetable garden as a planning device fit for articulating the space outside the house in space sequences, comprising threshold and living spaces that extended the criteria of functionality and habitability of the house to the outside (Haney, 2010). He experimented upon this principle in his collaboration with Ernst May on the construction of the “new Frankfurt”, building public housing neighbourhoods (e.g., in the settlements Praunheim and Romerstadt, Nidda Valley).

The legacy of this thought can now be revitalized thanks to the spreading of practices of appropriation, use and care of the neighbourhoods’ residential areas proximity spaces. These spaces have been undergoing enhancement and redesign in the wake of numerous projects based on the active participation of residents (Cognetti & Conti, 2012; Lambertini, Metta & Olivetti, 2013; Metta & Olivetti, 2016). The question of the rears of buildings opens up to not-so-trivial design issues that can shake up the composition principles of these areas and even the relations between the internal, intimate and private spaces of lodgings with the open spaces, promoting the care and activation of places that otherwise risk to remain vague, penalized by their indefinite design. The American artist Fritz Haeg, drawing upon Migge’s and Lynch’s lessons, has shown how his edible gardens could become a powerful device to subvert the anonymous and repetitive order of the American grid (Haeg, 2008). Other projects (Paans & Pasel, 2014), focusing instead more on the re-qualification of council housing neighbourhoods,

suggested that the re-designing of rears could contribute to improved habitability and attractiveness of common spaces if one adequately deals with their compositional items: fences, access systems, vegetation borders forming permeable filters between different settings, etc.

The relation between built and open spaces can also be assessed from a design point of view by considering building shells and ground floors as “mediation spaces” where more or less expanded forms of sharing can take place. For instance, corridors and communal galleries can be transformed into vertical gardens where aromatic herbs can be cultivated. Empty rooms at the ground level can be converted into communal kitchens or community cafés, and so on. Collectively used minimal spaces are able to significantly improve the everyday, ordinary experience of living, amending in the process the anxiety generated by the inevitable hostility of the transition zones that lead from a private dimension to the vagueness and anonymity of external areas.

Finally, a third design theme highlights the power that small productive spaces in neighbourhoods have in giving birth to new ecological systems, even at larger scales, and in exploring contextually new ecological declinations of open spaces. Thanks also to currents such as landscape urbanism and ecological urbanism, today we are urged to look at open spaces in different ways. Concepts borrowed from botany and ecology such as corridor, margin, threshold, and gradient (Dramstad, Olson & Forman, 1996), are currently useful descriptive categories to try to reinterpret the multiplicity of spaces in the contemporary city and to restore the wealth and the potential of those present in the public city. At the same time, these concepts offer opportunities to work on design forms fit for thinking (food) city spaces as places of new urban ecologies.

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## Sharing responsibilities to regenerate publicness and cultural values of marginalized landscapes: Case of Alta Irpinia, Italy

### Abstract

The paper deals with the issue of non-core areas in Italy by investigating the role that publicness and socio-cultural values of landscape can play in triggering development process in these contexts. Local communities have historically been the main producers of the cultural landscape. Nowadays, the importance of involving communities and sharing responsibilities together with policy makers and stakeholders is increasingly recognized. Their involvement is particularly valuable for processes that aim at safeguarding publicness and cultural values of places as well as for achieving social needs, carrying out economic activities, and promoting cultural assets. This research looks at Italian non-core areas in order to investigate the role of the “landscape community” in collaborative regeneration strategies. The aim is to highlight the power of landscape as a catalyst of civic activation and as the place in which to improve social practices for local development, competitiveness and attractiveness by using territorial capital and by strengthening territorial cohesion. For this purpose, Alta Irpinia, in Southern Italy, has been selected for empirical research. Preliminary evidence indicates the presence of bottom-up initiatives for reusing the historical Avellino-Rocchetta Sant’Antonio railway to promote the cultural landscape of the area and contrasting its marginalization. The main output of the ongoing research activity is the definition of the “action arena” to rearrange fragmented and conflicting perspectives and to start a collaborative process for local development in which the landscape could be recognized as driver.

**Keywords:** non-core areas, landscape, community, bottom-up approach, action research

### 1 Introduction

Regeneration strategies of non-core areas constitute a relevant challenge to mitigate territorial inequalities that exist in many national contexts. Progressively deprived of basic services, these areas are often prone to abandonment, decay, emptiness and depopulation: a marginalization process that increases the gap between core and non-core areas (Barca, 2009). In Italy, these areas amount to about 60% of the national territory, and to about 25% of its population. They are often characterized by the presence of un(der)used built environment, infrastructural heritage, environmental, historical, cultural and socio-economic resources, “[...] much untapped natural and human capital, seen as strategic for the recovery and growth of Italy’s economic system” (UVAL, 2014: 3), as highlighted in the National Strategy for Inner Areas. These characteristics pose a question of high social relevance, namely which places and resources must be mobilized to enhance territorial capital and social relationships and especially to strengthen social cohesion, which are the main goals of the National Strategy (Barca, 2016). In these contexts, social relationships, conviviality and leisure take place not only in the small villages but also in the open spaces of surrounding landscapes. For this reason, it is necessary to widen the field of investigation, including parks, natural reserves, rural pathways networks, and eco-museum systems to recognize their publicness and socio-cultural values. These open

spaces need to be built taking into account public's needs to reconnect with the natural environment, to provide places for recreation, to give an equal public access and to provide places where diverse population can meet and interact (Németh & Schmidt, 2011).

Against this background, authors explore whether the landscape in marginalized areas can be intended as place of publicness, as place of communities, as place of memory and collective identity but also as place for well-being, leisure, social interaction, and conviviality. In this perspective, the starting point is to share knowledge of the "territorial capital" (Camagni et al., 2009), involving all the local key actors in recognizing landscape resources, values and opportunities in terms of local development in order to strengthen or build "landscape community" (*Ita. Comunità di paesaggio*) (Carta di Siena, 2014). For this purpose, the research questions are: What role can the local community play in sharing responsibility for reversing marginalization processes in non-core areas? Can the landscape be the catalyst of social practices to activate new cultural, social, economic dynamics for a regeneration process of these areas?

Starting from these questions, the research deals with regeneration strategies in Italian non-core areas based on a collaborative approach that considers landscape as a common good: a socio-economic, cultural and healthy environment (Makhzoumi et al., 2011; Settis, 2013) that catalyses civic activation (Magnaghi, 2006; Poli, 2015). Specifically, the paper reports on the first steps of the ongoing research for building an action arena as support for a collaborative, co-design process through Action Research (AR). The aim is to improve the interpretation and representation of cultural landscape by taking into account "the value attached by each heritage community to the cultural heritage with which it identifies" (Council of Europe, 2005, article 12).

The selected case study is Alta Irpinia in Campania Region (Southern Italy). In the last years, the area was characterized by bottom-up initiatives and civic activism, which focused on the landscape as key factor for contrasting the marginalization process (Oppido et al., 2017). The historical Avellino-Rocchetta Sant'Antonio railway, disused since 2010, crosses the exceptional landscape of this area. Evidence from the case highlighted a wide network of civic activism, enthusiastic for enhancing the historical railway as a driver to revive the cultural heritage of the area. This activism preceded and urged the subsequent institutional initiatives for the reuse of the railway (Oppido et al., 2017). Considering both the characteristics of the case study and the aims of the research, AR has been selected to engage with local actors and communities; share knowledge, problems and aims with them; and involve them in an interactive, collaborative and learning-based process to reverse the marginalization of the area.

## **2 Collaborative processes for landscape**

In the European context, a cultural change has been registered in the ways the landscape issues are being dealt with. This change is based on the recognition that landscape "has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields", that it represents "a key element of individual and social well-being and that its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone" (States of the Council of Europe, 2000: 1). This contemporary approach regards the landscape as a cultural and socio-economic construction that is strongly related to society, thus overcoming an aesthetic approach and linking territorial heritage, community and local identity.

The scientific and cultural debate on landscape issues draws on approaches and experts from different disciplines – such as architects and planners, geographers, sociologists, economists, anthropologists, landscape ecologists – and highlights many studies focused on functions and values of landscape, investigating the contribution of landscape to cultural identity and diversity, and to ecological system (Stephenson, 2007, 2008). In the European Landscape Convention, landscape is understood as the result of the relationships that the inhabitants established with the territory along centuries, pointing out that “culture and identity are therefore not just about social relationships, but are also profoundly spatial. Inappropriate landscape development can change or obliterate locally distinctive characteristics and cultural meanings, creating a break between communities and their past” (Antrop, 2005: 22). This current debate also points to the social demand for landscape, both by insiders and outsiders: different groups can recognize different tangible and intangible values and ask for different uses (Selman, 2006).

The emphasis on the landscape as a primary source of territorial identification and quality of life, resulting from the relationships that people established with their territory, highlights the role of local communities that historically produced it and which today may constitute the key actors for its maintenance, conservation, and enhancement (Bonesio, 2007; Magnaghi, 2010a; Becattini, 2015). The role of community is also emphasized by the Explanatory Report of the European Landscape Convention (Internet 9), which regards the landscape as a matter that affects all citizens and which must be dealt with in a democratic way. This means that citizens, together with policy makers and stakeholders, must share responsibilities about decisions on conservation/transformation issues, not only in order to safeguard the quality and the identity of places but also to achieve social needs, carry out economic activities, and promote cultural assets (Carta di Siena, 2014). The issue of public participation is both a goal and a challenge highlighted by the European Landscape Convention and its implementation in practices bring up several critical points that need to be addressed (Jones & Stenseke, 2011).

At European scale, networks have been founded for promoting cooperation among sectoral subjects aimed at implementing the Landscape Convention, such as the European network of universities (UNISCAPE), the European network of local and regional Authorities (RECEP-ENELC) and the European network of civil society organizations (CIVILSCAPE). Nevertheless, in a local perspective, the cooperation should be applied in a collaborative process among key local actors and researchers aimed at sharing local and expert knowledge, recognizing resources and values and planning actions for landscape management and sustainable development (Attardi et al., 2014; Clemente et al., 2015; Cerreta & Daldanise, 2017). Therefore, the local community is fundamental to building consciousness of the place, to identifying and assessing its tangible and intangible resources (Dematteis & Governa, 2005; Magnaghi, 2010a; Esposito De Vita et al., 2016), thus considering not only physical elements but also collective memories, meanings, and identities (Cerreta et al., 2014).

Local communities can be involved with interviews, questionnaires, personal stories, or participative mapping in order to turn shared values into a decision-making process and thus integrate local knowledge with the expertise of researchers (Antrop & Van Eetvelde, 2017; Oppido et al., 2019). This place-based approach (Pugalis & Bentley, 2014) is based on improvement of local partnerships, on the involvement and the empowerment of local community in decision processes for co-planning, co-designing and co-evaluating of the landscape. Besides, this approach is consistent with the National Strategy for Inner Areas in Italy, which is aimed at increasing development, competitiveness and attractiveness by using territorial capital and by strengthening territorial cohesion (Camagni et al., 2009; Atkinson,

2013; Camagni & Capello, 2013). Territorial capital is here understood as consisting of local resources of an area, thus including communities and local know-how.

For this purpose, the main challenge is the construction of a widespread collaborative arena among institutions, experts, stakeholders, local communities and key actors for sharing knowledge and responsibilities in order to contrast marginalization process, starting from local heritage and specifically, from multidimensional values recognized in the landscape (Innes & Booher, 2002; Bailey, 2010; Bee & Pachi, 2014; Horizon 2020 Expert Group on Cultural Heritage, 2015; Monno & Khakee, 2016; Ferilli et al., 2016; Sager, 2016).

### **3 Research design**

#### **3.1 The non-core area of Alta Irpinia: Issues and opportunities**

Authors have selected the Alta Irpinia non-core area and have focused on the *Avellino-Rocchetta Sant'Antonio* historical railway and on initiatives around it. The main goal is to study the proactive role already played by local communities (Oppido et al., 2017), and also to set out the potentialities these communities could have in recognizing and promoting the non-core area landscape as driver for territorial regeneration. The case is characterized by:

- The excellence of the landscape distinguished by agricultural landscape, industrial landscape, protected natural landscape, and cultural and historical landscape;
- The historical railway linking Campania, Basilicata and Apulia regions;
- The length of this railroad (119 of 380 km of the unused railway in this region) and its engineering and architectural value;
- Civic activism initiatives against the closure of the railway;
- The introduction of the railway into formal protocols and regulations.

Additionally, Alta Irpinia has been selected as pilot area by the Italian Territorial Cohesion Agency among four non-core areas of Campania Region to test the Regional Strategy for Inner Areas (Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale, 2016). This region of southern Italy, located between the Apennine Mountains and the Tyrrhenian Sea, is characterized by heterogeneous morphology, with relevant natural and cultural heritage, including UNESCO World Heritage Sites like Amalfi Coast, Naples historical centre, and Herculaneum and Pompeii archaeological sites. In this representative territory, Alta Irpinia is characterized by historical, cultural and natural resources, but not adequately appreciated. This area, bordering on other two non-core areas of Basilicata and Apulia regions, is part of the Avellino Province administratively divided in Alta Irpinia non-core area and Area Vasta (Figure 1). This latter is aimed at identifying common requirements for a homogeneous development of the 38 member municipalities (Furno, 2015; Internet 1).

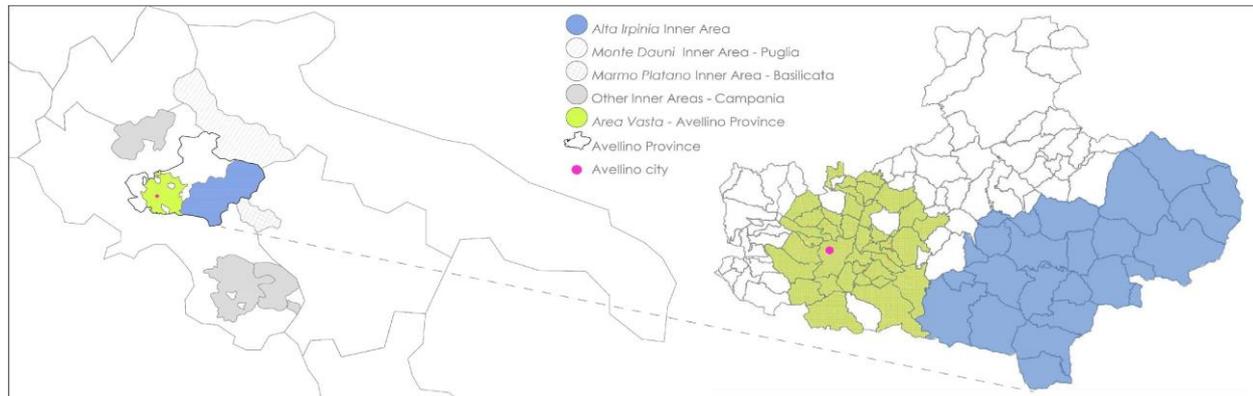


Figure 1: Territorial framework, Avellino Province and closest non-core areas (illustration: Serena Micheletti, source: Internet 1).

The main reason for strong criticisms of Alta Irpinia has been its fragmented and conflicting socio-political context due to the presence of 25 different municipalities that make disjointed decisions for local development. Conversely, the Regional planning identifies two homogeneous systems, one characterized by rural manufacturing sector (17 municipalities), and the other one by natural resources (8 municipalities).

In this wide territory of 1,118 km<sup>2</sup> there are heterogeneous orographic configurations (mountains, valleys, caves, lakes, river-heads and rivers) that have determined different soil uses. These latter have generated several typologies of landscape such as agricultural landscape, including several Protected Designation of Origin products (wine, hazelnuts, chestnuts, olive oil, “Annurca” apple and wheat) (Internet 2), industrial landscape (wood, tanning, wind), protected natural landscape (sites of community importance, special protection areas, natural reserves and ecological networks and corridors), and cultural and historical landscape (Figure 2).



Figure 2: (a) Historical centre of Calitri (photo: Sabino Battista); (b) Conza Lake seen from the train (photo: Stefania Ragozino).

Despite the richness of this heritage, data show the on-going marginalization process of the area threatening the landscape heritage: from 2000 to 2011, the population decreased by 5.8%, exceeding both the regional (1.4%) and the national (2.3%) average in non-core areas. In 2011, 23.7% of the population was over 65 years old, exceeding the regional and national average for non-core areas (Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale, 2016; SNAI & ISFORT, 2016). In

addition, in the last years there was increased soil consumption (11% of regional territory in 2016, exceeding the national rate of 7.6%) (ISPRA, 2017; Internet 3).

### 3.2 The Avellino-Rocchetta Sant’Antonio railway as strategic resource for Alta Irpinia

Among the factors affecting the marginalization of Alta Irpinia non-core area, the ineffectiveness of the accessibility system is one of the main ones. Specifically, the inadequacy of road network and infrastructural system has been increasing in the last years. The situation was worsened by the suspension of the Avellino-Rocchetta Sant’Antonio railway in 2010. The role of this railway was double: not only it linked the city of Avellino with the non-core areas within the province, but it was also a strategical infrastructure that connected three neighbours regions – Campania, Basilicata and Apulia – from west to east of southern Italy.

The Avellino-Rocchetta Sant’Antonio railway was inaugurated in 1895 and it is 119 km long. Due to political and orographic reasons, it is characterized by an irregular track (Maggi, 2008; Pane, 2008); it is a non-electrified single-track network with two terminals, connected to the main hubs of urban poles, and 31 stations almost all replaced by prefabricated buildings after the 1980 earthquake (Internet 4). A complex engineering infrastructure was required to overcome both variable altitude – from 217 meters of the Rocchetta Sant’Antonio to 672 meters of Nusco – and to overpass the Sabato, Calore and Ofanto rivers, as highlighted in the Figure 3 (Società Italiana per le Strade Ferrate del Mediterraneo, 1898; Internet 5).

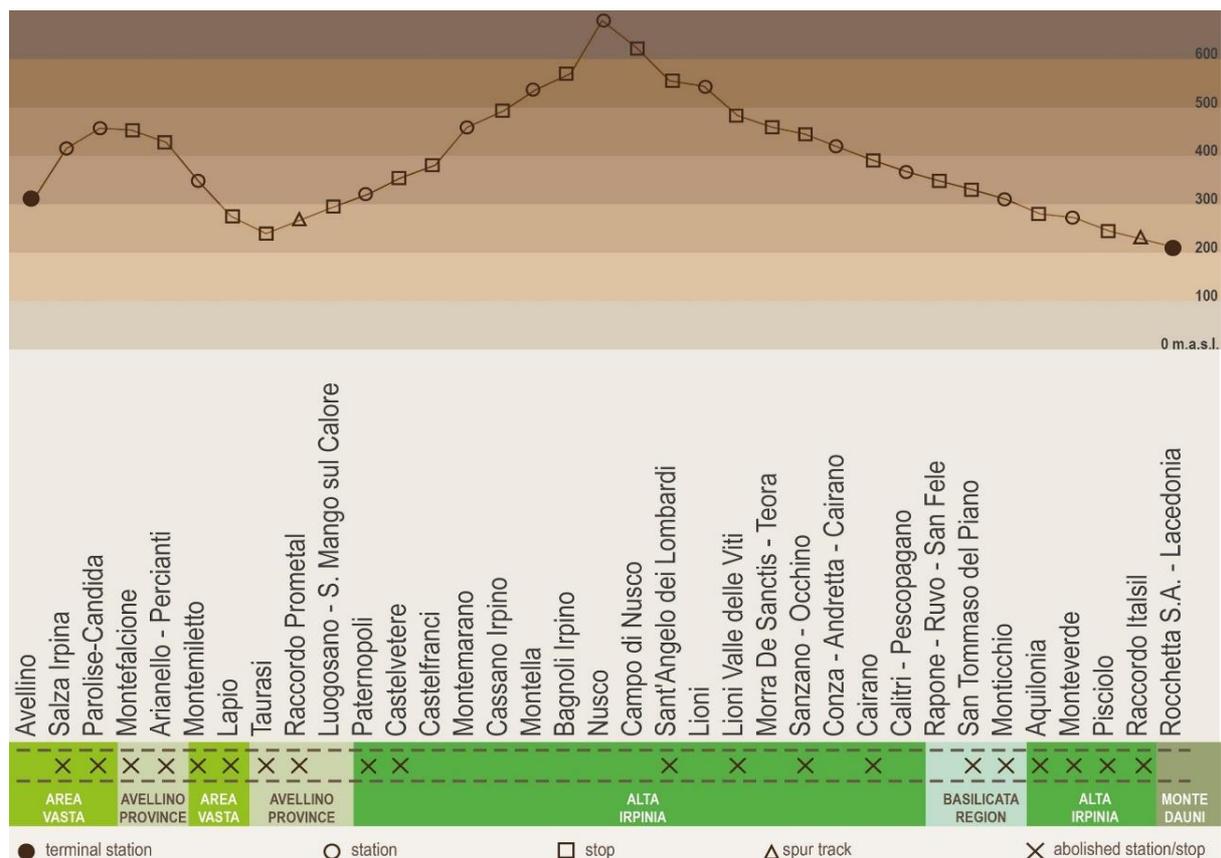


Figure 3: Stations and altitude (illustration: Serena Micheletti).



Figure 4: (a) Viaduct on the Sabato River (source: Internet 6); (b) Principe bridge (photo: Sabino Battista).

Among the other artworks belonging to industrial archaeology, 58 bridges and viaducts in steel or masonry are included in the infrastructure, such as the curvilinear viaduct on the Sabato River, with significant landscape value, and the Principe Bridge on the Calore River, renowned for its technological and dimensional features (Figure 4).

Since year 2000, the use of the railway declined, due to the considerable distance between stations and built-up areas, the low integration of railway system with mobility system, the incorrect planning of route schedules, the lengthy transit times for freight and passenger trains. Nevertheless, the local communities have protested against the definitive closure of the railway and have thus obtained its temporary suspension starting from 2010. Specifically, activists linked to the Avellino-Rocchetta Sant'Antonio railway became more consolidated during 2009, when the most active association, called *In\_Loco\_Motivi*, was founded by a group of small associations (Amici della Terra Irpina, Irpinia Turismo, RossoFisso, Irpinando), organizations, citizens and a labour union observatory. In order to keep a spotlight on this historic railway, they organized several activities (Internet 6). Among the discussed reuse options, they strongly opposed the possibility to turn it into a greenway (which would mean eliminating the railway) and preferred its tourism reuse. During 2009-2010, they organized several holiday packages to discover the territory and its resources through the historical railway. The initiative was named *Irpinia Landscape Train* (Ita. *Treno Irpino del Paesaggio*) and covered two Sunday train trips per month with excursions, lunch, cultural entertainment and guided tours. These trips attracted 2,051 visitors during 27 excursions (76 visitors per trip). Of these, three were organized for educational purposes (63 students per trip). The association rented an historical train, bought the tickets from the National Railway Agency (Ita. *Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane*), and designed a holiday package for visiting the landscape of Irpinia. Every visitor paid 15-35 Euros per package, including the trip in one or more of the 17 small villages crossed by the rail and some of more than 30 monuments of the area (*In\_Loco\_Motivi* archive). Due to the suspension of the railway line, the initiative was halted on December 13, 2010. In the last years, civic activism has preceded institutional actions: in fact, not until 2016 has this railway been included in formal protocols.

### 3.3 Action Research: A collaborative method for marginalized contexts

The challenging reuse of the Avellino-Rocchetta Sant'Antonio railway is an opportunity for the authors to reflect on the role of the community in regenerating publicness and cultural values of marginalized landscapes. They have selected this railway and the community around it in order to be part of the change by building new useful relationships through creating a stronger

network for the locals to nourish social practices aimed at strengthening the sense of belonging and at sharing responsibilities for local development. Action Research (Bradbury-Huang, 2010; Reason & Bradbury, 2001) is “a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001: 1). This method seeks to rearrange fragmented or conflicting perspectives (Kaneklin et al., 2010) and starts change from the bottom up by creating a reflecting and proactive community, which includes public and private stakeholders, associations, citizens, and researchers. The innovative element of the AR consists in the deliberate, mutual influence between research and action and context. The core of the practice could be summarized as trying to turn “a house into a home”, whereby the conjunct work of local actors and researchers is brought forward within an organization or enterprise or, as in our case, within a consolidated group of people involved in a territorial issue (Kaneklin et al., 2010). Importantly, the AR is specifically used for working with marginalized communities living in unequal and vulnerable conditions. It has been argued that improving self-organization and collective learning is one of the best ways to obtain possible forms of emancipation, understood as ways to achieve social equity (Luhmann & Febbrajo, 1990; Maturana & Varela, 1991; Saija, 2017). Additionally, in contexts in which physical vulnerability, social marginalization and institutional gridlock challenge the quality and the sustainability of social relations, this method reinforces linkages and strategies through reciprocal collaboration between researchers and local actors.

In order to apply the method, literature and practice suggest three main phases of work: start-up, continuation, and results. For this research, these established steps have been extended to include peculiarities of the reuse case of historic railway of Avellino-Rocchetta Sant’Antonio. The amended phases are: action research questions (1); inside out (2); arena (3); action (4); co-evaluation (5). Each is characterized by different stages of work and tools (Figure 5):

- Action research questions: The first phase is devoted to the construction or consolidation of the research questions. AR allows both questions previously formulated by researchers to be shared with the community and questions to be formulated together with the community. In this phase, the researcher has the responsibility to identify the demands of the community or to recognize unexpressed desiderata. Possible tools include focus groups, interviews, questionnaires and participation in meetings through which latent or already recognized issues may be identified and defined.

- Inside out: During the second phase, issues that have been previously recognized are further specified through listening and interaction campaigns, during which researchers organize and/or participate in roundtables, focus groups and workshops with local actors and experts in order to discuss priorities, to overcome conflicts and to program the next steps. Researchers improve their knowledge of the territory through site visits promoted by the local associations. One of the tasks is to further stimulate the debate about the territorial values through sharing visual devices to illustrate the territory, highlight conflictual or positive dynamics and possible future scenarios. One of the selected tools is the community map.

- Arena: In this fundamental phase, general and specific objectives, including strategies, actions, and responsibilities are defined. Conflicts and overlapping interests usually emerge in this phase. The role of the researcher is to facilitate the communication and the interaction among the different actors. A permanent territorial laboratory is built, as a physical and symbolic place dedicated to the process of change. The goal of the laboratory is to create

thematic working groups. Tools include roundtables, assemblies, focus groups, consultations, and simulations of scenarios.

– Action: Actors develop and promote strategies of change through thematic meetings, direct actions, and alternative initiatives of reuse of the territory. Community maps are the tool of choice for stimulating the community to express itself in a proactive way.

– Co-evaluation: in this phase, researchers and the community develop an assessment plan. It is structured in two stages: one of co-evaluation (Panaro, 2015) of the process and its results, and one of evaluation led by the researchers about validity of the research. The latter stage also seeks to identify takeaways for practice and research reports. At the same time, this reflection may also open up new questions for further research.

As highlighted in figure 5, this five-phase process is characterized by an iterative structure that provides continuous feedbacks from the field and coming back to previous phases of work in order to improve, enrich and frame them on the basis of the acquired information.

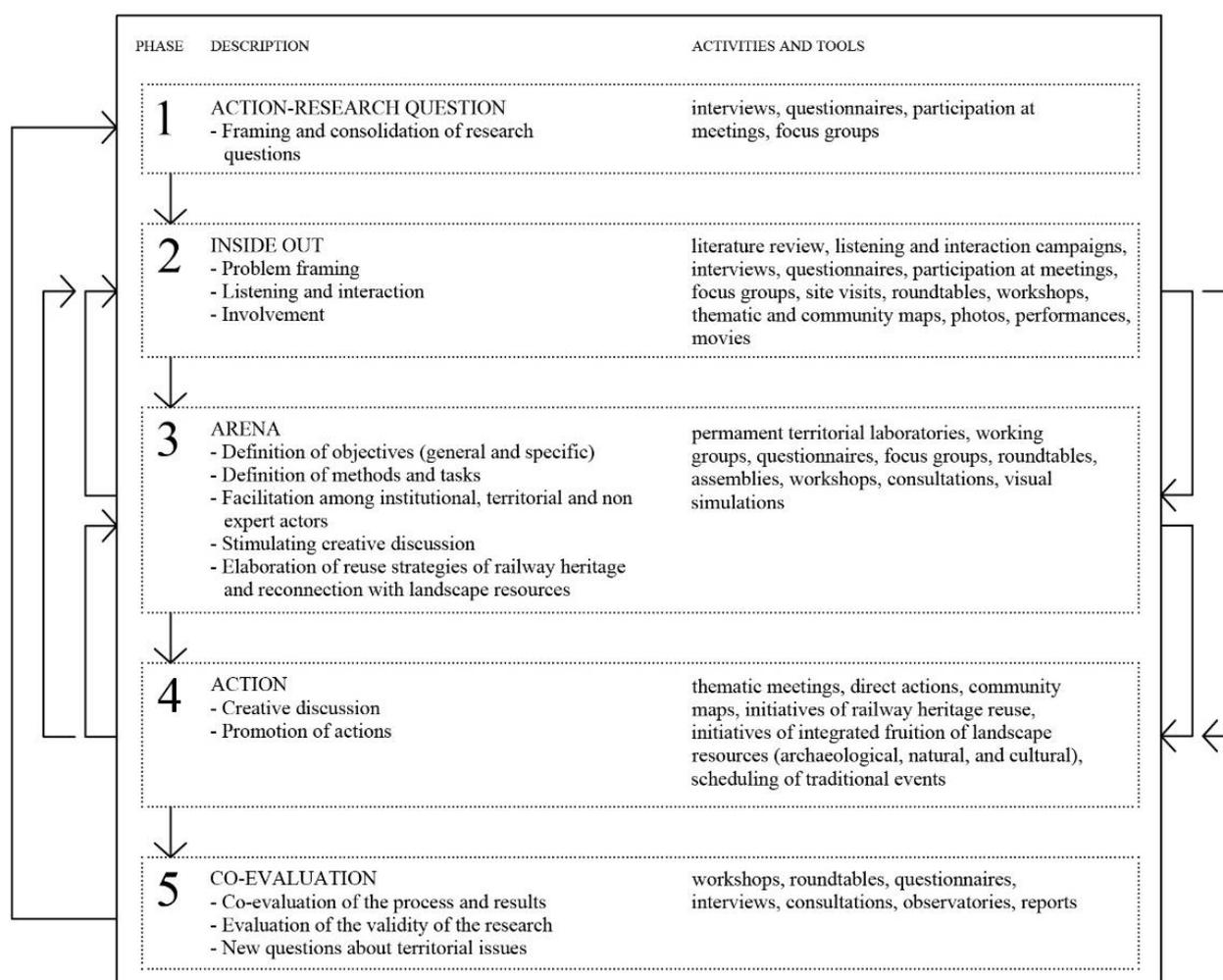


Figure 5: Methodology frame (illustration: Stefania Ragozino).

#### 4 Action research on the marginalization of Alta Irpinia

This research started in January 2017. In May 2018 the authors implemented the first two phases and are now developing the third one. In the first phase, authors consolidated the pre-

existing research questions and defined one question to be put to the community of Alta Irpinia. The first two are “What role can the local community play in sharing responsibility for reversing marginalization processes in non-core areas, starting from the reuse of the historical railway?” and “Can the landscape be the catalyst of social practices to activate new cultural, social, economic dynamics for a regeneration process of these areas?”.

These two research questions are useful to analyse facts and perceptions, implement theory about community-based and bottom-up initiatives in reversing marginalization processes, and to identify the potential role of the landscape in social activation. The question addressed to the community of Alta Irpinia is: “How can we reuse the historical railway in order to enhance or reinforce its publicness and socio-cultural value for the whole territory of Alta Irpinia?” This bundle of questions has led different phases of AR.

Having understood the pivotal role of the *In\_Loco\_Motivi* association and its potential in organizing the reuse of the railway (Oppido et al., 2017), the authors first got in contact with the association. During the first meetings, the research group appreciated the heterogeneity of local representatives and the association’s proactive role within the reuse process. Researchers were welcomed and included in organizational meetings (open to outsiders) in order to discuss the objectives of the AR. Together they examined the research questions, and they specifically focused on the publicness and socio-cultural value of the historical infrastructure and its potentials as a driver for local development. Local actors were interested in these contents and in finding new ways to bring launch the process. They also agreed on the proposed research questions and signalled the need to sustain their bottom-up initiatives. In order to do so, they introduced researchers to other important actors in the process: representatives of regional and local governments, scholars who had done previous research on the railway, professionals, school headmasters and local associations.

In the inside out phase, the authors deepened their analysis (Oppido et al., 2017) by conducting new site visits, consulting literature on the socio-economic history of the area, socio-demographic data and reports, planning documents, scientific dissertations, promotional brochures, official website, and reports of initiatives produced by institutional bodies and non-institutional actors (Maggi, 2008; Pane, 2008; Gargiulo, 2009; Cerreta et al., 2012; SNAI & ISFORT, 2016). They collected and systematized this material into technical and thematic maps supported by GIS, in order to analyse environmental, productive, cultural and socio-economic layers of the relevant territory and worked as a “neutral” starting point to open the debate and stimulate participants to draw their own maps. Community maps (Magnaghi, 2010b) were used to help participants represent their territory, landscapes, knowledge and traditions. Community maps can be arranged as tools to nourish a process of collective and personal self-representation to restore the sense of place by enabling the community to describe its territory as it perceives it. For these reasons, these maps contribute to guide researchers in the process of decoding of what is perceived as valuable. In this phase, researchers took part in local meetings and carried out interviews, selecting actors in order to cover the different categories and roles played by public and private stakeholders within initiatives concerning the railway. They contacted the national supervisor of the National Strategy for Inner Areas, executives of FS Foundation, Region of Campania, Superintendence of Avellino, Municipality of Avellino, Touring Club, Alliance for Slow Mobility (A.Mo.Do.), as well as local associations, headmasters, and professionals (architects, engineers, geologists, estimators). They informed the participants about the purposes of the research and sought to meet stakeholders, in order to identify roles and interests and to collect information about other actors involved in related initiatives.

Since May 2017, researchers enlarged the actor network by including institutional subjects. The meeting held in Calitri was the first institutional event to which researchers were invited as experts. This was the first occasion to hear local politicians speak about the obstacles and projects for the development of the area. In July, the researchers were invited to participate in an expert task-force whose goal was to prepare a “Study Day” about the Avellino-Rocchetta Sant’Antonio Railway in November 2017. Researchers were also invited to collaborate in the design of the Masterplan for the sustainable local development in the area of the *Avellino-Rocchetta Sant’Antonio* railway. Specifically, they were asked to give methodological support for the construction of the Masterplan. In August 2017 the research group took part both in the official opening and in the first trip on the historical train from Lioni to Rocchetta Sant’Antonio and back, held at the fifth edition of the “Sponz Fest”. This festival is a rich, one-week programme of music, dancing and theatre events, performances, readings, meetings, movie and walking events, which in 2017 attracted 35,000 people. Through participation researchers were allowed to observe the tourism fluxes and the local civic engagement attracted by this event and to appreciate the potentialities of railway reuse in terms of cultural promotion of the Alta Irpinia, creation of new linkages between isolated villages, landscape and core-areas, and construction of a tourist destination, which can determine a new demand of accommodation services and facilities. Central and local governments and private bodies participated in the opening event, including representatives of Italian Parliament, FS Foundation, Campania Region and mayors of municipalities that use the railway. Researchers met the CEO and a member of the FS Foundation and initiated contact with this private body in order to frame the community-based reuse proposal within the FS Foundation strategy.

In the Arena phase the Municipality of Avellino invited the researchers to work as experts in several technical meetings with the Superintendence and *In\_Loco\_Motivi* members. The goal of these meetings was the definition of a draft Masterplan to be presented at the Study Day in November 2017. Anticipating new funds from the Campania Region and aiming at a collaborative planning, the Municipality of Avellino repeatedly met with mayors of municipalities crossed by the railway to collect proposals and desiderata about possible scheduling of cultural events and initiatives for recovery and reuse of local cultural heritage. Learning from several unsuccessful attempts at involving the local mayors, the Municipality of Avellino sought to lure them by leaving more room for their own ideas and projects for the reuse of the railway. In these contexts, researchers observed political and social dynamics among local actors, listened to different desiderata and proposals, and presented successful examples of already developed practices of railway reuse by focusing on applicable methods and tools, such as focus groups, territorial laboratories, cultural mapping and locative media. In this phase, during May 2018, the entire railway was renewed and launched with an official two-day trip in which the researchers participated and where they observed the local communities affection and the real potentialities of the whole infrastructural system enhancement. Conversely, researchers reported the lack of necessary services along the track in terms of hospitality and narration of the territory. On the other hand, only some subjects took the advantage of this event for spontaneous promotion of their local products.

## 5 Findings and discussion

This section collects first findings related to the first three phases of the method presented previously. They mainly deal with obstacles and opportunities of physical context, and socio-economic and political sphere.

First findings emerged during the observation of the Alta Irpinia territory – supported by the technical GIS mapping and implemented through interaction with local actors. They can be summarized in two points. The first one relates to the strength of the railway, which is barycentric with respect to the Alta Irpinia resources. In fact, the proposed buffer area includes archaeological, historical, cultural, environmental and productive sites that could be easily linked to the railway line (Figure 6). Conversely, the second point relates to weakness in terms of logistics, because the distance of the historical villages from the railway stations is problematic, especially in a view of the complex orography of Alta Irpinia. Many historical stations were demolished after a violent earthquake in 1980 and have been replaced with low quality prefabricated buildings. During the first site visits, researchers reported critical conditions of the railway stations and a real lack of an integrated system for the accessibility to the local resources, even if during the special events bus transfers had been provided. The low level of accessibility

has contributed to the marginalization process, although this same condition of segregation has protected the areas from negative aspects of the homologation processes that have affected the core areas.

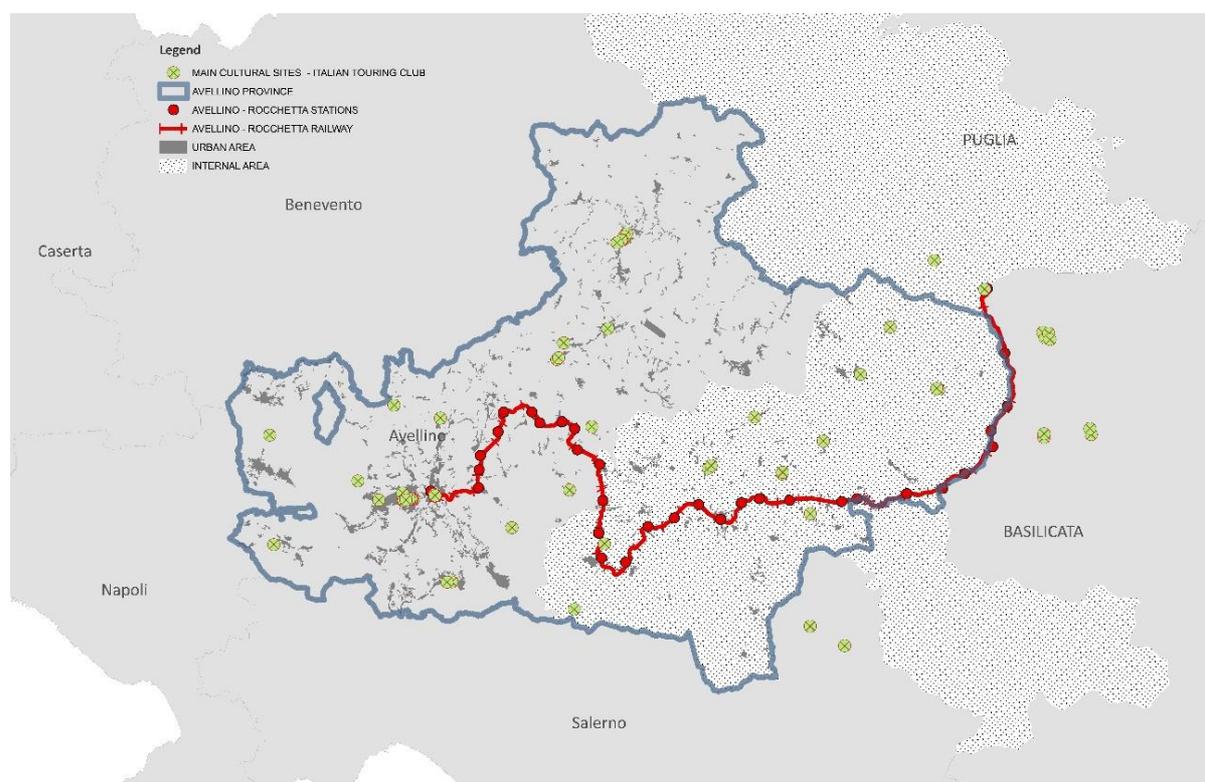


Figure 6: Barycentric position of the railway in the cultural resources system surveyed by the Italian Touring Club (illustration: Oppido et al., 2017; source: Internet 7).

From a socio-economic and political point of view, this phase has revealed the pivotal role that civic activism in general, and the *In\_Loco\_Motivi* association in particular, plays in creating

local spontaneous arenas. This forerunning association has demonstrated in advance the potentialities of railway tourism, which are confirmed by the nation-wide increases of this sector in the last years: 45% in terms of visitors and 39% in terms of historical railway trips since 2015 (Internet 4).

In\_Loco\_Motivi has attracted local associations, citizens, school executives, experts and universities, and has motivated the sustained commitment of the FS Foundation. This network has allowed an effective engagement with the issue of railway reuse through a wider collaborative arena; in detail, the FS Foundation has progressively recovered the *Avellino-Rocchetta Sant'Antonio* railway by including it in its national project for conservation and touristic reuse “Timeless Tracks” (Ita. *Binari senza tempo*; Internet 8).

The analysis of the social and political process and the visualization of the bottom-up and top-down actions have shown a near absence of the local governments and entrepreneurs until the summer of 2016. As shown in Figure 7, the interest and the engagement of local activists had already started in 1995. Institutional actions started only in 2016, when FS Foundation signed the Memorandum of Understanding for the opening of the track for touristic purposes. The only action carried out before this date was the Declaration of Cultural Interest of the historical railway: recognition of its engineering, historical and cultural value, which constitutes the starting point for the protection of this heritage. This public action has a nation-wide relevance as this was the first time that a Declaration of Cultural Interest targeted a whole system and not merely a single element

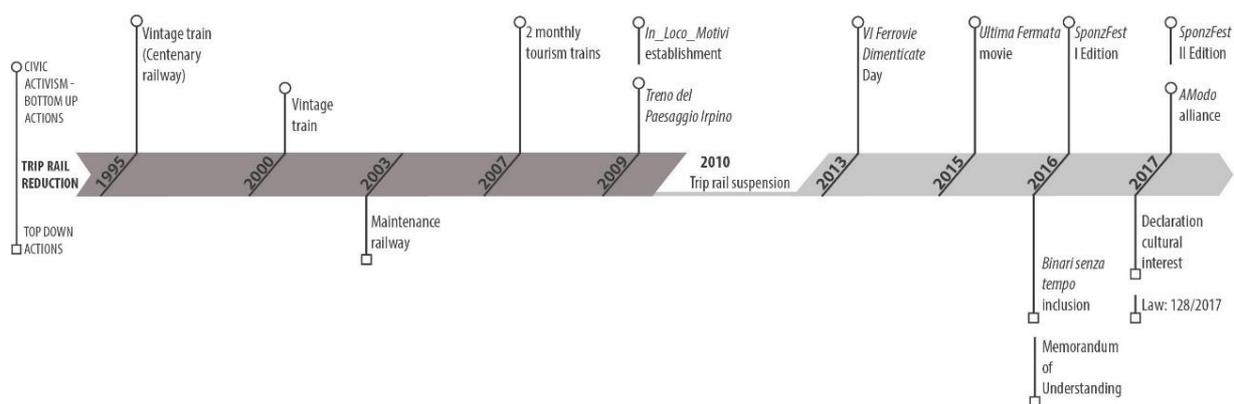


Figure 7: Civic activism and public action timeline (illustration: Serena Micheletti).

Importantly, the official opening of the first renewed part of the railway was the first tangible proof of cooperation between the FS Foundation and central and local governments. The train trips were included in the program of the Sponz Fest (Internet 8) and expressed the community’s strong sense of belonging to the area. Local communities and visitors played an active role of cultural participation and animation by organizing a dense programme of activities on the train (performances, traditional music sessions and comedies) and in the stations during the train stops (traditional music sessions and welcome committees). The initiatives that were organized for the inauguration of the track showed the richness of the traditions of Alta Irpinia and the locals’ affection for them (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Photos from the reopening of the first part of the railway (photo: Stefania Ragozino).

During the active observation sessions, researchers intercepted relevant subjects to introduce to the arena for a collaborative process. They could be divided into four main categories, related to civic activism, public action, private initiative and research activity (Figure 9).

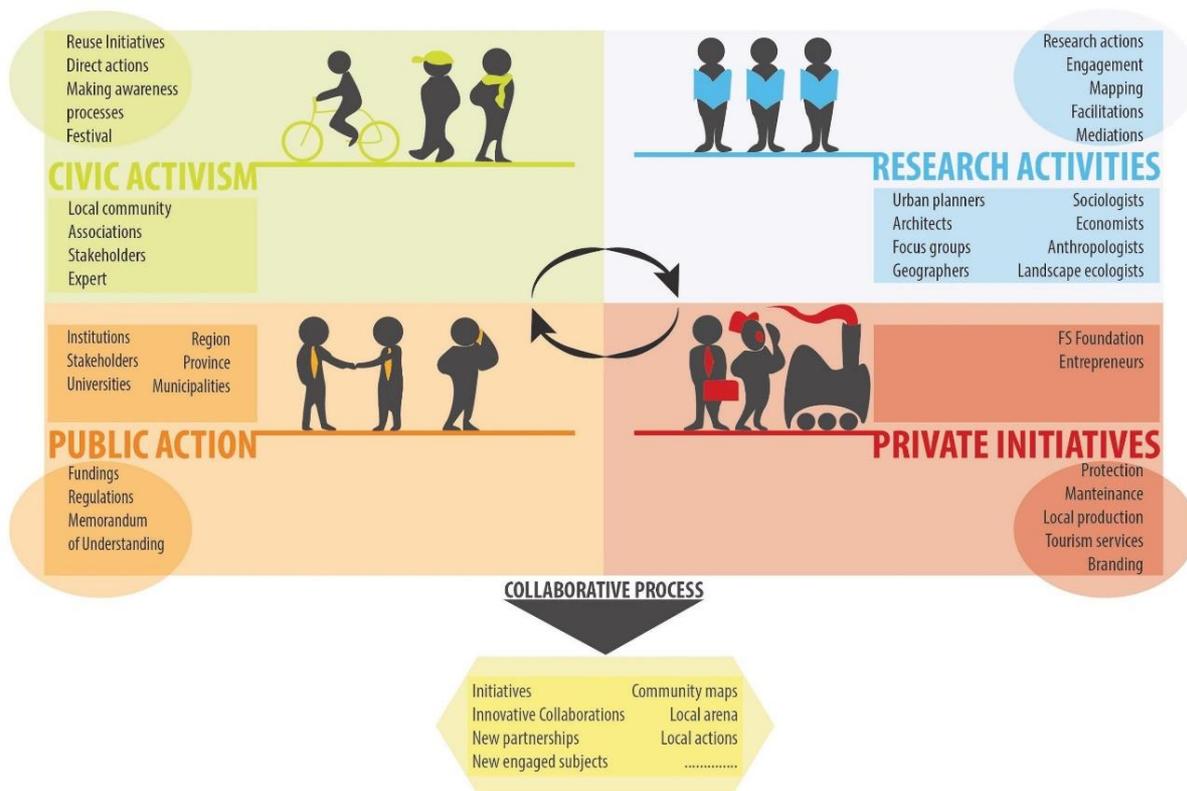


Figure 9: Actors and actions of the collaborative process (illustration: Serena Micheletti).

Additionally, these first phases allow for a presentation of preliminary reflections about the publicness and socio-cultural values of landscape. On one hand, the scientific debate highlights these values among those recognized in the landscape by current multidisciplinary approaches (Stephenson, 2008; Makhzoumi et al., 2011; Settis, 2013; Antrop & Van Eetvelde, 2017). On the other hand, these values have been catalysts for activism initiatives inspired by the richness of the Irpinia landscape to enhance its role as common ground for redeeming marginalized

areas. The initiative “Irpinia Landscape Train” is aimed at telling, sharing and improving collectively the local identity, identified as driver for regeneration processes. A further step, already incorporated in the AR agenda, is to transfer this theme into institutional decisions, first of all the Masterplan for the sustainable local development in the area of the Avellino-Rocchetta Sant’Antonio railway as well as in the construction of a community destination.

As we are in the middle of the AR, we can conclude with a preliminary consideration about the awareness of the potentialities offered by landscape. Specifically in the case of Alta Irpinia, the landscape could be considered as a driver for local initiatives but also as a structural element through which to build a regeneration strategy for the territory. This reasoning has been validated by the mapping process that has highlighted the consistency and the quality of the landscape, as well as by the bottom-up and top-down initiatives that have confirmed the acknowledgment of the landscape as an element of local identity with a strong value of publicness. Additionally, the exchange of competencies and experiences, and the participation of researchers in local initiatives have contributed to new awareness of the concept of landscape. Specifically, researchers highlighted the potential role of the landscape not only as tourism asset but as driver to reverse the marginalization process in Alta Irpinia.

These first findings of the AR enable researchers to start a wider reflection on the publicness of the landscape in the non-core areas. The main challenge in these areas is the strengthening of the territorial cohesion (Barca, 2009), and the AR method allows for sharing of a knowledge system and decisions for local development, and thus of responsibilities for the future of the areas. This way of working is adequate to emphasize the publicness of landscape by activating an equal process of regeneration based on collective commitment to co-planning and co-design actions. The main goal is to rebuild ties between community and territory, and among different local actors, by activating self-recognition and self-organization of development processes (Oppido et al, 2019). The hardest challenge for these areas is related to the governance both in the phase of territorial resources interpretation and in the phase of planning. Indeed, we should strive for a method that would interpret the public value of the landscape and valorize it as community heritage for the social cohesion, instead of slipping into the heritage marketization drift.

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