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Periferie
Dinamiche economiche territoriali
e produzione artistica

a cura di Giuseppe Capriotti e Francesca Coltrinari

Saggi

Creativity as a tool of local empowerment and socio-cultural revitalization: a study of a peripheral neighbourhood in Catania*

Teresa Graziano **, Enrico Nicosia ***

Abstract

This paper deals with the geo-territorial analysis of the impacts exerted by cultural policies in a deeply marginalised suburban neighbourhood in Catania, called Librino, where in recent years many creativity-based projects have been attempting at containing socio-economic marginalisation. In fact, a no profit foundation, local actors and civic associations promoting these projects try to limit the deeply-rooted disadvantages of the territory by involving the local community, particularly the youth, in art-based activities and events. Thus, this work aims at highlighting the effects of these projects, analysed within

* Despite the fact that this work is the outcome of a shared work of the two authors, Enrico Nicosia wrote §§ 1, 3, 4 while Teresa Graziano wrote §§ 2, 5, 6.

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the theoretical frame of urban and geographical studies about peripheries, by tracing the urban history of this satellite quarter and its recent evolution thanks to the brand of art and creativity.

Il presente lavoro si basa sull'analisi geo-territoriale degli impatti esercitati dalle politiche culturali in un quartiere profondamente emarginato della periferia di Catania, chiamato Librino, dove negli ultimi anni molti progetti basati sulla creatività hanno tentato di arginare la marginalità socio-economica. Infatti, una fondazione non profit, gli attori locali e le associazioni civili che promuovono questi progetti mirano a limitare gli svantaggi insiti nella condizione di marginalità del territorio, attraverso il coinvolgimento della comunità locale, in particolare i giovani, in eventi e attività improntati all'arte. In particolare, il presente lavoro è finalizzato a evidenziare gli effetti di tali progetti, analizzati nell'ambito della cornice teorica degli studi urbani e geografici sulle periferie, tracciando un affresco dell'evoluzione storica di questo quartiere satellite e della sua configurazione attuale grazie al *brand* dell'arte e della creatività.

1. *Creativity as a tool for urban regeneration*

The current changes in technological, social, political and economic phenomena have strongly affected the role and structure of urban life. Thus, the need for urban regeneration and revitalization strategies has emerged. Cities compete with one another even harder than before so that they continuously attempt to redefine their economic role as past activities have been fading away¹. Consequently, the quality of the metropolitan environment, in particular the peripheral one, has become extremely important for the location of (potential) residents, businesses and visitors, with an evident shift from hard to soft location factors.

Wide attention has been devoted to the creative city, especially in recent years. Its characteristics and ideals are the basis for the construction of a model that can ensure to the urban context a competitive advantage in comparison with other areas, in addition to establishing criteria and processes of economic and cultural planning that should be durable, sustainable, diversified and able to regenerate the territory².

Thus, creativity is considered as a necessity, especially for those cities that do not have established cultural elements of attractiveness.

The creativity of a city seems to be assured by the presence of a number of creative spaces that promote a continuous regeneration of the city itself, more closely linked to the dynamics of a cosmopolitan city if compared with even bigger and embedding geographical, social and territorial spaces³.

¹ Hall 1998; Osorio 2013.

² Lavanga 2004.

³ Sommer 2005; Evans 2007.

A substantial body of literature has been recently developed on the relationships among cities, culture, creative industries, places⁴. Urban cultural policy has become an increasingly significant component of economic and physical regeneration strategies in many European cities. Some common trends in the evolution of urban cultural policies can be identified⁵.

In this paper we propose a study about the potential of social implications of a neighbourhood-based creative economy, through the analysis of case study about the impact of a cultural project on a socio-economically marginalized neighbourhood located in Catania, Sicily (Italy).

2. Public Art/Art for the Public: tools for socio-cultural revitalization

The so-called “cultural turn” in recent years has increasingly underlined the leading role of culture as a tool for economic and social development. In fact, several culture-led regeneration projects have been promoted in different urban areas all around the world with the aim of making contemporary cities more competitive on the global scale.

Globalization, with trade liberalization measures and fast technological changes altering the relations of production, distribution and consumption, has very substantial effects on city development. What is more, the space-time compression and the rise of the so-called “signs and symbols” of capitalism have exerted important consequences on places. Different seminal works⁶ have shown the material and experiential implications of the post-fordism shift, which has implied the rise of “commercial cultures” based on the convergence between culture and economy.

One of the main consequences of such a phenomenon is that only a few out of many location-based characteristics gain importance for global actors enforcing competition across cities. Among the different economic fields affected by the growing global competitiveness, culture, intended in a wider sense, seems to represent the sector where the urban image and attractiveness become even more important.

Thus, most of European urban regions are looking at cultural-led regeneration in order to favour potential investors and tourists. The recent proliferation in Europe of Cultural and Creative Industries, which already account for ca. 4% of EU-GDP and jobs, have revealed a great potential to stimulate innovation in other sectors, with a competitive edge.

⁴ Bianchini, Parkinson 1993; Landry, Bianchini 1995; Scott 1997; Hall 1998; Landry 2000; Florida 2002.

⁵ Bianchini *et al.* 1992; Bianchini, Parkinson 1993.

⁶ Harvey 1989; Featherstone 1991; Lash, Urry 1994.

Since the early eighties, a rising awareness of the strong connections between urban cultural environment and local economic development began to make its appearance. Hitherto, local economic development programs had been greatly influenced by economics-based and growth-pole theories, such as that one of Perroux⁷, that considered cultural-products industries as irrelevant. After two decades, nowadays culture and cultural activities are widely known as a key source for producing economic flows, income and employment, apart from tackling the social marginalisation by arising community awareness. In some countries, indeed, the cultural economy is now one of the major frontiers of expansion of output and employment⁸.

According to Evans⁹, culture-led regeneration is a growingly spreading planning paradigm of cities as they seek to establish themselves as competitive. At the same time, the cultural input to neighbourhood regeneration has been extended to include the quality of life, apart from economic outcomes. However, Evans underlines that there is little evidence of how far flagship and major cultural projects contribute to a wide range of regeneration objectives. This is due to the awareness that measuring the social, economic and environmental impacts attributed to the culture in regeneration is problematic.

Quite different is the impact exerted by Public Art, because its objectives, since its very beginning, have always been strictly linked to the territory where it is performed, thus revealing strong social implications. In this case, Public Art does not propose art and culture just for aesthetic reasons or for their economic implications, but rather as tools to increase civic awareness, democratic participation and social inclusiveness.

Indeed, social and cultural dimensions are deeply interwoven so that cultural policies and institutions can exert a positive impact in terms of social development of local communities. The conceptions of democratization of culture were universally codified by the European ministers of culture during the UNESCO conference of Helsinki in 1972, followed by the growing diffusion of community art (especially in UK) and the concept of diffused heritage, based on the links between cultural heritage, shared art creation and social development.

One of the first expressions of art in public spaces is the installation of big format sculptures, dating back to the sixties in several countries such as Great Britain and France. Nowadays this concept of Public Art as an object, that is to say a work of art in a open space without explicit social goals, is even more recurring, with art installations, performances, happenings. Another way of conceiving art in public space is that one of art as a container through recently opened museums¹⁰.

⁷ Perroux 1961.

⁸ Lash, Urry 1994; Scott 2000; Healy 2002.

⁹ Evans 2005.

¹⁰ Inguaggiato 2009.

Art in public space can also be seen as a link which connects a territory with specific projects and processes of socio-cultural developments. It includes several cultural activities that in recent years have persuaded artistes to promote projects strictly linked to the cultural and social environment, trying to interpret the local milieu as a kind of catalyst of inhabitants' voices.

Another mechanism through which art is inserted in the territory is the one of re-use of underused or abandoned buildings, usually proto-industrial degraded ones, in new spaces devoted to art and creativity, often for a temporary period. In this way, art can be considered as a shared tool to promote processes of territorial re-configuration.

Finally, art can be conceived from a social standpoint as an essential instrument of integrated processes finalised to urban regeneration of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Thus, art becomes one of the practices activated by local public and private actors with the aim of increasing social inclusiveness and democratic participation, local levels of employment as well as improving standards of neighbourhood services and community identity. Art becomes an instrument of communication, interaction, sharing, due to its intuitiveness and fascination among different socio-demographic targets of populations. It can be defined as "social art" since the final output is not only the work of art in itself, but rather the cultural effects and the social implications provoked in the involved territory. So, art becomes the result of a complex process involving different actors and action levels that, in its final stage, can become a very instrument of transformation of the urban fabric.

In spite of being a mere backdrop, as it was with the first expressions of Public Art during the seventies, nowadays urban environment is no longer a stage for artists but rather the very object of art itself that aims at transforming public space. Moreover it interprets inhabitants' desires and exigencies by connecting them with local institutions. "Art for art's sake" leaves space to an art that, in spite of being a mere cultural expression in a shared open space, turns out to be "public" because its social goals involve the whole community, that is to say "art in the public interest".

So, Public Art has been increasingly advocated on the basis of a series of (supposed) contributions to urban regeneration since the 1980s, since it should help developing sense of community, arising civic identity, addressing community needs, tackling social exclusion and promoting social change¹¹.

The contributions of Public Art, it has been argued, can be economic, social, environmental and psychological. Such advocacy is in line with a broader shift towards a culture considered as a tool to address the problematic legacies of deep-seated structural adjustment in cities.

While critical and evaluative writing has recently begun to emerge, above all about the theoretical framework and empirical methodologies, without

¹¹ Hall, Robertson 2001.

any doubt public art is increasingly playing a growing role in regeneration processes¹².

As a matter of fact, a wide range of Public Art, permanent and temporary, has been employed widely in smaller-scale neighbourhood regeneration projects, above all promoted by the public and the voluntary sectors, as well as by social activists.

The development of much Public Art in this context is based on a socio-cultural approach to regeneration rather than a purely property-led or economic art, in the line of the community arts dating back to the 1960s in UK.

What is more, studying the impact of public art in the involved territories implies some different questions related to empirical, policy, structural, ideological issues, that are used as theoretical and methodological basis for our work.

First of all, Hall and Robertson¹³ highlight that a study about the social implications of a cultural project should deepen what tangible, measurable impacts a project has on the territory where it is performed, in addition to the relationship between the Public Art programme and broader urban regeneration initiatives or policies affecting the territory. What is more, researchers should take into account the limitations of deeper structural conditions influencing the role of Public Art and its potential of transformation, above all in critical urban areas, such as the socio-economic disadvantaged peripheries.

Before addressing the main theme of this paper, that is to say the social impacts of culture-led regeneration projects in degraded urban areas, it is necessary to trace briefly the concept of periphery and the evolution of the neighbourhood at the core of the case study: “Librino”, a peripheral area of Catania (Italy).

3. *The “maze” of peripheries*

The term periphery defines today the main portion of urbanization, particularly the one built after World War II, seemingly everywhere equal and indifferent to the identity of the area, a portion of urbanization unable to represent its inhabitants¹⁴.

The description of peripheral areas should be based on the evaluation of these spaces beyond the *clichés* that describe them as ugly, shapeless and anonymous

¹² The types of Public Art involved in urban regeneration programmes depend on the type of regeneration programmes, ranging from flagship, or prestige, regeneration projects to municipality-level regeneration projects, in addition to bottom-up cultural policies promoted by local community representatives and private actors.

¹³ Hall, Robertson 2001.

¹⁴ Clementi, Perego 1990; Cresme 2000.

citadels. In a first stage, peripheries were a kind of compensation of saturation in the historical center and areas devoted to the industrial development, even though the evolution of the world economy made its image of a working class suburbs as obsolete. Although it still appears as an unresolved wrap without identity, the recent periphery is inhabited by a population with a deeply rooted identity and capabilities to transform the territory¹⁵.

According to Picone¹⁶, it is not easy to define what is a neighbourhood¹⁷. It is an intuitive concept, almost taken for granted, but very difficult to explain in scientific terms. The neighbourhood is the area closest to inhabitants' home residence. However the question is where a neighbourhood ends and what characterizes and distinguishes it from the others. What is more, it should be deepened whether its inhabitants realize that they live in a different portion from the rest of the city.

In urban areas, some peripheries are often a reflection of a process of concentration of the degradation of housing (crisis of the urban environment), the social degradation (physical and social segregation) and the lack of services and infrastructures¹⁸.

Urban decay can be analyzed in relation to the different elements combined in isolation or in combination. In particular, it should be studied the location of the neighbourhood related to the location of city center, business centres and malls, in addition to the road and rail network, the system of public transport, the metropolitan road networks, the connections with other urban settlements, the provision of business services for the neighbourhood (central markets, supermarkets, department stores, retail stores).

Social unevenness reflects a high degree of inactivity or unemployment, informal jobs, a large number of retirees, evicted and homeless people, immigrants and illegal immigrants, the spread of illegal activity and the presence of social and cultural deviance (criminal organizations, petty crime, robbery and pick-pocketing, theft in apartments, shops, car theft and different forms of violence)¹⁹.

In the case of Catania, marginalization and segregation in peripheral areas can be read and interpreted in two ways, which should be based on the direct observation of the territory: topographic/spatial and social/territorial.

In particular, from the topographical point of view, we can distinguish different typologies of periphery: the disadvantaged districts of the historical center, the areas within the immediate outskirts of the city center and the areas

¹⁵ Amato, Sommella 2013.

¹⁶ Picone 2011.

¹⁷ The historical significance of the word refers to administrative subdivisions of the Middle Ages and even today the neighbourhoods are areas defined by municipal zoning regulations (Farinelli 2003).

¹⁸ Cremaschi 2001.

¹⁹ Cirelli *et al.* 2008.

of social housing in the anonymous peripheries. From the socio-territorial standpoint, it is the concentration of marginal social classes, the weak social heterogeneity, the scarcity or inadequate use of services and infrastructure that are usually referred to the idea of periphery. With regard to the more qualitative aspects of well-being we should take into account the weak supply of services, the absence of tertiary, the environmental degradation, the presence of organized crime and social deviance.

4. *What future for Librino?*

The southern area of the city of Catania, developed in the past half century, is located within the 6th District (San Giorgio, Librino, San Giuseppe La Rena, Zia Lisa, Villaggio Sant'Agata). It is mainly made of recently built popular settlements, deriving from a public urban planning programme dating back to the seventies. According to this urban programme, Librino would have been a kind of autonomous and fully equipped "satellite city", even though several portions of the district are spontaneously grown beyond any planning rule, equally lacking in equipment and services. This area covers an area of 14.000 hectares, accounting for about two thirds of Catania.

From the urban point of view, Librino and San Giorgio neighbourhoods are the most recent. Their urbanization, inserted in the Piccinato's general urban plan of 1969, was actually started during the 80's of the last century. The area, which was conceived to house about 60.000 inhabitants, distributed among the so-called "villages" of Librino, Castagnola, Bummacaro, S. Toedoro, Grimaldi, Sant'Agata and San Giorgio (figg. 1-2), was destined to the residences of workers employed in the nearby industrial area of "Pantano d'Arce" with the aim of reducing commuting, as it was established in the Piccinato's plan (fig. 3)²⁰.

The original plan related to Librino and San Giorgio, drawn up by the worldwide famous architect Kenzo Tange, included a hospital, university facilities, service centres, cultural and aggregation centres, shopping malls. It was realised in 1976. It followed the orography of the territory, creating a ring road system consisting of dual carriageway roads surrounding the buildings.

The first change of the original project was due to the height limits for buildings located nearby the airport. What is more, the wild and irrational illegal building completely transformed the original project so that an amnesty of illegal buildings was made. Consequently, the neighbourhoods ended up to house more than 80.000 inhabitants.

Even though in recent years some public policies have tried to reduce socio-economic marginalisation, by improving city centre connections or providing

²⁰ Ruggiero, Cirelli 1989.

social services above all in the field of education, the physiognomy of Librino is still today strictly linked to the image of a dormitory city typical of metropolitan suburbs (figg. 4-7).

In spite of its strategic location close to the airport and a short distance away from the industrial area of “Pantano d’Arce”, in addition to the main road systems such as a motorway (Catania-Palermo), Librino has only recently been taken into account for the localization of important functional service facilities to reduce commuting to the central areas of the city.

However, the absence of a real economic structure, along with the marginalization of the urban areas, characterized by low levels of income per capita if compared to the city and the whole metropolitan area, actually influence negatively the capacity of attraction. An emblematic building, renamed the “Building of Concrete”, is sadly become the symbol of the whole area. It is a dilapidated structure, already occupied by squatters despite being devoid of fixtures, elevator, installation of electricity, water and sewerage. Now this property is the catalyst centre of criminal activities practiced away from the sense of the common law. What is more, a recently opened five hundred-seats theatre has been left in a state of complete abandon and several other structures (such as the “Pala Nitta”, a polyvalent sporting area, an old millstone nowadays used by the Evangelical Church, and the “Bonaiuto” manor farm) are actually underused or abandoned, although their potential in socio-economic and cultural terms.

This functional economic marginality could change quickly thanks to the recent location choices made by both public and private actors.

As for the public policies, it is certainly the construction of the new “San Marco” hospital that could briefly become the most important element of functional change and revitalisation. Moreover, a revitalising effect could be exerted by the public-private initiative called “Zona Franca Urbana” that could ensure the creation of new businesses through fiscal incentives²¹.

In recent years private actions have been more impressive. Among the most important location choices have to be mentioned: the construction of a shopping center, called “Porte di Catania”, in the area called “Gelso Bianco”, along the final axis of the motorway CT-PA, a facility which occupies 12.500 sq. m. and with its 150 stores and 5.000 parking spaces offers a diverse range of products; the first Sicilian IKEA store, located in the area called “Buttaceto”, which has a total area of 30.000 sq. m., 19.000 sq. m. of which dedicated to trade, a restaurant with 465 seats and 2.500 parking spaces. This location choice confirms the attractiveness of the southern area of Catania for the location of retail stores.

In addition, a new shopping centre (“Centro Commerciale all’Ingrosso”), located in the area called “Bicocca”, can become another tool for reducing the marginality of these neighbourhoods.

²¹ Cirelli *et al.* 2011.

The structure is impressive, since it covers a total area of 897.500 sq. m., divided into 217.000 sq. m. of covered areas, 349.500 sq. m. parking lots and almost 195.000 sq. m. of green spaces. The shopping center is located in a particularly important territory from the strategic point of view, a short distance away from the main motorway junctions of eastern Sicily, from the Catania main infrastructures (port, railway station and airport) and the commercial hub of Misterbianco.

It is a structure that will be certainly used by the whole metropolitan system of Catania, but it will be also an important step in the process of urban regeneration of the entire southern area of the city.

5. *“Fiumara d’Arte”*: a culture-led project of social regeneration

The case study at the core of this paper is really emblematic about the short-term illusory old paradigms of urban planning on one hand, as well as the potentialities of socio-cultural development of shrewd and innovative policies inspired to art and creativity on the other, if they are inserted in a wider vision of urban development supported by public actors. In effect, creativity-based projects can limit socio-economic marginalisation in degraded suburban neighbourhoods, although they should be inserted by local public actors in a wider long term urban and cultural planning in order to be really effective.

In particular, the study aims at evaluating to what extent cultural facilities and programmes have positively contributed to the regeneration of the Catania neighbourhood called Librino, subject to economic and physical decline and multiple social problems such as unemployment, poverty, crime, poor amenities, education and housing.

The chosen methodology is based on the analysis of the impact exerted by a cultural foundation in the neighbourhood, through several fieldworks devoted to evaluate the signs of change within the urban fabric and social structure as well as a series of questionnaires and interviews to the representatives of the foundation.

Librino seems to epitomize the placeless-ness condition of degraded peripheries. In effect, Librino urban conception represented the local version of a wider urban movement of satellite cities spreading since the fifties in France (*ville nouvelles*) and Great Britain (new towns), as well as huge residential and social housing compounds destined to thousand of people, even though considered already outdated in the seventies.

Thus, from the urban planning theory, Librino was obsolete even before being built. Furthermore, it was the public government to support financially and logistically the realization of the complex road system, made of a vehicular section which never crosses the pedestrian one situated on an upper level.

Local actors should also have realized infrastructures, services and intermodal connections to the city centre, unfortunately always postponed.

Owing to these reasons, Librino shows to be since the beginning a space of segregation, physically and symbolically marginalised from the city centre, a kind of want-to-be satellite city of the future that has been realized only from the formal standpoint, without any connection with the surrounding urban fabric. It is the worst face of urban sprawl, careless of social and cultural implications²².

However, after many years of socio-cultural marginalisation, some efforts in supporting local development have been made by private actors.

In the specific case of this satellite neighbourhood, the leading role in stemming marginalisation has been played by a cultural foundation, “Fiumara d’Arte” (A Torrent of Art)²³, which has been promoting social inclusiveness in the district through beauty and creativity since the eighties. The main aim is limiting the deeply-rooted disadvantages of the territory, by involving the local community, particularly the youth, in art-based activities and events.

The key-concept at the core of this cultural foundation is promoting the “utopia” of beauty and art as ethic driving forces in disadvantages territories, where often inhabitants citizenship and democratic participation is denied.

Through cultural projects ranging from poetry to photography, the foundation has been attempting at putting the issue of disadvantaged peripheries at the core of public interest, by giving the inhabitants the tools to achieve self-empowerment thanks to culture and beauty.

So, in the demographically youngest district of Catania residents have been involved in events and projects promoted by worldwide known poets and artists, with the aim of building the socio-cultural background for the citizens of tomorrow.

The innovative approach of the foundation mission is really far from the deeply rooted welfarist approach which has been dominating for years in Sicily: that is to say, exploiting ethics, beauty, art as tools of development, rather than a traditionally conceived capitalist economy.

What is more, every cultural project promoted in the neighbourhood has implied the participation of the young population of the whole city. By involving several primary and secondary school located in different city neighbourhoods, the foundation has attempted at promoting social inclusiveness and democratic participation, in order to avoid that cultural projects destined to Librino young people could be perceived as top-down instruments that paradoxically could sharpen the “ghetto” representation.

²² Nigrelli 2001. Segregation can be regarded as the projection of a social structure onto space. Although hypothetically it is possible to build a socially unequal city without spatial inequalities, urban and social transformations of contemporary capitalism has led to an increase of spatial segregation between different social groups in cities.

²³ The founder is Antonio Presti, a contemporary philanthropist grown up in a well-off family who has decided to devote himself to the cause of beauty and art in disadvantages territories.

During 15 years of activities carried out in the district, the foundation has spread a new awareness among young people and, through them, among their parents: the pilot of an effective public cultural policy is its sharing. It was from this starting point that twenty projects came into light, within the cultural programme called “Terz’occhio-Meridiani di Luce” (The third eye-Meridians of Light, the third eye is that of imagination and heart, through which Librino can be transfigured in a place full of beauty). About 80.000 inhabitants of Librino and 50.000 of the whole city have been involved in the programme, apart from 80 neighbourhood commercial and economic activities involved. In particular, the cultural programme has involved students of different levels (infant, primary, secondary, high schools, university, fine art academy) and city’s inhabitants of different ages and socio-economic profiles²⁴.

Among the different projects²⁵, we remind the transformation of an impressive 500 meters-long gray road bridge crossing the whole district as a scar, become a symbol of an urban sprawl careless of concepts such as beauty and art, in an endless open air work of art. Students of several city schools were involved in the realization of clay models inspired to the theme of the Mother Hearth, later on set on the bridges gray walls. The figurers of the project are impressive: 2.000 students involved, 9.000 clay models set on the bridge walls, 11 well-know artists coordinating the whole work²⁶. Thus, the physical structures and infrastructures of urban fabric, which are often marked by degradation and ugliness in disadvantaged districts, can be converted in shared work of arts which can promote social inclusiveness trough the principles of a bottom-up culture-led regeneration (fig. 8).

The most ambitious cultural project is that of creating an open air “Museum of the Image” within the neighbourhood, which should be developed around the above-mentioned already-existing converted concrete bridge, renamed “Porta della Bellezza” (the Door of Beauty).

According to Gianfranco Molino, Cultural Executive Producer and Vice President of the Foundation,

the idea is converting a functional structure such as a road without any esthetical value, that stands out as a symbolic wound, into a shared work of art representing inhabitants identity, emotions and civic engagement. Presti’s main aim is transforming Librino in a cultural destination for local inhabitants and tourists coming from the nearby airport, attracted by an open air museum. Instead of a ticket to enter, the visitor will be asked to spend the

²⁴ Data provided by Arch. Gianfranco Molino, Cultural Executive Producer and Vice President of the Foundation, our interview, 23.03.2014.

²⁵ We remind the following projects: “The offer of the Word: Poets in Train”, involving several contemporary poets and writers from all over the world; “500 Advertisements for Librino”; “A five km-long canvas for Librino”; “500 flags to be a City”; “Pain cannot be wasted”; “Voyage to Sicily... towards Librino”; “The canticle of creatures”; “The Ritual of the Light”.

²⁶ Data provided by Arch. Gianfranco Molino, Cultural Executive Producer and Vice President of the Foundation, our interview, 23.03.2014.

equivalent of an entrance ticket in one of the several economic and commercial activities of the territory in order to promote a change and above all to support the economic structure²⁷.

Through this symbolic “Door of Beauty”, opening up in a newly perceived territory, where evident marks of decay should become signs of beauty, the potential visitor should enter an open air museum showing up the very heart of the district: its population (figg. 9-10).

The projects, still in progress, imply that the anonymous gray facades of 100 impressive and often degraded buildings can be temporary reused as screens where pictures, video, poems of Librino inhabitants (created by them with some supervisor artists, and above all representing them) will be projected. This open air museum – a very socio-anthropological archive – should be the output of the long intense networks of relations between artists and residents of Librino, starting from the local schools. Children of the neighbourhood have been involved not only in workshops of photography but also in the logistic implementation of the whole project that implies huge organisation efforts. In total, more than 30.000 pictures, representing Librino people, have been collected thanks to the efforts of students, teachers, citizens, civic, social and religious associations (fig. 11).

As said by Gianfranco Molino,

in a periphery, like in other similar marginalized territories, where inhabitants are accustomed to ask institutions for help with a typically southern welfarist perspective, but without receiving any real support, the Museum of Image has involved the whole community thanks to the several years of presence in the territory. The enthusiastic answer of Librino inhabitants is due to the fact that they are the main actors of the proposed projects, involved through a series of events in the schools and even blocks of flats of the district, in order to meet with artists, poets and photographers and, through them, with Culture in all its forms²⁸.

However, after four years devoted to photograph workshops and collecting materials, the projects has reached its deadlock. Born after the idea of a private philanthropist, its logistic and economic implications need a broader support by local institutions in order to be fully implemented. Consequently, the already existing archive of pictures and videos are waiting to be exploited and the Librino population is still waiting for “using” its neighbourhood in the name of beauty and creativity. Meanwhile, the neighbourhood is still perceived and represented as a Waste Land where nobody goes to, except its inhabitants, a shapeless and placeless territory dominated by crime and degrade, where any effective regeneration programme has been really supported by local actors.

²⁷ Our interview, 23.03.2014.

²⁸ Our interview, 23.03.2014.

6. *Final considerations*

Librino seems to embody the very essence of every marginalised urban periphery, marked by the absence: without a shared identity, a common project for the future, any perspective of improvement. Symbolically divided from the rest of the city, the satellite quarter seems to be destined to socio-economic marginalisation.

The case study at the core of this paper testifies to what extent a cultural project could arise the sense of community and identity in a socially and economically marginalised neighbourhood. However, if a culture-led revitalisation project is not inserted in a wider urban regeneration programme, it will be destined to a partial failure since its social impacts, in terms of increased civic participation and education to the concept of beauty, are not supported by a wider transformation of a degraded urban fabric and a poor economic structure. Presently, recent local policies have been supporting the economic regeneration of the area (through the creation of a tax relief business area, the “Zona Franca Urbana – ZFU”). However, this is not enough, if the whole local community is not involved in a widely-conceived revitalisation programme that cannot elude from the paradigm of sustainability and quality of urban life.

As said by the Cultural Executive Project Gianfranco Molino²⁹, any institutional support has been assured by local actors, despite their promise of creating a green area and providing a better lighting system all around the “Door of Beauty”. According to him, local institutions are interested in Librino residents just for political and electoral reasons, whilst Fiumara d’Arte «aims at developing emotions and feelings of Beauty without any consideration about age, places of origin, social levels»³⁰. With regard to the “ZFU” creation, Molino underlines that

it could be a historical opportunity of change for the economic revitalization of the district, even though tax breaks are not sufficient if bureaucracy is not simplified and the district’s inhabitants are not involved. Furthermore, it should be necessary to provide social services and welfare, that do not actually exist, apart from rebuilding the neighbourhood image, in order to give potential investors a sense of safety. Our Foundation is working towards this direction, by providing a national and international image of a district where projects can be pursued and results achieved. Economics growth is at the core of every process of development, but a deeply sustainable growth comes from a new civic consciousness about the district potentialities, by involving the local community and associations working in the territory. It is fundamental that a tax break programme does not turn out into a top-down financial speculation³¹.

²⁹ Our interview, 23.03.2014.

³⁰ Our interview, 23.03.2014.

³¹ Our interview, 23.03.2014.

To conclude, as testified by other experiences of urban regeneration in global or middle-size cities, a mere programme of economic revitalization cannot take root without the full involvement of local community and a strategic project of territorial marketing, based on a process of urban (re)branding that can improve the territory attractiveness in a growingly competitive world. Thus, owing their intuitive approach, art and creativity represent nowadays the most exploited tools to support regeneration, but only if inserted in a wider urban planning programme.

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Appendix

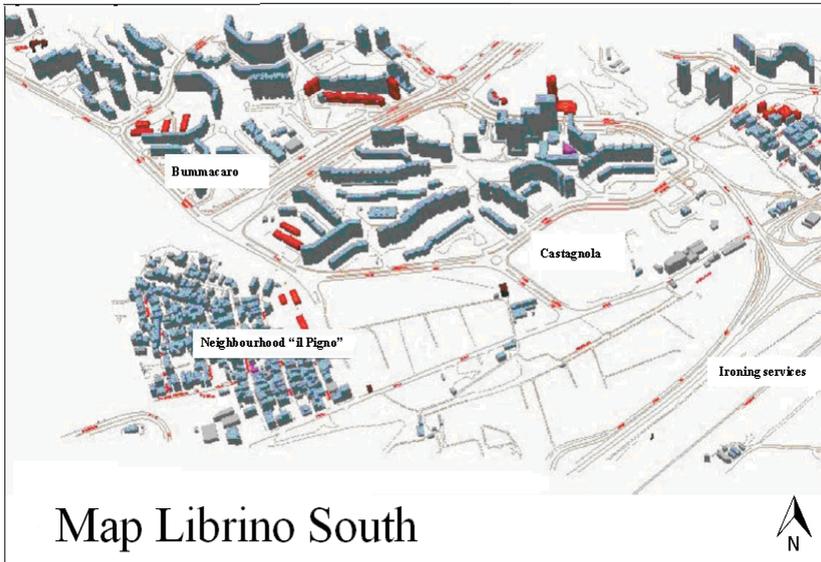


Fig. 1. Map Librino South (Source: our elaboration)

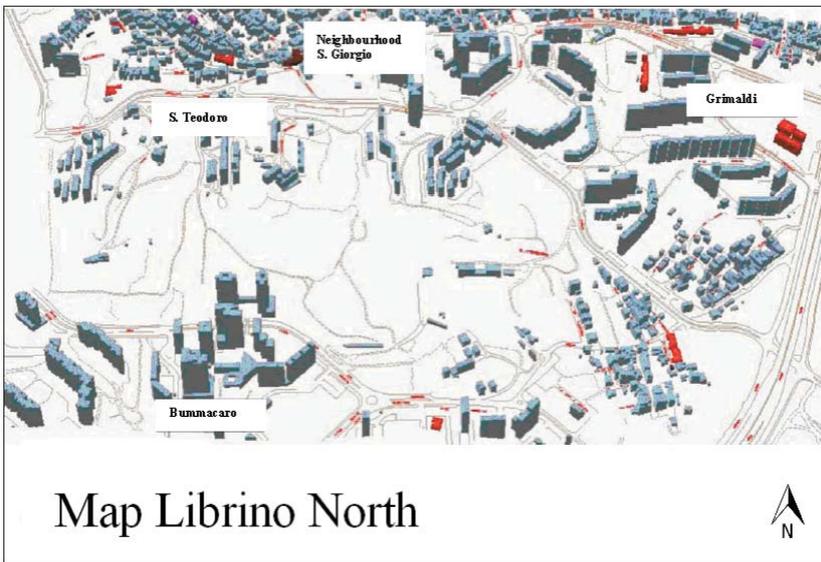


Fig. 2. Map Librino North (Source: our elaboration)



Fig. 3 Librino: Planimetry of Piccinato's Plan



Fig. 4. Picture of the district



Fig. 5. Picture of the district



Fig. 6. Picture of the district, “il Palazzo di cemento”



Fig. 7. Picture of the district, inside “il Palazzo di cemento”



Fig. 8. From a bridge to a work of art



Fig. 9. The idea of the Museum of Image



Fig. 10. The idea of the Museum of Image



Fig. 11. The foundation's website with Librino children

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