

A case study, Bagnoli: a difficult transition

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Abstract

Bagnoli, a neighbourhood on the west outskirts of Naples, has been a typical industrial and working class area for more than eighty years, having put up an important factory district in a wide territory belonging to its seaside zone, where the Ilva-Italsider building, third steel industry centre in Italy, dominated. Since 1993 this huge factory has been definitely closed and its facilities have been phased out. So the large territory has become object of an important conversion and urban requalification project. Between 1995, when the variant Regulation Plan of Naples Municipality was introduced, and 2005, when the Executive Urban Plan was approved, this project has been developing and completing, defining the future of the ex industrial area, according some privileged lines: enhancement of natural and landscape aspects inside the heart of Pozzuoli gulf; recovery and development of the original touristic vocation through the thermal system and bathing restoration.

This project opens towards great expectations of transformation and improvement of life and environment quality both for the inhabitants who live there in the neighbourhood and for the whole city. At the same time it has happened a speculation phenomenon through the sale contract concerning buildings and flats by the realties, together with the transfer of many historical inhabitants and the arrival of new people in the neighbourhood. They are attracted by the changing prospective of the area, but they have no relation with the zone and its history.

So, during the last twenty years, the neighbourhood identity has been modified. Contemporarily, the soils draining proceeds slowly and among thousands difficulties, while the sea bottom draining isn't active yet. Today, most of the area is under seizure by judiciary, that found irregularities and defaults in the draining works, realized only for the 65%. The future imagined in the conversion project results, in this way, largely compromised.

In this research work we intend to verify how a particular physical-spatial dimension has influenced the social relations and the same identities of the people and their "community", how we can delineate the perception and the performance of a urban transformation largely failed, and which contribution the citizens of Bagnoli can give to the urban design through their own imaginary and meanings they ascribe to their environment (Lynch 1960). In this sense, the study aim at giving a contribution to the participative practice, that up to now is out of the transition dynamics.

Keywords: transformation; identity; participation

Introduction

Bagnoli is a quarter in the western suburbs of Naples in the Campi Flegrei, an area overlooking the gulf of Pozzuoli. Its story is linked to the third iron and steel centre of Italy, the big Ilva-Italsider factory, which was closed down in 1993.

Twenty years have passed since then, and the quarter is still waiting for the reconversion of its territory. The territory is rich in natural beauties, hot springs and with a coast line characterized by a long row of beaches where bathing has been permitted since the early decades of the twentieth century and which have been well-known and attended in summer time since then.

Before turning into the working and industrial district it has been for more than eighty years, Bagnoli was one of the typical tourist centres of the twentieth century. It was frequented, in fact, for its beautiful bathing beaches and comfortable spas. Hence the name “Balneolum”, which means “little bath”. Before telling about Bagnoli’s industrial past and, above all, about its following deindustrialization, it is right to linger over its original pre-industrial identity, as it is just this identity we mean to rediscover and revive today in order to re-qualify its territory, giving its inhabitants a new development and wellness opportunity. The future of Bagnoli depends, in fact, on a return to its origins. This has proved to be a very difficult task, anyway, despite the many disappointments, both its inhabitants and the town-planners responsible for the transformation project, are still convinced that this will be its future outlook.

Bagnoli: Utopia and industrial district

Bagnoli has been the centre of great town planning projects since the late 19th century. In the years before the Cholera epidemic that hit Naples in 1884, (later followed by a great clean up work), the Bagnoli area was already a matter of interest for the great Scottish-Neapolitan architect Lamont Young (1851-1929) who aimed at cutting down the density of population in the unhealthy quarters of the city centre by extending westwards the urban area. His project of the new Campi Flegrei district is dated 1883. It was based on an efficient transport net through two underground lines, the “upper line” and the “lower line”, departing from Bagnoli to the whole town. One of the most original elements of this project was building two new quarters - Venice and Campi Flegrei - on a lagoon area with a wide navigable canal in between. This canal would become, after the underground, the most important connection between the town centre and the western area. If realized, this project could solve one of the most serious problems of Naples: its notorious traffic congestion, largely caused by its particular geographic position between the hills and the sea. Actually, Lamont Young

had designed a charming utopia with Bagnoli transformed into a large park of gardens, lakes, hotels, exhibition halls and even a crystal building with theaters, art galleries, conference rooms and restaurants. Furthermore, there were areas for sports and other recreation activities, spas, bathing establishments, a lot of green areas and even an electric railway line connecting the two underground stations. The importance he gave to the green areas led him to design, besides the public parks, a garden for each private building as well (Cardone 1989: 132-133). Young was so sure of the effectiveness and perfection of his project who declared: "I believe in fifty years my golden dream of the Naples of the future will rise up majestic and enchanting in the most beautiful region of the world" (Alisio in Mazzucca 1983: 20-21). Unfortunately his "golden dream" was broken by the insuperable obstacle of the lack of funds. On July 21, 1888 the municipal administration of Naples approved the great architect 's project on condition to find in six months a company with enough funds to invest on this project.. Complying with this condition was very difficult so, after an extension, the license expired on August 12, 1892 and the "dream" was put aside for ever (Cardone: 136).

As a matter of fact the Cholera epidemic had imposed other priorities. On this regard it is important to underline that, in the history of Naples, emergencies have often been more influential than other factors. In that awkward situation a sanitary clean up of part of the town was necessary and this required considerable funds.

The situation was made even worse by the bank crises, which led between 1893 and 1894 to the crack of two big credit banks - The Società Generale of Credito Mobiliare Italiano and the Banca Generale. This had very serious effects on the building sector and the interruption of the building plan was avoided only by an extraordinary intervention of the Bank of Italy. Lamont Young's project was put aside, however his utopia returned later in a more practical and moderate version by the marquis Candido Giusso, a local noble landowner with modern ideas. In 1888 he presented a town-planning scheme of his lands. He himself drew an orthogonal plan consisting of *cardi* and *decumani*, a neat and tidy quarter of cottages of no more than two floors, the two thirds of the land for the garden and balconies jutting a maximum of 60 centimeters. He set some more bounds for the wellbeing of the inhabitants, like the prohibition to start out noisy or smelly working activities in the quarter and the prohibition to discharge sewage into the sea, as it had to be kept clean for the bathing. By doing this, Bagnoli was to be an amusement and relax-oriented quarter. In fact it became a holiday resort chosen as a summer residence by well-to-do Neapolitan families, a quarter whose tidiness and decorum made it quite extraneous to the rest of the town.

In 1914 the marquis Giusso, by deed of gift, gave Naples Municipality the street plan of the new district, named "Rione Giusso". He urged the local authorities to get all the bounds respected, "in order to keep the quarter its characteristics of cleanness, tidiness, decency and place of delight" (Mautone: 71).

The resolution to settle the third iron and steel centre of Italy in Bagnoli changed its territory completely: the landscape greatly suffered the effects of this transformation and even the houses turned into working-class buildings. Thus, instead of “golden dream” or a place of delight, between the Twenties and the Thirties Bagnoli became the western industrial district, where the coexistence of the factory and the quarter gave no troubles. In the post war years, on the contrary, Bagnoli became a dormitory quarter characterized by the growing of the factories and by the relation between factory and territory thanks to a relevant working-class employment which meant stability and development for a part of the Neapolitan proletariat. This kind of industrialization with strong environmental impact made tourist activities impossible, destroying the territorial peculiarities and damaging landscape qualities. The industrial settlement caused, in fact, a serious environmental deterioration owing to air, water and soil pollution.

The choice of industrialism, however, must be seen in the context of those years and, above all, explained according to the purposes of the special law for “the economical revival of Naples” which was passed on July 8, 1904, inspired by the statist Francesco Saverio Nitti (1868-1953), who was an expert on the problems of Southern Italy. This law aimed at reducing the delay of Southern Italy development by promoting the town industrial development within the production plan of that time, based on the economic take-off of iron and steel industry.

Nitti’s plan was never completely carried out, anyway a sort of modernization was achieved with the birth of a conscious working-class that became the protagonist of the democratization process, after II World War.

Some factors explain why Bagnoli was chosen as the site of a heavy industry plant in contrast with its natural resources (beaches, spas, etc.). These factors are, for example, the wide sea front where ships carrying mineral supplies would dock and then sail loaded with steel; the low cost of the land, the proximity to railways and to Pozzuoli, where a modern sector of the ship-building industry was expanding. For the same reasons steel industry occupied coastal areas in many other parts of Italy and Europe. The opponents to this project maintained that Naples industrial area had to be moved eastward, since the Campi Flegrei area was the suitable place for tourist, environmental and landscape activities, but they were unheard.

Bagnoli industrial history starts in 1910, when the Ilva factory is opened. It employed about 2000 workers, doubled in 1918. In the World War II its machinery were completely destroyed by German bombs but the factory was rebuilt thanks to its workers’ great efforts. In 1961 owing to the merger with the Cornigliano factory, the Ilva took the name of Italsider. These are the years of the great expansion of the plant which occupied most of the housing sites of Naples western suburbs. Furthermore, 20 hectares of sea were filled with hard materials creating the so-called “colmata”.

In the Seventies, the industry enlarged occupying 220 hectares of land and employing up to 9000 workers. In these years the iron and steel industry in Bagnoli was more and more regarded as an environmental problem. This is a turning point in the awareness of the relationship between man and nature. Politicians, labour leaders magistrates, associations such as "Italia Nostra" and some intellectuals like Antonio Iannello, who stands out from the others, denounced vehemently the serious sanitary and environmental damages caused by the industrial settlement, and contributed to create in the population an interest in these problems.

The crises which led to the factory shut down became evident during the eighties. It was not caused by environmental problems but it was the inevitable consequence of a general revision of the international production of iron and steel. In 1989 the blast furnace stopped working, and in 1993 the Italsider factory was closed down.

The Deindustrialization: from the reclamation to the reconversion

A new era started out for Bagnoli and its inhabitants once the factory shut down. Local authorities and town-planners see it as a great chance to improve environmental conditions and the quality of life. Residents are dismayed, while a deep sense of loss, uncertainty and failure spreads among workers and their families. A gradual process of loss of identity starts, but with the passing of time the inhabitants begin to think that something will be done, despite some difficulties and the need to face the speculation risks always present within an economic background more inclined to take public funds than to start out entrepreneurial activities.

In the meanwhile, the demolition of the factory was begins, followed by the land reclamation (Law of the 18th November, 1996). A company, the Bagnoli S.P.A, is set up set complete the first phase of demolition works, it will close down in 2002 to be replaced by the STU (Società di Trasformazione Urbana - Urban Transformation Company) named *Bagnolifutura*, whose shareholders are the Municipality of Naples (90%), Campania Region (7,5%) and the Province of Naples (2,5%).

This Society is in charge of the realization of the PUE (ETP - Executive Town Plan) adopted by the Municipality of Naples in 2005. Tthe ETP identifies *Bagnolifutura* Company as the right subject to carry out the transformation of the disused area, which is divided into 9 different theme areas; the project also provides the preservation of 16 buildings of industrial archeology. The most important element of this plan is the vast city park that is 120 hectares large.

The whole plan is aims at promoting tourism, services and accommodation facilities.

The purpose is the restoration of the ancient shape of the coastline, the landscape recovery, the respect of the natural environment and the improvement of its resources.

The Town Council declares its aim at giving the beauty of the places back to Naples and Bagnoli inhabitants.

As provided in the plan, the following works will be made. Only some of them have been completed so far:

- Theme area 1: the large Coroglio urban park that extend as far as the beach and includes a canal port of 350 boat moorings. As said before, the park is the heart of the whole urban transformation. It will be a vast area of green with some monuments of industrial archeology. The building of the steel plant (formerly chosen as the seat of the Music City), will be the seat of a big aquarium; the system for water decontamination of the rolling tape, now houses the “Turtle point” (the Turtle Hospital), one of the three works that have been completed so far. In addition to this works there will be a centre for audio-visual production (Napoli Film Studios), in the ex-machine shop; the Museum of Work and the Ilva Archive, now exhibition rooms, in the ex- blast furnace.
- Theme area 2: tourism equipments, hotels, tertiary sector services. Here, between via Cocchia and via Nuova Bagnoli, a modern multi-functional centre has been built, with swimming pools, solarium, fitness centre, a 300 seats conference room and a park for 600 cars. The centre has been completed, but is not working yet, only the conference room has been opened.
- Theme area 3: (the Cavalleggeri d’Aosta area): residences, production activities, University seats. The biennium of the Faculty of Engineering has been already settled.
- Theme area 4: (near the Cocchia quarter): training and research premises (by private capital), such as the Technologic Pole for the Environment, a centre for training, research and sustainable development, promoted by the Chamber of Commerce of Naples and by the Environmental Risks Competence Centre. Up to now, these are only written words.
- Theme area 5: (Via Diocleziano - Via Campegna): houses, production and commercial activities, oriented towards the improvement of the square where the new Cumana railway station will be settled.
- Theme area 6: (FS machine shops): activities for service production.
- Theme area 7: preservation of extant houses and activities.
- Theme area 8: (ex-army arsenal): extant buildings for the education.
- Theme area 9: (at the bottom of the hill of Posillipo): the Sport Park, not working yet, has been built by public funds. It is settled in a reclaimed area, now under inquiry for presumed lawlessness in the decontamination works. It is a sport pole planned to reproduce the Campi Flegrei landscape. Indoors: rugby, football and hockey fields, tennis courts, ice-skating rings, and spaces for gymnastics and athletics.

- In addition, important improvements in the transport sector have been planned in order to grant efficient connections with the transformation area. The Cumana railway will be moved under the ground, it will reach the internal part of the disused area, where three more stations will be built. The “Coroglio” station will be for the urban Park and the port, the “Cederna” station for the ex-iron and steel factory, the “Campegna” station will reach the Sport Park to converge on Campi Flegrei railway junction (line 2).

To be noted that only a very small part of the plan, areas 3 and 5 (Cavalleggeri and Diocleziano -Campegna) is for home building. At first, the 30% of total volumes was planned for public buildings and the 70% for private ones, but all the biddings called by the *Bagnolifutura* have failed so far. The market did not trust on investing on an area yet to be revalued.

Twenty years after the great factory shut-down, many delays have been accumulated, costs have arisen up and the completed works are really a few and not yet open to the public with the exception of the North Wharf (Pontile Nord) turned into a beautiful 1 km sea promenade. There you can enjoy a wonderful view, but only if you look at the sea, because on the ground behind you there is still the desolation of the landscape of the “colmata” and of the turned off chimneys.

The final stop, after so many delays, arrived on April 11, 2013, by order of Magistracy the whole disused area was confiscated, owing to suspected illegal activities in the decontamination works. The *Bagnolifutura* management, who in eight years should have valued that area by means of public bids, is now under investigation.

A failed transition?

In 2004 the environmental historian Gabriella Corona argued, “A law of the late 90s ruling the reclamation works has declared Bagnoli, together with 24 more areas, a place of national interest. This law is effective now, and regards technical aspects as well. The Ministry of environment agreed on this project.

The demolition and dismantling phases have already been completed, and the plan for the reclamation of lands and water tables has been finalized. In other words, we know the polluted substances penetration and the most polluted areas. So, why so much slowness? Where are the obstacles?” (Corona 2004).

This is the question that Bagnoli inhabitants have long been asking, one of them has expressed his state of mind, shared by many people: “the quarter of Bagnoli, its inhabitants, its ex-workers’ families are living without an identity, suspended in the emptiness. We miss the factory but we cannot see any trace of a damn future, as if we all were condemned to an eternal waiting of something that will never happen” (Galdo 2007:107).

Thus, more than ten years after the publication of *Vivevamo con le sirene* (Albrizio, Selvaggio 2001), I interviewed again some ex-Italsider workers and young inhabitants of Bagnoli.

On June 20, 2013, I met some Italsider workers in their Club, a very well kept place where many social, sports, recreational and cultural activities take place, exclusively reserved to members and their families. The ex-workers are rightly proud of this place. You feel like being in a fort where the last energies of an ancient worker aristocracy are gathered. Here people want to protect the memory of the past from dispersion and keep their own identity, where they meet and feel at home. A more precious place for those who no longer live in Bagnoli, as they were expelled by the speculations made by building societies during the deindustrialization period. The interviewees instead of talking about the present, prefer talking about the factory, the importance of work in their lives. Their job was not ordinary; it was characterized by capability and value involving an everyday challenge in their performances. They proudly care talking about their story more than explaining present days and discussing of all the promises and the pointless expected post-industrial reconversion. From the focus group a composite and coral narrative comes out. This is a sort of “collective subject” who keeps on identifying life with the productive work system of the “fordist industry”, characterized by work shifts marked by the sound of sirens, a world made of discipline, solidarity, class struggles, and the will to improve, gain rights and learn democracy.

They still feel sad for the shut-down of their factory, defined: “Highly productive and very professional” and they judge negatively the political class that decided the end of the factory. They point out their efforts during the rebuilding period to reach the highest professional standards: “We are really proud since we have proved to be highly professional”; “We were praised by an American group who declared that the steel produced in Bagnoli was one of the best in the world!”. They impute to the privatization the environment degradation and the serious risks for health suffered by the city of Taranto, where the court has recently attached the factory.

The workers think that “The national steel industry is a wreck now, because it has been undersold to Riva, Marcegaglia and Lucchini who have bought the whole state holding steel industry”. This situation put an end to those industrial disputes in Liguria, Tuscany and Bagnoli, whose “first part” dealt with the environmental conditions inside and outside the factory”.

As regards the reclamation and its partial results, (in 2012 the activities covered about the 65% of the total area), the interviewees preferred to talk about the phase they participated directly, the one of the “dismantling of the plant”, remembered as a great proof of responsibility and competence, despite the “downheartedness” of demolishing their factory.

The next phases highlights the difficulties and costs due to the extension of the area to reclaim, enlarged up to the ex-Eternit area and other sites. This had negative effects on the STU, that is “overstuffed with engineers, architects and biologists”. A further obstacle is the interference of several authorities’ competences, for instance, the “colmata” involves both the Maritime Domain and the port Authority.

Thus, we should judge the failed transition as the result of many delaying factors (see the more and more restrictive laws on environment) or of periodical stops of the works (owing to lack of funds). The disappointing result is thus due to incapacity, interests and circumstances reflecting the muddled and inefficient way of ruling.

The ex-workers cannot see any sort of future. They show a sort of hope about the prospect of a change and the tourist development of the area, but only on condition that the plan will be reconsidered without demolishing the “colmata” and giving up the idea, so loved by town-planners, of the restoration of the coastline as pictured in the nineteenth century postcards.

The future of Bagnoli seen by the “Bancarotta” group

On July 18, 2013, I interviewed the group in the ex-“Pola beach” premises, they had after their forced eviction from the former Banca Intesa site inside the disused area. They explain that their name was chosen because the premises they used at first had been once occupied by a bank, and because they want to denounce by this name that “Bagnoli has gone bankrupt”.

Their analysis is very different from the ex-Italsider workers’. On one hand, this group express a tough idea of a complete failure in the transition; on the other, they expect a better future for the quarter, only if a new development plan and a better life quality will be carried out.

“On April 17, we made a popular squat in *Bagnolifutura*, a symbolic action, to say that the company has been a failure, its existence is pointless, moreover the management will have to give reason for their behaviour and return the money, to be used for the decontamination [...] in this district people keep on falling ill, everybody here suffers the effects of the undone decontamination...” - (Domenico).

More: “To wipe out one hundred years of violence on this territory, we need the people’s participation in decisions about common welfare...”.

Therefore, they insist on the fact that popular initiatives have to be taken in order to get rid of the STU and to avoid uncontrolled privatization and emergency intervention risks: “ We founded, with other territorial associations, the committee “Bonifichiamo Bagnoli” (Decontaminate Bagnoli) which promotes meetings in public areas, marches, pickets... we discuss all issues concerning Bagnoli quarter”; Luca adds: “We must

undertake this commitment: dropping false myths and being in charge of a creation of a new type of development, without waiting for politic and authority's decisions, putting all this into practice by ourselves... ”.

New ideals of work come out, not referring to the working-class culture and memory. In Luca's view: “It is not true that work itself leads to self-awareness. this depends on the work type: the factory was built as consequence of a compromise representing a sustainable model for working-class, too... ”.

“We must create an alternative model, with the awareness that its conditions do not depend entirely on us. Nothing can be done without the decontamination [...] In my opinion an alternative model, cannot ignore what is happening all around the world, the production is changing worldwide [...] a traditional wealth production crises is on: you can build resorts, entertainment services but all this is pointless if there is not enough money circulation, [...] Thus, we have to consider how to change the old production system completely. The existing resources are partly natural (sea, hot springs, landscape) and partly the result of social activity (facilities, buildings, the know-how)... ”.

Territorial resources should be regarded as common property, beyond traditional models of production and wealth distribution: “We have now the opportunity to change these models completely, to think about self-management, new working systems and above all to create an economy not based only on goods and money exchange, but also on service, care, knowledge... ”.

At this point the loss of the factory has been a catastrophe for the workers and the problems of present days are all related to the “modus” used for reconversion.

For young generation the problem they have to face with is the failure of the completely or partially unachieved plan.

In conclusion, these questions arise: What kind of communication is possible between these different views? What do Bagnoli inhabitants think about? Will it be possible to join active forces to get out of the present situation? Will the emergency caused by the court actions, by the Città della Scienza fire (on March 4, 2013), by the release of the Nato premises, give rise to more care and warning or will it allow all the speculation attempts, prevented so far?

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