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## Table of Contents

### Articles

- Gypsy Palaces: A New Visibility for the Roma in Romania?* 3  
François Ruegg
- Symbolic Policies and Citizenship: The Case of Naples* 22  
Paola De Vivo
- On Reconstructing Buraku Leather Towns into 'Japanese National Spaces'* 42  
Flavia Cangià
- Molding of a Rite of Passage in Urban Japan: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* 61  
Melinda Papp
- Cultural Reverberations among Fukushima Radiations:  
Institutional vs Emotional Versions of the Nuclear Accident* 83  
Davide Torsello

### Discussions and Comments

- 94
- On Classical Ethnography: A Comment Inspired by Leslie Bank's  
Home, Spaces, Street Styles*  
François Ruegg
- Bosnia-Herzegovina: Connecting the Dots*  
Christian Gherasim
- Visual Approaches to Urban Ethnography*  
Lidia K.C. Manzo

### Review Article

- 103
- The Art of Making a Living in Naples*  
Wolfgang Kaltenbacher

### Book Reviews

- 110
- B. L. Read (2012), *Roots of the State: Neighborhood Organization and Social Networks in Beijing and Taipei*. Stanford: Stanford University Press  
by Christian Giordano
- M. Gordon, G. Lins Ribeiro and C. Alba Vega (eds) (2012) *Globalization from Below: The World's Other Economy*. London and New York: Routledge.  
by John Gledhill
- X. Ren (2013), *Urban China (China Today)*. Cambridge: Polity Press.  
by Luo Rumin

### Completed Doctoral Dissertations

- 120
- Urban Firewalls: Place, Space and New Technologies in Figueres, Catalonia*  
Francine Barone
- Performing the Buraku: Narratives on Culture and Everyday Life in Contemporary Japan*  
Flavia Cangià

*Ethnicity as a Capital: Construction and Mobilisation of Ethno-cultural Identity  
by Tatar Youth in Tatarstan (Russia)*

Andrea Friedli

*Mining Postsocialism: Work, Class and Ethnicity in an Estonian Mine*

Eeva Kesküla

*Life in the Shadow of the 2012 Olympics:*

*An Ethnography of the Host Borough of the London Games*

Iain Lindsay

**Research Reports**

126

*Russification in the Bay of Kotor:*

*Urbanization According to Standards of Russian Immigration*

Tamara Lepetić

*IRAM: An Innovative Research Center about Digital Issues and Contemporary Society*

Marielle Toulze

**Conference Report**

130

*Relocating Borders: a comparative approach, Berlin 11–13 January 2013*

Zdeněk Uherek

**Announcements**

134

## *Symbolic Policies and Citizenship: The Case of Naples<sup>1</sup>*

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Drawing on the theoretical framework of territorial and urban governance, this paper focuses on changes in urban policies in Naples. Based on the analysis of three policies, it argues that: 1) the City government uses the rhetoric of urban change in the city to build political consensus; 2) the construction of such rhetoric is based on the involvement of the citizens through various tools and forms of participation, in order to create legitimacy around the work of the local administration; 3) the weight of citizens' participation in the governance networks and the substantive effects of this participation is minimal; 4) the shift from the rhetoric of the announcements to the implementation of the projects and measures leads to symbolic policies that do not improve the conditions of life of the population. Three urban policies will be compared. The first policy (the Bagnoli district) was started more than twenty years ago; the second (Historical Centre) started about fifteen years ago; the third (Free Trade Zone) never started but has fuelled a very lively and interesting public debate. These are three of the most important policies adopted by the City Council, and they have all had the same outcome: a difficult implementation that has thwarted their potentiality to contribute substantially to urban change.

**Keywords:** territorial governance, urban policies, symbolic policies, citizenship.

### **Introduction**

Drawing on the theoretical framework of territorial and urban governance, this article focuses on changes in urban policies in Naples. Based on the analysis of three urban policies, it argues that: 1) the City government uses the rhetoric of urban change to build political consensus; 2) the construction of such rhetoric is based on the involvement of the citizens, through various forms of participation, in order to create legitimacy around the work of the local administration; 3) the weight of citizens' participation in the governance networks and the substantive effects of this participation is minimal; 4) the shift from the rhetoric of the

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<sup>1</sup> A first version of this work was presented at the International and Interdisciplinary Conference on 'Issues of Legitimacy: Entrepreneurial Culture, Corporate Responsibility and Urban Development' (Naples, Italy, 12-14 September 2012). This article benefits from discussion and comments at the conference and from the peer-review process and feedback from this journal's Editorial Board. The discussion is based on the results of a research programme that I have carried out on urban changes in Naples over the last ten years. The first research was on a Variation on the Regulatory Plan of the city approved by the City Council in 1998. It was based on 330 interviews carried out with residents in Bagnoli (a quarter at the periphery of Naples) concerning their expectations and levels of information about the project of urban regeneration (De Vivo 2000). I also draw on the analysis of three urban policies that I have studied over the last four years with the aim of understanding the differences between them. The research was based on the use of secondary data and documents and on thirty-five in-depth interviews with mayors, public officials and citizens.

announcements to the concrete implementation of the projects leads to symbolic policies that do not improve the conditions of life of the population.

The discussion that follows addresses the critical role played by the local institutions and citizens in the process of urban transformation and its impact on the city. The literature on the topic recognizes that the role of local government in the development of the new urban space is often direct and forceful. In this perspective, urban governance becomes a collective action based on cooperation and coordination among many actors, both ‘vertically’ and ‘horizontally’, involving, respectively, multi-layered relationships of governance (at local, national and European level) and the relations among local actors (Le Galès 2011, Mayntz 1997). Coordination among these vertical and horizontal relationships should lead to a coherent integration of responsibilities, competences and visions. This is not as straightforward as it may seem. Scholars have pointed the differences between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ way of interpreting the theoretical and practical meaning of governance and of the attending ‘dilemmas’ (Bevir 2011, Pardo and Prato 2011).

In the case of Naples, the strategic policies for the renewal of the city have not taken fully into account citizens’ needs and it is unclear who the major beneficiaries are. Naples, after Rome and Milan, is the third Italian city for number of inhabitants, just over one million people (three million in the metropolitan area). In the ranking of the Italian cities, Naples is in the lowest positions for GDP per capita and employment, and in the highest for poverty, unemployment and criminality. The city is currently in search of a new urban vision capable of overcoming its decline in recent history. In spite of a continuous supply of proposals, ideas and projects to make Naples again competitive with other Italian and European cities, the focus has become increasingly unclear and the economic revival and social development of the city remains out of sight.

The City government has offered a large number of tools to address the urban complexity and the backwardness of the economy, but the results of its political and administrative action have been limited. Also the implementation of the Strategic Plan for the city, approved in 2004 and thought of as a main tool for supporting the regeneration of different parts of the urban territory (the old centre, the port and the dismissed industrial areas), is encountering many difficulties; some projects and activities are still at the beginning stage, others are at a standstill, due to an impasse affecting the decision-making process and the bureaucratic choices necessary to implement the plan. In spite of the great potential that some proposals have to enhance the urban resources, in their implementation they encounter

serious obstacles. In the discussion that follows I will discuss why and how this happens, looking in detail to the situation on the ground. The discussion will develop as follows.

A first point that deserves attention concerns the recent advancement occurred in the field of urban policies, namely the emphasis on planning and on an integrated strategy that includes tools for social inclusion and economic growth. From a theoretical perspective, the literature on this issue brings out the potential of these tools, in the sense that they seem to provide a way to address social and economic problems (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007, Hodd 1986, Linder and Peters 1989, Bifulco and Leonardis 1997). More attention, however, needs to be paid both to the problematic of implementation process and to the adaptation of these tools to specific contexts (Burroni, Crouch and Keune 2005; Parés, Martí-Costa and Bonet-Martí 2012). Only in this way the benefits that the adoption of urban policies can bring to citizenship can be fully appreciated. I will then offer a systematic exploration of these aspects, looking at the aforementioned theoretical issues in the light of the fact that while Naples shares with many other large cities in the world problems and development opportunities, it also has distinctive characteristics that need to be taken into account.

### **Global Cities in Competition: The Role of Urban Policies**

In the light of the progress made in the field of urban studies, the first aspect that needs to be considered concerns the strength of the cities in the processes of economic and international exchange. Over the last few years, the issue of governance has gained growing attention in the theoretical framework of urban studies, and sharp analytical differences have arisen. Three main approaches can be identified: 1) one focuses on the changes that have occurred in the relationship between the national, regional and local governments; 2) a second one focuses on the growth of the role played by the European Union in the policies and decision-making of the national states; 3) a third one focuses on the process of globalization (Le Galès 2002, Robinson 2007, Sassen 2008). There is a strong interdependence between these three lines of analysis, but what is relevant are the changes in the spatial scale and the influence and the impact that these changes have on the economic processes. As a consequence of the erosion, or transformation, of state intervention, there has been a reorganization in the central and local political and administrative apparatuses (Cerase 2006). In some cases, this reorganization has produced competition between such apparatuses; in others, it has generated cooperation in the attempt to solve shared problems. Some cases have been marked by the shift from urban *managerialism* to urban *entrepreneurialism*, while, at the opposite

end, new forms of cooperation among institutional actors and policies have been observed (Harvey 1989, Sassen 2001). Moreover, the cuts in the national budgets have drastically reduced the policy-options open to regional and local governments, which are often forced to manage the resulting tensions at the local level. For instance, local and regional governments have to learn how to face the reduction of the financial resources transferred to them from the centre, and most of the time they can do so only by imposing new local taxes or by increasing the existing ones. At the same time, they have to deal with the declining quality in the supply of public services, or find ways – also drawing on resources from the private sector – to finance activities and services aimed at improving the quality of urban life. In short, the line of action of public intervention has increasingly moved toward the periphery of the administrative systems. Regional and local governments have experienced an increasing responsibility in trying to contrast the risk of fragmentation and marginality in local societies (De Vivo and Sacco 2008). For these reasons, when the national governments lose their capacity of steering and guiding the society, or see it eroded away, the cities gain a stronger role as ‘collective actors’ compared to the past.

In an attempt to protect the local interests, the urban political élite try to adjust to these processes by balancing economic and social demands; thus, policies aimed at economic development are combined with redistributive measures. Where, acting in this way, the urban political élite have succeeded in opening new opportunities for social mobility and for the well-being of the citizens, they have gained in terms of their own image. Of course, this brief outline of the new developments in urban studies does not make justice to the different contributions offered by a great number of scholars (Borraz and Le Galès 2010; Jouve 2005; Pardo and Prato eds 2012, Sassen 2008); there are, nevertheless, common points in the literature which are worth emphasizing. One of these is that in view of the decline experience by many cities, particularly in Europe, increasing attention has been paid to the revaluation and possible exploitation of the city old centres, also in cultural terms (Vicari Haddock 2004). More generally, emphasis has been put on the fact that cities are represented and perceived as the places where the most relevant social and economic infrastructures for global competitiveness are concentrated.

During the Fordism period, and under the influence of Keynesian policies, economic development was entrusted to the ability of the cities to provide adequate conditions for competitiveness: logistic spaces, structures for services, human resources and so on. For a long time urban policies failed to attract much attention — due also to the influence of a



prevailing neo-liberal political approach. Today things have changed and one main reason for the renewed attention to the role of the cities in the international relations of exchange is the expansion of the financial and telecommunication sectors and the media; that is, sectors in which innovation technology is key and needs to be continuously updated. The processes of spatial reorganization of the economy have contributed to the development of the so called 'global cities': New York, London, Paris and Tokyo are characterized by a strong capacity to attract financial investment and human resources (Sassen 2001). These capitals have reshaped the urban geography, connecting with each other through complex political, cultural and economic exchanges. Alongside the establishment of functional and international links, each city has developed a 'specific competence' in some economic field and this has led to a development based on specific sectors (like manufacturing, culture or fashion). The network that the most relevant cities of the world have built among them, as an outcome of the transaction of financial and human capital and of the exchange of products and services, provides also a frame to establish what position they occupy in the international division of production, labour and culture (Sassen 1991, 2001; Mariotto 2007). Of course, this network is also a consequence of the functioning of capitalistic development, which needs equipped spaces in order to expand. In these processes, the cities that predominate are those that have improved their competitive performance through efficient governance. These political and administrative urban élites have managed to produce an effective mix of political reforms and economic measures: on the one hand, they have actively pursued external financial investment, on the other, they have offered incentives to the development of human resources and technology. The point is, then, that the best-performing global cities have succeeded in implementing urban policies aimed at encouraging economic growth, while attracting private investment for the promotion of public programmes aimed at the renewal of the urban infrastructures. Thus, they have managed to modernize urban infrastructures and to protect urban spaces from decay. Let us now return to the Naples situation.

Although the need for an international re-launch of the city is particularly felt by its urban élite and especially by the city government, Naples plays no role in the network of global cities. This finds explanation in an approach shared by the political élites that have governed the city for the last twenty years, whereby a rhetorical and symbolic management of urban change does not translate into an improvement in the conditions of life of the population.

## **The Challenge for Naples**

How competitive can Naples be among global cities? For about twenty years many commentators have dwelled upon the policies that could address the revitalization of vast areas of the city and help overcoming its many shortcomings (the closure of industries, poverty, unemployment, criminality and so on; Cavola and Vicari 2000, Leonardi and Nanetti 2008). One expression of this political and cultural debate is the variety of proposals that have been put forward, ranging from the definition of new models of strategic planning to the reorganization of the political and administrative functions and competences of the city via the reform of the municipality; from the idea of reviewing Naples' links with its metropolitan area to idea of reconsidering Naples' relationship with the other cities in the Campania region.

The efforts of the local government have not engendered the promised development (De Vivo 2007). Opposite forces seem at work: one pushing for the advancement of the city, the other for bringing the city backward. As a consequence, the city is in a marginal position both in the international and the national ranking of large cities, while holding a predominant position in relation to the other cities in the Campania region. The predominance of Naples in the region depends on its supremacy both in terms of size – Naples is by far the most populous city of the region – and in terms of services and administrative functions. As it is, the city has to face a growing tension between the overall demands by the citizens and the poor quality of its urban infrastructures and services.

One main reason for the persistence of the opposition that I have described lies in the fact that Naples (like others southern cities) is completely cut off the network which at the national level link together the most strategic large Italian cities (Cafiero 2009). Cities like Milan, Turin and Rome are driving the national economic development and they have found – or seem determined to find – a specific cultural and economic identity in the current stage of Italian and global capitalistic development. Naples has difficulties in entering this network. The city appears unable to express a definite identity, nor does it have any specific economic characteristics. Due to the sea and its impressive historical heritage, Naples is often considered a tourist city; but at times it is also seen either as a post-industrial city or as a city still in search of industrialization. In the end, Naples appears to be a city with a big unexploited potential. As a consequence, Naples seems like running without having a precise destination in the ongoing challenge with other cities.

In this situation, the urban policies lose their effectiveness because they face a double challenge: on the one hand, the need to keep the city at the forefront of an increasingly globalized and competitive economy; on the other hand, the need to put an end to, and deal with, the consequences of the present lag. However common to most urban contexts this double challenge may be, in the case of Naples meeting it implies first of all for its political and administrative system to fill the existing gap and modernize its material and non-material infrastructure (above all through growth and investment in its human resources; Pardo 1996 and 2001). In order to meet this challenge, however, it is important to avoid the trap of turning the existing conditions into a pretext for undermining urban transformation and the search for innovative models of political and administrative action. How, then, can the city break away from this situation and how can urban policies contribute to stimulate economic development, combat social marginality and facilitate the participation of citizens in public decisions? I will try to deal with these questions in the following pages.

### **In Search of Change: Making Use of Urban Policy**

Before attempting to answer the questions that I have just raised, we need to review briefly the policies undertaken in recent years by the local government in the attempt to overcome the difficulties and the obstacles which frustrate local development. First, it must be noted that for a long time – almost twenty years – left-wing parties have been in office. This long period started in 1993 with the election of Antonio Bassolino as a mayor leading a new left-wing administration and continues today with the election of Luigi De Magistris, the winner of the last election held in 2010. The official political idea that has guided uninterruptedly local governance over this period of time is based on the involvement and participation of citizens in public life. What this means in practice is, however, not easy to explain. In brief, I note that the use of citizens' mobilization is primarily a political method and a way to create legitimacy around the action of the city government (see also Pardo 2001 and Pardo and Prato 2011). In this sense, the differences between the various City Councils that have governed the city are minimal: all the programmes for the development of the city emphasize the concept of citizens' participation. Yet, comparing the first period of Bassolino's term in office to the most recent, under De Magistris, the relevance of social mobilization and citizens' participation appears to have declined. More precisely, in spite of the emphasis he placed in his electoral campaign on wanting to spur citizens' involvement, the present mayor tends to decide on his own. The government of Antonio Bassolino lasted seven years, a

period of exceptionally long stability for a city that in the previous three decades had seen a succession of 26 different City Councils. Bassolinos's administration was initially identified with the 'renaissance' of the city and was seen as an example of 'good governance' capable of improving the quality of local life. The city government returned to play a key role in urban planning by revisiting proposals of urban innovation that had been frozen twenty years earlier and by demonstrating a new vitality.

However, it was only in 2004, under the mayor Rosa Russo Iervolino, that the City Council approved the Strategic Plan for Naples, while elsewhere similar plans had been adopted much earlier (for example, in 1988 in Barcelona; in the second half of the 1990s in other Italian cities). Strategic planning can be seen as a new form of urban governance that is needed to manage a growing special complexity in the context of global competition and of the new challenges cities have to meet. In the case of Naples, the city plan included main projects such as the regeneration of the dismissed industrial areas, the revaluation of the city centre and the modernization of the port area. They were all thought of as a way to reverse the negative image of the city. The strategy also included new institutional instruments, such as the Urban Free Zone; that is, the delimitation of an area allowed to have a special system of low taxation and which is set up by the national government with the aim of attracting international investment and promoting occupation and social inclusion. If all these projects and instruments had been put into practice, Naples would have probably become more attractive in terms of economic competition, sustainable environment and quality of social life. Instead, as the review of two examples of urban policies included in the strategic plan – the renewal of the Bagnoli district<sup>2</sup> and of the Historical Centre – and the attempt to adopt the Urban Free Zone in delimited areas of the city will soon show, the difficulties that the City government met during the process of implementation undermined their potentiality for urban innovation.

There is a good reason for comparing these three urban policies in that the first project, pertaining Bagnoli, was started more than twenty years ago, the second (pertaining the Historical Centre) was started about fifteen years ago and the third (the Free Trade Zone) never actually started, even though it has fuelled a very lively and interesting public debate. In essence, these are three of the most important policies adopted by the City Council, and they have all had the same outcome: a difficult implementation that has thwarted their potentiality for urban change. Interestingly, for all three policies the method used to achieve

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<sup>2</sup> Bagnoli is a municipality at the immediate Northern periphery of Naples.

the strategic objectives was based on the negotiation of local interests. The city administration, as the main public actor involved, should have acted as coordinator between the private and other public parties involved and should have facilitated forms of participation and the active involvement of the citizenry.

### **The Urban Renewal of a Dismissed Industrial Area**

The first policy addressed the urban renewal of the dismissed industrial area of Bagnoli. Public intervention in the urban regeneration of this area began about twenty years ago but, to date, remains incomplete. The area was characterized by the presence of a big steel plant, established at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The plant was located in one of the most beautiful spots in the gulf of Naples. In 1992, after many vicissitudes, it switched off its chimneys.

The de-industrialized area of Bagnoli extends for 340 hectares, making it the largest urban void in Europe. In 2012, after twenty years, the first public work financed jointly by the municipality, the region and the European Union actually started. After so many years, then, something is finally being done in an area considered strategic for the development of Naples. Two key questions are: *What to do with the district of Bagnoli?* Or better, *What should it become?* Linked to the wider national and international debate on how to deal with urban voids, the projects that purported to offer answers to these questions have generated endless discussions locally. The urban redevelopment of the extensive portion of coastline of Bagnoli has been seen by many as a unique opportunity for the revival of Naples and its image. Indeed — like in many other brownfield sites — the recovery of the environmental quality of the area, which was heavily compromised, directly and indirectly, by the presence of the Italsider steel plant, is not only meant to promote its tourist development but also provide a most suitable location for research activities related to advanced industry.

However strategic, the renewal of Bagnoli appeared to encourage a new development path for the city. Yet, its implementation sparked bitter conflict among the different actors and interests at stake, resulting in endless confrontations. To name only a few, building contractors and organized crime groups behind them started to exert pressure to secure procurement contracts related to the implementation of the project; the public institutions variously involved became quarrelsome about the volumes of the construction of the new

buildings; for a long time the central government froze the funds for the recovery of the soil occupied by the Italsider plant (about 81% of the total industrial soil).

Going back to the questions, what kind of development, what kind of renewal one notes that reclaiming an abandoned area means, in the words of some actors whom I interviewed, starting with the reclamation of the soil and then proceeding to reclaim the whole local environment (De Vivo 2000). The aim is to move toward a green city well embedded in a broader process of sustainable development. This idea was originally expressed in the variation to the Plan Controller presented in 1999 by the City Council, and adopted at the beginning of 2001. Undoubtedly, the environmental cause has its reasons: Naples needs to regain environmental quality through the re-naturalization of its territory for, here, the ratio population/green in the city is the lowest in Italy. Thus, although neo-industrialization and the consequent growth of employment is an urgent need, the idea of making Bagnoli a tourist area, also including a technology park, is widely shared by the citizenry. The pace and the extent of change pose interesting problems. Projects of urban renewal like this require huge financial investment and far-reaching actions that cannot be supported by a single entity; they call for new organizational decision-making mechanisms, new operating tools to reach consensus and to bring together the interests of different actors. Since the presentation of the project concerning Bagnoli, the City Council has placed great emphasis on its willingness to rely on the active participation of citizens in every phase of the project. This stand was heavily broadcast through press releases, announcements and information campaigns. The results are, however, contradictory. A first issue that needs attention concerns the apparent contrast between a good level of information to the public about both the elements of the project and its promoters and the citizens' little involvement in activities related in its formulation and implementation. As a local man in his late 50s said to me, 'this year, a lot of politicians have come to Bagnoli during the electoral campaign and they all illustrate to us the same project; so we have understood everything about the issue of re-generation, but after twenty years we wonder when and how the project will be completed. I think never'.

Information is not the only factor that can drive citizens to participate. Participation can be more strongly stimulated by the mobilization of local associations. The willingness of the City government to engage the local community in the redevelopment of Bagnoli extends to the involvement of groups and associations, the assumption being that they could serve as a link between civil society and the public sphere. Groups and associations could serve as a

point of collection and dissemination of information, thus facilitating communication, contributing to a better understanding of the issues and providing a framework within which members could find an explanation and make sense of the process involving them. As the bearers of organized interests, groups and associations could influence the opinions and preferences of their members and contribute to consensus-building. Yet, the associations do not seem to produce these results, nor do they seem to have much influence on the participation of their members and of the citizens in general in the activities related to the implementation of the project. In the end, their impact in mobilizing and organizing the participation of citizens has been weak. The restoration project of the area is currently managed by the Urban Transformation Society (STU) 'Bagnolifutura', which was established in 2002; local authorities (predominantly the City of Naples) are the major stockholders, but a small proportion of private stockholders are also involved. However, the main institutional actors responsible for the actual implementation of the plan, the City Council and the STU, are unable to overcome the negative attitude of the citizenry, based on previous experience. The view is widespread, across the local community, that the work of the local institutions is an additional constraint to the advancement of the development path outlined above, as opposed to being a stimulus for its realization. During a meeting organized about ten years ago by the municipality of Bagnoli, an old man, who had been a worker of the steel plant, gave a speech about the bad condition of the territory and of the life of residents. He was very angry and at the end of his speech, he said to the participants 'I think that I'll die before something will change in Bagnoli. The true problem of Bagnoli are the politicians, not the lack of financial resources'. A few months ago I met the son of this man, who was then unemployed. He recalled the words of his father, remarking that he did indeed die without having seen any change in Bagnoli. The changes brought about by deindustrialization have, on the other hand, generated hardships for lower social classes, and the future prospects of the area have influenced the housing market making house prices rise dramatically.

So, the urban policy pertaining Bagnoli is still far from having been implemented and, after countless announcements about the change it would bring, local people's living and working conditions have not improved, instead they have worsened. A most critical point is that citizens' participation has badly weakened. The promises made by the various municipal councils about the change that would be brought about by the closure of the plant are now seen as empty rhetoric, a view that also applies to the urban policy concerning the historical

centre. Although the actors involved are partly different, the results appear to be the same: empty rhetoric and no substantial change.

### **The Regeneration of the Historical Centre**

Much has been written on the Historical Centre of Naples, the most frequent target of local government interventions. Here I will focus on a few key issues. The fact that in 1995 the Historical Centre was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site implies that its protection must be internationally accountable. The traditional perimeter of the Historical Centre includes both the districts of the Aragonese city protected by UNESCO (720 hectares) and those derived by the Variant of Safeguard of the territory approved by the City government in 1996 as a modification of the regulatory Plan of 1972, which covers an area of about 1972 hectares. The first delimitation (Piano Regolatore 1972) included, in whole or in part, 12 of the 30 districts of Naples. In spite of the interventions implemented during the nineteenth-century, these districts have remained almost unchanged. The districts have lost part of their population due to the process of decentralization experienced by Naples since the 1990s. Between 1981 and 2001, the historic centre lost more than a quarter of its population in favour, first, of the suburbs and, then, of suburban areas at the periphery. Just under 320,000 inhabitants live now in this part of the city (about 30% of the total population, as opposed to almost 70% in 1951).

As is the case with many other world metropolises, in this relatively small area are concentrated the city's core economic and cultural activities: the University, important commercial activities and more than half of the services of the entire city. However, the commercial vocation of the old centre is counterbalanced by the reduction of manufacturing activities, especially along the waterfront (just under 20% of residents are employed in the industry, 20% work in commercial activities and over 50% work in the tertiary sector). The districts of the old centre can be grouped in two categories. On the one hand, those with a predominance of professional groups, attracted by gentrification; on the other hand, the oldest neighbourhoods, marked by the deterioration of housing and by economic decline. The City government has attempted to improve the economic, urban and social conditions of the historic centre through various plans and programmes. Last among these measures is the Urban Integrated Programme, involving 80% of the area declared by UNESCO as an historical site. The best known, however, are the Urban Project and the Project Siren. The



first is a programme aimed at redeveloping a specific area, the Spanish Quarters,<sup>3</sup> with the aim of improving the overall housing, social and health conditions. In 2002, the City Council started the consortium Si.Re.Na,<sup>4</sup> a large project for the restoration of private housing, based on concerted actions between citizens and construction companies. The programme was supposed to give an impetus to reclaiming the historical and cultural heritage through triggering a sort of spontaneous regeneration based on the self-organization of local private actors. The Naples Integrated Programme operates along similar lines focusing on ‘Great Cultural Attractions’ financed by the European Union structural funds through the Regional Operational Plan. This programme includes many projects which also affect places of worship.

A public servant working for the Campania Region remarked, ‘the Naples Integrated Programme “Great Cultural Attractions” isn’t simply a document; it is an agreement between the actors involved in it. At this time, I believe that there isn’t a correct perception of what they have to do all together. Where is the sharing? Each actor is isolated and doesn’t want to work with the others. The actors don’t trust each other’. A dealer in religious goods stated, ‘private actors don’t risk their own financial resources...They wait and wait, without taking any kind of initiative. They always want public money. We need private actors to change their mind-set’.

Also in this case bitter conflicts arose among different public institutions, which was compounded by the fact that the requirements for the conservation of historical monuments collide with those for modernization. In the end, the measures undertaken by the City administration fell short of the expectations that it had fostered. This was also due to the lack of an effective communication policy on the part of the administration, as well as to its inability to mobilize the residents in taking an active role in carrying out the project.

The story of the redevelopment of the historical centre and the difficulties inherent in the process of change that it implies provides clear evidence of how the thrust toward change can be thwarted by entrenched social ties and connections. The map of these relationships that comes to light gives a good idea of the local order they produce, and of the influence that this order exercises on what happens in the area. Formally, employers, trade unions, local parties, local government, environmental groups and individual citizens are all part of the

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<sup>3</sup> This area is known for its high presence of organized crime.

<sup>4</sup> Company for recovery initiatives of Naples established in 2001 by the City of Naples and by the Association of Builders of the Province of Naples.

network around which the process of transformation of the town can be built. However, this key point is that within this order not all actors have the same weight and power. The resources and interests involved are quite different. For the business component, for example, the main interest is to secure as much financial resources as possible; instead, interest-groups such as trade unions and political parties aim mainly at enforcing consultation mechanisms in order to protect the interests of the groups that they represent; the objective pursued by public actors appears more complex, in so much as their task usually consists in reconciling limited organizational, economic and financial resources with the need to mediate the demands of the different actors involved; from the start, environmental groups tend to be mainly engaged in trying to ensure environmental sustainability; finally, citizens as a collective subject turn to one or to the other party involved according to their motivations and demands. This gives a sense of the complexity of the network generated by the ties that connect the actors involved in the renewal plan; even more complex is the task of the local administration in trying to ‘construct’ and manage a virtuous decision-making process. This is not to say that the actors involved cannot establish cooperative relationships aimed at the advancement of the plan, but this depends on the extent to which they are able to influence the dynamics of the different demands elicited by the renewal plan, drawing on their material, ideological, political and cultural resources, as well as on their actual participation and involvement. To sum up, whether the network structure generated by the plan will provide a basis for its effective enactment is an open question. Given that such a structure is both socially constructed and contingent, it depends on how it is managed. The City government can play a key role in so far as it is able both to mediate the different interests at stake and to enforce ‘rules of the game’ to which all actors must abide to. A review of the implementation of the plan highlighted, however, that also in this case the city administration was unable to mobilize citizens’ participation and that the impact of the plan on the territory turned out to be minimal.

In spite of so many programmes, a real process of recovery of the historical centre has never taken off. Unsurprisingly, UNESCO has repeatedly reprimanded the City Council for the bad condition in which the historical centre still is. Moreover, the various local actors involved in their implementation lacked the capacity to coordinate and negotiate among themselves. Let us now look at the Urban Free Zone which, unlike the two policies examined above, requires constant mobilization.

## The Urban Free Zone

To start with, it is important to explore the logic that has inspired and guided the establishment of Urban Free Zone,<sup>5</sup> a legislative instrument particularly suitable to supporting the economic and social disadvantaged groups living in Naples. Its main objective is to combine environmental concerns and urban development with economic growth and social integration. There are at least three reasons to pay attention to this project, as it takes into account lessons learned from previous territorial policies experimented elsewhere. The first is that its implementation has produced positive outcomes in urban areas (for example in France) that were facing social and economic challenges not unlike those in Naples. The second is that it addresses the issue of tax benefits, leaving behind the option of direct and automatic incentives to the enterprises, and trying to boost the international role of the city by capturing foreign investment. The third refers to the construction of social and institutional practices for the implementation of development programmes. Comparatively, the French experiment remains a milestone, although also other countries have implemented similar programmes. Here it will be useful to mention the urban transformation processes occurred in specific disadvantaged French towns, because their socio-economic conditions are similar to those of parts of Naples (De Vivo 2007). Introduced in France at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the ‘Urban Zones’ are one piece of the larger mosaic of urban policies best known as *Politique de la Ville*. The Urban Zones policy was conceived to address social exclusion and urban segregation, and is an appropriate mix of interventions for housing renovation, of support programmes in the economic, social and employment fields, of programmes aimed at encouraging the local people’s mobilization and participation in social life and of programmes aimed at containing the phenomenon of school dropout among young people. A strategy of integrated action has achieved the intended objectives striking a good balance between public and private expenditure, investments and initiatives. In light of the French case, then, the question arises, is it possible to replicate an experiment of this nature in Naples? In spite of the emphasis that the Naples City government put on it – ‘The Urban Free Zone will re-launch Naples in the world’, the mayor of the city declared to a journalist. The project never went beyond the announcement stage. Yet, citizens have been involved in forums that have debated its contents.

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<sup>5</sup> The measure adopted by the national government through the Finance Act of 2007 (L.296/2006), confirmed by the law 244/2008, assigned 50 million Euros for the Urban Free Zones but has not yet been implemented, despite a myriad announcements and changes.

In the case of the Urban Free Zone, it is also important to consider the role played by the national government, which used this project as a tool to divert attention from weak public intervention in the South. In Italy, the central government has pledged to make available financial public resources to address the social and financial hardship that characterize the southern cities, with a focus on their slum areas. But an effective overall plan is still lacking.

As in the French case, the Urban Free Zone could have a positive impact on the revitalization of public and private investment in Naples. However, since it was conceived as a possible solution to the problems of a limited part of the city, it cannot serve to overcome the overall shortcomings that besiege Naples. The socio-economic problems besetting the city are deeply entrenched in its past and recent history: organized and widespread crime, de-skilling and impoverishment of human resources, lack of private investment, low interest of banks to finance private development projects and to participate in the financing of public infrastructures. Furthermore, in an over-populated city with an urgent need for an overall urban restructuring, it is difficult to find suitable space for new industrial plants. The zoning restrictions imposed by the regulatory plan — as well as those pertaining the preservation of the historical and environmental heritage and those stemming from a web of bureaucratic licensing and permits — are formally so strict that the possibility of finding rapidly a suitable space for new economic enterprises is practically nil. In France, a ‘consensual urbanism’ was promoted in order to avoid these predictable obstacles. This practice consists in an ongoing consultation between public and private entities involved in the programme of urban renewal which has allowed to reach agreements with maximum flexibility and to use the planning instruments in order to respond effectively to the demands of the community. Finally, the interest raised by this tool is explained mainly with the success it has had in France; in Naples, however, due also to regulatory uncertainties generated at the national level, it never took off. It became, instead, part of an intense political communication strategy. For several months a public debate — involving politicians, scholars and citizens — went on, highlighting the relevance of this initiative for the international revival of Naples. To date, it is not yet clear whether and how the Urban Free Zone will become effective. Meanwhile, Naples continues to be excluded from the international trade exchanges among global cities, and its citizens continue to be deluded that the change occurred in France could happen in their city.

## **A Blocked City**

As we have seen, the three policies that I have examined have basically had discouraging outcomes. In the last twenty years the left-wing parties that have governed Naples have outspokenly pursued a model of cooperation between the public and private spheres and, above all, have sought citizens' involvement in public choice. The question is whether they mastered the necessary resources. Considering the many negative factors that hold back the city and frustrate entrepreneurial initiative, the question to be asked is whether it is possible to escape the straightjacket of the starting conditions in pursuing urban policies. The role played by the European Union and by the Italian government apart, a positive answer to this question implies focusing on the role of the City government. So far, through strategic planning, it has adopted a systemic approach to urban policy. It could perhaps achieve more by implementing the urban zone device for, thus, it might foster the separation between the long-term mission of city planning (whereby the city is seen as a single entity) and a short to medium term strategy aimed at programming, managing and monitoring the achievement of specific objectives. Paradoxically, the vision that looks at the city in all its complexity has to face all the urban problems at once, and this ends up hindering rather than facilitating the task of an overall urban renewal. The five quadrants in which Naples is divided by the Strategic Plan — Western, Northern, Eastern, Historical Centre and Waterfront — reflect clearly the vision of the City government, centred on the regeneration of the peripheral areas and the re-launch of their competitiveness. Yet, despite the effort to systematize and redefine the frame of the city, the starting priorities and the criteria and indicators selected to orient public choice appear inadequate. Even where the city government started a programme of urban regeneration — like in the Bagnoli district or in the Historical Centre — after many years the results have been minimal. In both cases, the time schedule and the allocation of financial resources for specific work seem to be dictated more by emergency considerations than by a planned strategy with precise and targeted goals. Moreover, the choice to work simultaneously in more than one direction raises the issue of substantial financial and organizational costs. This situation is further exacerbated by a weak formal monitoring of the work to be done. The limit of this approach lies in the fact that the City government underestimates the complexity of managing and implementing an overall urban renewal and overestimates the organizational capacity of its administrative machine. A selective method of intervention, based on measures aimed at given areas of the city and engaging its residents in public choice, may be more effective. A sort of 'microsurgery' operations in the treatment

of the urban problems might well be appropriate. Thus, the City government would be better equipped to keep a close eye on specific programmes and monitor their implementation. Moreover, thus the accountability of the measures undertaken would be enhanced.

Past experience shows that building consensus among public institutions is particularly difficult in Naples. This difficulty has contributed considerably to the disappointing performance of the policies examined above. However, it is also clear that the other actors involved – associations, citizens and so on – have to learn how to perform differently from the past. The implementation of integrated policies needs the active participation of the many components that structure Neapolitan society, opening the road to an urban regeneration which will benefit the entire community rather than those of limited groups. However difficult it may be, developing new modes and rules of interaction between government and civil society is a main step in that direction.

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