

Networks Cultivating Values: Insights from Five Culture-based Regeneration Projects in Italy

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This contribution aims at improving the understanding of the conditions and dynamics that facilitate processes of culture-based urban regeneration via social innovation. It presents and discusses the outcomes of an in-depth investigation of five projects taking place in large cities in Italy dealing with the reuse and regeneration of urban spaces through creative and innovative practices. Research findings demonstrate the centrality of the network dimension in sustaining and shaping processes of urban regeneration through social innovation and cultural production. Networks are led by social entrepreneurs having a strong territorial focus that “cultivate” new values for the local community by reusing and mobilizing publicly owned vacant or abandoned material assets.

Introduction

Urban regeneration using culture in its broad sense has long emerged as a key feature of our cities. Several scholars highlighted that culture-based regeneration is crucial for the economic success of urban areas.¹ Alongside the large-scale and top-down development projects with cultural facilities, infrastructures and events having a central role, the past decades have seen the proliferation of small-scale cultural actions involving grassroots and community creative groups, that have framed arts and culture as catalysts for widening the usage of local amenities as well as for animating and/or revitalizing deprived urban neighborhoods. This has obviously given rise to tensions between top-down and bottom-up cultural initiatives that have pushed local administrations and policymakers to address critical issues but also to integrate culture into local plans and strategies.²

Among the benefits generated by small-scale cultural practices, the capacity to sustain urban regeneration processes through the reconfiguration of social networks, the socio-political mobilization of marginalized groups, and the co-

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1. Among the many: Florida R (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, New York: Basic Books; Pratt A (2010), Creative cities: Tensions within and between social, cultural and economic development: A critical reading of the UK experience. *City, Culture and Society* 1(1): 13-20.

2. Tallon A (2013) *Urban regeneration in the UK*. London: Routledge; Grodach C (2013) Cultural Economy Planning in Creative Cities: Discourse and Practice. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37(5): 1747-1765.

production of activities and services is emphasized by some authors.³ Due to its attempt to achieve responses to unmet social needs, strengthen empowerment and increase collective efficacy, community involvement in culture-based urban regeneration has often resulted in the emergence of social innovation (SI).

Within this framework, this contribution aims at improving the understanding of the conditions and dynamics that facilitate processes of culture-based urban regeneration *via* SI. It presents and discusses the outcomes of an in-depth investigation of five projects taking place in large cities in Italy dealing with the reuse and regeneration of urban spaces *via* creative and innovative practices. Research findings demonstrate the centrality of the network dimension in sustaining and shaping processes of urban regeneration through SI and cultural production. Networks are led by social entrepreneurs having a strong territorial focus that “cultivate” new values for the local community by reusing and mobilizing publicly owned vacant or abandoned material assets.

The contribution includes four sections. The first section presents an overview of the concepts of urban regeneration, social innovation and cultural production, and discusses some implications present in the debate. The second section highlights the research methodology and briefly introduces the study cases under investigation. In the third section, the research findings are presented with a specific emphasis on the profile of actor(s) promoting the projects, the type, size and ownerships of the assets involved and their forms of mobilization, the management procedures and regulations and the relationships with the municipality. The article ends with a discussion of the findings and some concluding remarks.

Theoretical Framework

Several scholars highlighted that the concept of SI can be considered a productive field for urban regeneration.⁴ Reasons lie in the increasing recognition that SI initiatives often produce a range of socio-spatial benefits that can improve urban areas and neighborhoods, helping to contrast dynamics of social exclusion, spatial segregation, and material decay.⁵ Despite remaining a suspicious concept

3. Ostanel E (2017) Urban regeneration and social innovation: the role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua, Italy. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 11(1): 79-91; Cerreta M, Daldanise G, Sposito S (2018) Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action, *Urbani Izziv* 29 S. 9-28; Baraldi S, Salone C (2022) Building on decay: urban regeneration and social entrepreneurship in Italy through culture and the arts. *European Planning Studies* 30(10): 2102-2121.

4. Vicari S, Moulaert F (2009) *Rigenerare la città*. Bologna: Il Mulino; Moulaert F, MacCallum D, Mehmood A, Hamdouch A (2013) *The international handbook on social innovation, Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research*. UK: Edward Elgar; Ostanel E (2017) Urban regeneration and social innovation: the role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua, Italy. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 11(1): 79-91.

5. Phillis J A, Deiglmeier K, Miller Dale T (2008) Rediscovering social innovation. *Stanford social innovation review* 6(4): 34-43; Cajaiba-Santana G (2013) Social innovation: Moving the field forward. A conceptual framework. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 82(1): 42-51; Ionescu C (2015) About the conceptualization of social innovation. *Theoretical & Applied Economics*, 22(3): 53-62.

in the eye of many due to its uncertain and vague demarcation⁶ and the uncritical view – still dominant in the debate – that its broad effects are necessarily good,⁷ SI has been frequently framed in a context of scarcity of public resources and private investments, as a possible, quick-fix and low-cost solution to contemporary economic, social, and spatial challenges that characterize urban.⁸ Ostanel⁹ pointed out that in the past two decades, the intervention of the State in deprived and low-income neighborhoods has progressively diminished due to financial crisis and austerity politics, which have produced also significant retrenchment dynamics in local welfare systems. While this process has resulted in creating limitations to the exercise of *social citizenship* (widening the gap between social needs and service providers and challenging the quality of local welfare supply),¹⁰ at the same time a variegated wave of new ideas, projects, and initiatives initiated by citizens, young professionals and community groups has emerged in different urban neighborhoods in European cities and abroad. The interesting point is that many of these initiatives, while responding to unmet social needs, empowering specific social groups, and modifying social relationships in the light of social justice and cohesion, have also sustained and promoted relevant processes of regeneration and revitalization of the existing material legacy.¹¹

There is wide evidence in the debate that space is a critical dimension for the emergence of social innovation.¹² SI initiatives often take place in a physical space that is empty, available, functionally flexible and that can be easily mobilized for hosting new activities. Thus, the significant role that SI has for urban regeneration depends on the presence of a stock of underused, unsold, or abandoned material

6. Mulgan G (2006) The process of social innovation. *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization* 1(2): 145-162; Bragaglia F (2020) Social innovation as a ‘magic concept’ for policy-makers and its implications for urban governance. *Planning Theory* 1-19; Dobay KM (2021) Social innovation and rural development. Two longitudinal case studies from the North-East Romania. *Agricultural Economics and Rural Development, New Series, Year XVIII* 1: 109-129.

7. Brandsen T, Evers A, Cattacin S, Zimmer A (2016) Social Innovation: A Sympathetic and Critical Interpretation. In Brandsen T, Cattacin S, Evers A, Zimmer A (eds) *Social Innovations in the Urban Context. Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies*. Cham: Springer.

8. Bragaglia F (2020) Social innovation as a ‘magic concept’ for policy-makers and its implications for urban governance. *Planning Theory* 1-19.

9. Ostanel E (2017) Urban regeneration and social innovation: the role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua, Italy. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 11(1): 79-91.

10. Martinelli F (2012) Social Innovation or Social Exclusion? Innovating Social Services in the Context of a Retrenching Welfare State. In: Franz HW, Hochgerner J, Howaldt J (eds) *Challenge Social Innovation. Potentials for business, social entrepreneurship, welfare and civil society*, Berlin: Springer Verlag, pp. 169-180.

11. Brandsen T, Cattacin S, Evers A, Zimmer A (2016) (Eds.) *Social innovations in the Urban Context. Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies*. Cham: Springer.

12. Among the many: Brignone L, Cellamare C, Gissara M, Montillo F, Olcuire S, Simoncini S (2022) Social Innovation or Societal Change? Rethinking Innovation in Bottom-Up Transformation Processes Starting from Three Cases in Rome’s Suburbs. In Calabrò F, Della Spina L, Piñeira Mantiñán MJ (eds) *New Metropolitan Perspectives. NMP 2022. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems*, vol 482. Cham: Springer, pp. 483-493; Ostanel E (2017) *Spazi fuori dal comune. Rigenerare, includere, innovare*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

assets, that can be readapted to new uses with relatively low effort and resources.¹³ Abandoned properties can be transformed into *commons* that public administration can grant to whoever has the capabilities to initiate a socially innovative project.¹⁴ According to Mangialardo and Micelli,¹⁵ this revitalization process has produced a paradigmatic change in our cities which is both content and process related. The aim is no longer to extract financial rent from properties but to experiment with new forms of economic and social development. Moreover, this change has pushed local authorities to formulate new legal frameworks for the use of public assets by community groups that have allowed to explicit the legal conditions, the arrangements and the resources needed for a public property to become a support for SI.

As far as the process dimension is concerned, Ostanel¹⁶ underlines that SI projects can push toward the creation of innovative multi-level governance arenas that may help to overcome the policy *silo* approach by which local administrations usually approach urban regeneration, promoting institutional learning, and innovating regeneration policies. In other words, SI possesses a tension that can work to overcome the idea of urban regeneration as a comprehensive and top-down approach of public policies leading to the resolution of urban problems through sectoral interventions,¹⁷ toward a more critical and pragmatic interpretation. Urban regeneration can thus be interpreted not only as a large-scale and public sector-driven redevelopment approach focused on economic growth and property development,¹⁸ but rather as an incremental bottom-linked governance process¹⁹ that can trigger an incremental socio-spatial change in the existing urban fabric, modifying social relations between individuals and groups. In this vein, bottom-linked governance can be seen both as an outcome of urban regeneration and a socially innovative space of action where the local community's effort toward addressing regeneration challenges can be channeled.²⁰

13. Cerreta M, Daldanise G, Sposito S (2018) Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action, *Urbani Izziv* 29 S. 9-28.

14. Soma K, Vatn A (2014) Representing the common goods: Stakeholders vs. citizens. *Land Use Policy* 41: 325-333.

15. Mangialardo A, Micelli E (2017) From sources of financial value to commons: Emerging policies for enhancing public real-estate assets in Italy. *Papers in Regional Science* 97(4): 1397-1408.

16. Ostanel E (2017) Urban regeneration and social innovation: the role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua, Italy. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 11(1): 79-91.

17. Figueiredo I, Prim MA, Dandolini G (2022) Urban regeneration in the light of social innovation: A systematic integrative literature review. *Land Use Policy* 113: 105873.

18. Tallon A (2013) *Urban regeneration in the UK*. London: Routledge.

19. Mehmood A (2016) Institutional forms of social innovation. *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development*, 10(3): 300-311; Castro-Arce K, Vanclay F (2020) Transformative social innovation for sustainable rural development: An analytical framework to assist community-based initiatives. *Journal of Rural Studies* 74, 45-54.

20. Moulart F, MacCallum D, Van den Broeck P, García M (2019) Bottom-linked governance and socially innovative political transformation. In Schröder A, Kaletka C, Howaldt J, Zirngiebl M (eds) *Atlas of Social Innovation - A World of New Practices*. München: Oekom verlag, 62-66.

Culture is by no doubt an important driver for SI initiatives to trigger urban regeneration.²¹ Cerreta et al.²² describe two relevant aspects in relation to the creative and SI practices linking culture and urban regeneration. The first concerns the generation of complex values of places, considering value as a multifaceted output of culture-led regeneration that comprises various tangible and intangible dimensions (spatial, economic, social, environmental). The second is the creation of complex values networks, which means that the presence of networks rooted in a locality contributes to shape the system of values itself and create complementary relationships between its different dimensions.

The network dimension is emphasized also by Tricarico et al.²³ who use the term “platform spaces” to refer to “the cultural and creative spaces where social innovation plays a key role in community engagement activities as well as generating horizontal/collaborative interactions among different stakeholders and their interests while aligning with territorial development targets”. The main point is to consider platform spaces as the outcome of a growing role of SI and culture within urban regeneration and territorial development approaches. Following this view, platform spaces can act as real engines for the regeneration of private spaces and public services where community groups are interpreted not as a mere end-user of the process but as activators (of spaces) and connectors (of actors and resources) in the revitalization of vulnerable urban neighborhoods.²⁴ Hence, platform spaces have the potential to enhance the synergistic effect of culture-led regeneration processes, working both on mobilizing latent resources, generating new values, and on strengthening existing (or shaping new) networks according to an interactive growth process.²⁵

Methodology

The five projects investigated belong to the 2017 and 2018 editions of *Culturability*, a call promoted and funded by Fondazione Unipolis. Unipolis is an enterprise foundation operating in Italy since 2007 whose work is oriented to the cultural, social, and civic growth of local communities, with a specific commitment to wellbeing, culture, and mobility as the three axes shaping the Foundation’s

21. Campagnari F, Micelli E, Ostanel E (2022) Culture Leading to Urban Regeneration. Empirical Evidence from Some Italian Funding Programs. In Calabrò F, Della Spina L, Piñeira Mantiñán MJ (eds) *New Metropolitan Perspectives. NMP 2022. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems*, vol 482. Cham: Springer; Baraldi S, Salone C (2022) Building on decay: urban regeneration and social entrepreneurship in Italy through culture and the arts. *European Planning Studies* 30(10): 2102-2121.

22. Cerreta M, Daldanise G, Sposito S (2018) Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action, *Urbani Izziv* 29 S. 9-28.

23. Tricarico L, Jones ZM, Daldanise G (2020) Platform Spaces: When culture and the arts intersect territorial development and social innovation, a view from the Italian context. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44(4-5): 1-22.

24. Ostanel E (2017) Urban regeneration and social innovation: the role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua, Italy. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 11(1): 79-91.

25. Cerreta M, Daldanise G, Sposito S (2018) Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action, *Urbani Izziv* 29 S. 9-28.

strategy toward long-term sustainability. The objective of the Call, whose first edition was launched in 2009 and that in the past ten years has significantly evolved in terms of mission and objectives),²⁶ is to support ideas and projects conceived by third-sector organizations contributing to the creation of new spaces where culture generates processes of community activation, empowerment, and cohesion. The Foundation supports the projects selected not only through a monetary contribution, but also through the establishment of an enabling and collaborative process, which consists in the provision of skills of its dedicated staff, and in the creation of relationships and partnerships with the aim to create synergies between the projects. While the first edition of the Call was oriented to promote the creation of new cultural and creative enterprises promoted by young entrepreneurs, since its second edition the Call is aimed at supporting new cultural hybrid centers born through bottom-up regeneration processes.

The selection of the five projects (Table 1) is based on the willingness to analyze, under a comparative lens, initiatives of urban regeneration *via* social innovation and cultural production located in large cities in Italy (Torino, Bologna, Bari, Palermo, Prato). We decided to focus, respectively, on Italy as this is the domestic context which we are most familiar with, and on large cities as we believe that our research can contribute to the debate on the conditions and dynamics that facilitate processes of urban regeneration *via* social innovation and cultural production in urban and metropolitan areas. More research is thus needed to explore the role of culture and SI in regenerating rural and inner peripheral contexts.

Table 1. Background Information of the Five Projects under Investigation

Case-study	Edition of Culturability	Location	Promoter	Other actors involved
1. Lottozero, textile laboratories	2017	Industrial neighborhood, Prato.	A non-profit cooperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art and craft schools • professional associations • municipality • local museum and fab-lab
2. MET Meticceria Extrartistica Trasversale	2017	Peripheral neighborhood, Bologna.	A social promotion association (APS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipality • Academy of Fine Arts • university • music school • international networks in the field of performing arts
3. Imbarchino, uno spazio per vivere la cultura	2018	River bank in a public park, Turin.	A cultural association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipality • Conservatory • local cultural associations and social cooperatives • local health company
4. Spazio 13	2018	Central neighborhood, Bari.	A temporary association formed by 12 associations and 2 innovative start-ups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipality • Academy of fine arts • cultural and social associations operating in the neighborhood
5. Spazio Franco	2018	A former industrial area, Palermo.	A temporary organization formed by 4 cultural associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipality • cultural and neighborhood associations • migrants association

26. Franceschinelli R (2021, ed) *Spazi del possibile. I nuovi luoghi della cultura e le opportunità della rigenerazione*. Milan: Franco Angeli.

In the selection, we also adopted the criterion that at the time of submission to the Call the projects should have been already in an advanced state of development and generated significant impacts in the regeneration of the spatial capital.²⁷ In particular, two projects were presented in the 2017 edition of *Culturability* (“Lottozero textile laboratories” in Prato and the “Meticceria Extrartistica Trasversale” hereafter “MET” in Bologna) and the other three in the 2018 edition (the “Imbarchino, molto più di un luogo comune” in Torino, the “Spazio 13” in Bari, and the “Spazio Franco” in Palermo). A brief introduction of each project follows.

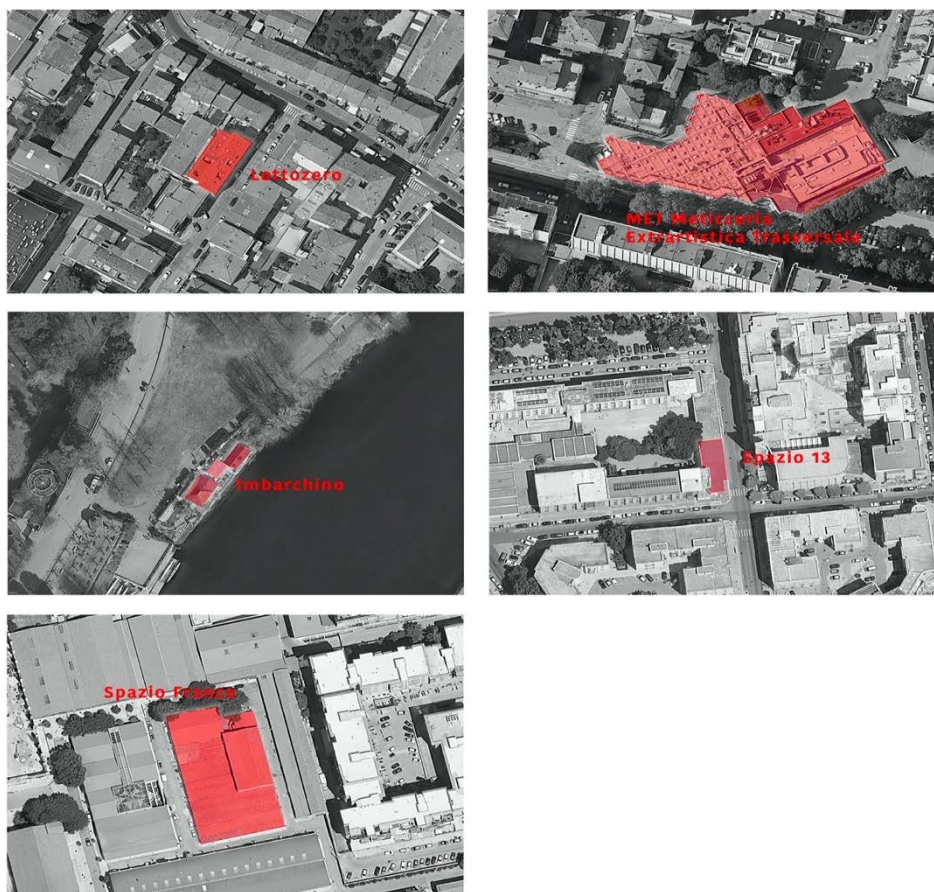


Figure 1. Locations of the Five Projects in the Urban Context

Source: Elaboration by the authors on images extracted from Google Earth.

The first project, “Lottozero textile laboratories”, consists in the transformation of an old shed located in an industrial neighborhood in Prato to create a new hub for young creative and talented entrepreneurs, sustaining research, experimentation, and networking in the field of textile design. MET is the second project investigated and it is promoted by an association involved in the production of theatrical performances in Bologna. The project has created in a peripheral

27. Micelli E (2018) Enabling real property. How public real estate assets can serve urban regeneration. *Territorio* 87: 93-97; Micelli E, Ostanel E, Lazzarini L (2023) “Wanna Be Provoked”: Inner Peripheries Generators of Social Innovation in the Italian Apennine. *Land* 12: 829

neighborhood a center to valorize and transform the competencies of migrants and refugees into employment opportunities to be invested in the cultural and creative sectors. The third project is the “Imbarchino, uno spazio per vivere la cultura”. It sees an old embankment point along the river Po in Turin transformed into a space for social recreation and cultural co-design that strengthens the citizens’ participation in city’s cultural program, as well as offers new resources to young people to implement their creative ideas and projects. In Spazio 13, chosen as the fourth project, a group of cultural associations has taken over a former secondary school building from the municipality, which has been readapted as a cultural and social hub for activating, aggregating, and qualifying the youth resources of the city linked to sectors of digital manufacturing, design, music, and photography. The fifth and last project’s mission (Spazio Franco) is the creation of a laboratory for art production and for training and creating synergies between young artists inside a pavilion located in a former industrial area (Cantieri Culturali) affected by socio-spatial marginality in Palermo.

From the methodological point of view, the projects were investigated thanks to two qualitative data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis of project applications. As far as the semi-structured interviews are concerned, we conducted a total of 6 in-depth interviews addressed to 11 project promoters. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, were recorded, and then fully transcribed. These were conducted using a common track of questions, covering the following topics: i) profile and background information of project promoters, ii) typology and profile of the organization leading the project, iii) actors and networks shaping – or cooperating in – the project activities, iv) relationship with the local administration, v) expertise and skills needed to carry on the project, vi) role and features of the building or space where the project takes place. Concerning the documentary analysis, emphasis was placed on the materials included in the project applications, especially the Project Dossiers and the summary sheets. In particular, each Dossier’s structure follows the guidelines provided by the *Culturability* Call, and includes three sections: presentation of the project, description of the project, and background information about the proponent actor. The second section is the most relevant both for the evaluation of the proposals by Unipolis Foundation and for our research objectives as it includes three sub-sections that offer relevant information about the project: identity, origin and motivations, SWOT analysis and risks’ management, description of the space or area hosting the project, targets, stakeholders, resources available and needed, funding mix, governance, monitoring and evaluation.

The data collected were analyzed comparatively in a survey carried out following a common analytical framework (Table 2). The framework, readapted and integrated from Campagnari et al.,²⁸ includes five dimensions: size and ownership of the asset(s) involved in the project, their forms of mobilization, management procedures and regulations, contribution of the project to local/

28 Campagnari F, Micelli E, Ostanel E (2022) Culture Leading to Urban Regeneration. Empirical Evidence from Some Italian Funding Programs. In Calabrò F, Della Spina L, Piñeira Mantiñán MJ (eds) *New Metropolitan Perspectives*. NMP 2022. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems, vol 482. Cham: Springer.

national/international networks, and relationship with the local government. Findings from the comparative survey are presented in the following section.

Table 2. *The Analytical Framework for the Investigation of the Five Projects*

Case study	Type, size and ownership of the asset(s) involved in the project	Forms of mobilization of the asset(s)	Management procedures and regulations	Contribution to local / national / international networks	Relationship with the municipality
1. Lottozero, textile laboratories	A 400sqm shed owned by two entrepreneurs.	In 2016 the owners of the shed granted it to the cooperative through a free-use loan for 10 years. It was refurbished thanks to a crowdfunding campaign.	No regulatory or procedural implications reported.	Participation in two international networks (TCBL and European Creative Hubs Network). Collaboration with international schools, universities, and Fab Labs in the field of textile training.	Collaboration with the culture department of the municipality was initiated after the project started. This helps the cooperative to strengthen its visibility and supports it in participating in EU projects.
2. MET Meticceria Extrartistica Trasversale	A portion of a multifunctional building (520sqm) where also a large supermarket and other associations are located. The municipality owns the building.	In 2017, the tenant of the building (cooperative) granted the space to the association <i>via</i> a free-use loan for 49 months.	The municipality has given the building on rent for 99 years to a supermarket cooperative. This has granted some space to the association <i>via</i> a free-use loan.	Participation in two international networks related to European projects (Beyond Theatre and Urban Innovation Actions).	Collaboration with the culture department of the municipality and the youth information office (Informagiovani).
3. Imbarchino, uno spazio per vivere la cultura	A former 360sqm embarkation point readapted as a bar during the 1980s, currently owned by the municipality.	In 2016 the municipality has granted the space to the association for 14 years through a public tender.	The agreement provides that the association takes charge of the renovation works in exchange of a reduction of the rent during the first years.	Participation in a local network of social, cultural and environmental organizations operating at city level.	Good collaboration with several municipal departments: youth policy, culture, public property, retail.
4. Spazio 13	A former secondary school for a total of 1000sqm indoor and 500sqm outdoor (courtyard).	In 2017 the municipality has granted the former school to the association for 3 years <i>via</i> a free-use loan.	The agreement provides that the association does not pay any rent for the use of the space. Bills are also covered by the municipality.	Participation in the local network of associations and start-ups that manage the space.	Partnership with the municipality. The governance of the space is shared with municipal representatives.
5. Spazio Franco	A 200sqm pavilion owned by the municipality	In 2017 the municipality has granted the pavilion to the association for 12 years (6+6) <i>via</i> a public tender launched by the youth department of the National council presidency	Presence of regulation constraints due to the classification of the area as an industrial archeological site.	Participation in a local network of cultural and social associations operating in the area and the city.	Creation of a permanent technical table where municipal representatives get together for jointly tackling the problems of the area.

Findings

Firstly, we should acknowledge that the four projects investigated in the survey present a specific and contextual relationship between the initiative of project promoters, the forms of mobilization of local assets and resources, the levels of institutional support provided to the project and the patterns of collective efficacy present in each local community. This last dimension refers to the intersection between mutual trust, shared expectations among actors, and the willingness to intervene and interact in a given context, all conditions influencing the success of the projects.²⁹ We believe that, alongside the comparative lens adopted by this article, this diversity should be acknowledged and not overlooked by the research.

Nevertheless, given the choice of the projects within the same framework of the *Culturability* Call already mentioned, several common traits can be recognized. These were made explicit in the guidelines of the Call and relate to the ways in which culture-led urban regeneration can be sustained and promoted *via* social innovation in urban contexts by the grassroots effort of creative professionals or cultural associations.

The first aspect of interest concerns the profile of the actors promoting the projects. The survey highlights that these include a cooperative (Lottozero), two social and cultural associations (MET and Imbarchino), and two temporary associations formed by other third-sector organizations to participate in the Call (Spazio 13 and Spazio Franco). In the case of Lottozero, project promoters motivate the form of the cooperative by recalling the need to achieve the project's economic sustainability and guarantee adequate revenues for cooperative employees.

“We see Lottozero as a company, not as an association [...] The important thing for us is not to make a profit, but also not to work for free and as a volunteer...”
Interviewee TM.

The temporary associations instead recall the objective of building a time-limited and purpose-oriented coalition of actors (14 associations in the case of Spazio 13 and 4 in the case of Spazio Franco) that were already cooperating within the project and that are thus searching for new ways to scale up their activities and enlarge their settings.

Looking at the actors involved in the projects, it is interesting to notice the diversity of the profiles present in each project. The local government is always present, as well as several third-sector associations operating in or around the regeneration area. In four of the five cases, the contribution of education organizations is also relevant (from the art and craft schools to the conservatory), due to the need to bring external expertise in the project as well as to involve

29. Sampson RJ (2011) Neighborhood effects, causal mechanisms and the social structure of the city. In Demeulenaere P (ed) *Analytical Sociology and Social Mechanisms*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 227-249; Jørgensen A, Fallov MA, Casado-Diaz M, Atkinson R (2020) Rural Cohesion: Collective Efficacy and Leadership in the Territorial Governance of Inclusion. *Social Inclusion* 8: 229-241.

students among the target users of the initiatives, not just as mere audience but as individuals actively contributing to the regeneration process.

The second aspect concerns the typology, size and ownership of the asset(s) involved in the project, and their forms of mobilization. It is interesting to notice that in four of the five cases investigated, the assets are publicly owned, with the municipality owner of the building where the project takes place. In the case of Spazio13, the building is a former welfare space (a secondary school) that the municipality decided to grant to project promoters to host cultural and social activities. In two cases (Lottozero and SpazioFranco), the projects reuse vacant sheds and industrial pavilions that the private sector left empty and that for their inherent features (large surfaces, wide functional adaptability, good structural conditions, low real estate value) are particularly suitable to be exploited for culture-based activities.³⁰

A mention of the dimensions of the assets mobilized by the projects reveals that the majority of spaces are 200/500 sqm large, with just one space 1000sqm large (Spazio13). The prevailing medium size of the assets depends on the specific matching between the projects, the resources that these can mobilize, and the existing material legacy present in each city. Thus, what counts is the capacity of project promoters to take advantage of the assets available in the contexts where they operate, achieving a good balance between social needs, project missions, and economic resources that can be mobilized to reuse and/or restore the asset. These aspects have in turn an impact on the scale of the regeneration process generated by the project. All initiatives focus on the regeneration of one single asset due to the limited amount of resources in the hand of the project promoters needed to restore or furnish it, even though three cases (Imbarchino, Lottozero and Spazio Franco) show an emphasis on the capacity of the project to generate positive impacts on the surrounding area or neighborhood, activating local latent resources, improving the quality of public spaces and triggering new practices and activities.

“It is a reality that we live much beyond our 200 sqm. We are the theatrical heart of the Cantieri Culturali [...] Several relationships have already been born [...] There are many things to do, and now we have to start doing small things together, like getting out of our space and trying to figure out if our skills can generate collective value in the public space.” Interviewee GP.

One relevant aspect which influences the achievement of project objectives concerns the forms of mobilization of the asset(s). As previously mentioned, the majority of the assets are owned by the municipality. Accordingly, the most common device used to mobilize them is the free-use loan (in Italian “comodato d’uso gratuito”), adopted in three of the five cases investigated. In the other two, the asset has been granted to the project promoters through a public tender, and its use is subjected to the payment of an annual rent that was defined after a negotiation process with the local government in order to ensure that the fee was

30. Mangialardo A, Micelli E (2017) From sources of financial value to commons: Emerging policies for enhancing public real-estate assets in Italy. *Papers in Regional Science* 97(4): 1397-1408.

economically sustainable for the project. One critical factor is the duration of the loan or rent contract: in three cases (Imbarchino, Lottozero and Spazio Franco) this is equal to (or longer than) 10 years, while in the other two (MET and Spazio 13) is between 3 and 4 years, though with possibilities to extend it over a longer period of time.

Concerning the management procedures and regulations, the survey highlights the problematic role that in one case (Spazio Franco) local regulations have had for the development of the project. In particular, the presence of regulation constraints due to the classification of the area as an industrial archeological site acts as an obstacle to the activities as any transformation in the place requires a specific permission procedure issued by a different institution.

“This is an area subjected to restrictions because it is defined as industrial archaeology. When restructuring and reconversion of the small, medium, and large works that can be made inside the spaces, every time there is a passage to do to the Superintendency which is not easy. There are actors within the area that have had great difficulty, and had to change their original project because it did not comply with the constraints set by the Superintendency.” Interviewee GP.

In two cases, the interaction between the project promoters and the municipality has contributed to co-produce the management procedures in order to guarantee favorable conditions for the use of space by the users. For instance, in the Imbarchino study case, after a catastrophic event (a river flood) that significantly damaged the spaces in 2016, the agreement stipulated between the association and municipality has provided, respectively, that the first would have taken charge of the renovation works in exchange for a reduction of the rent to the second during the first years of activity.

As far as the network dimension is considered (Figure 1), it is important to recall that all projects are managed in connection with important networks of actors allowing project promoters to cooperate with a coalition of different actors belonging to several sectors and levels. While in the case of Imbarchino, Spazio 13 and Spazio Franco the networks are mainly spatialized locally with cultural and social organizations operating at the neighborhood or city level, for Lottozero and MET the participation in international networks is motivated by the opportunity to contribute to EU funded projects and take advantage of partnerships with international institutions bringing expertise on specific issues (e.g., textile training or theatrical performances).

It is relevant to notice that solid cooperation with the municipality is a relevant aspect of all projects. What emerges from the survey is a good level of collaboration built between project promoters and different sectors of the local administration, especially with the culture department, both with the political representatives (council members or assessors) and the technical staff. In almost all cases, cooperation with the municipality was among the pre-conditions that ensured the initiation of the project. Different is the case of Lottozero where the collaboration with the municipality began only after the project started. The advantages of these forms of collaboration lie in the already mentioned provision of material assets that local government has granted to project promoters *via* free

loans or rents, as well as in the visibility and support that it can provide to project activities.

Discussion and Conclusion

The five study cases presented above show the central role played by culture as a driver for urban regeneration processes.³¹ Culture is interpreted as a crucial factor acting both on the regeneration of abandoned or underused spatial capital and on the creation of new or strengthening of existing social and territorial networks. One important aspect to recognize is that the cultural orientations characterizing the projects are strongly shaped and influenced by the individual and collective cultivation of attitudes. Ferilli et al.³² pointed out that “the ability of a community to generate social and economic value through culture is largely path-dependent”. In this vein, the cases highlight the crucial capacity of young and creative entrepreneurs and innovators to “cultivate values” and become promoters of cultural initiatives that activate and sustain regeneration processes. What these actors have in common is the attempt to conceive original formulas for creating cultural activities and services starting from the (re)use of material assets:³³ an abandoned shed in Prato and Palermo, a former secondary school in Bari, a damaged embarkation point in Turin and a portion of a multifunctional building in Bologna.

The capacity of these actors to mobilize territorial capital resources through innovative procedures and farsighted design abilities motivates why they can be defined “territorial entrepreneurs”,³⁴ considering entrepreneurship as one of the vehicles by which SI can acquire a territorial configuration and contribute to shaping local and territorial development practices.³⁵ The relevant role of territorial entrepreneurs lies in their capacity to shape new territorial relationships and configurations, reassemble local expertise and assets,³⁶ and produce with their activity a socio-spatial impact on the surrounding local community that results in

31. Cerreta M, Daldanise G, Sposito S (2018) Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action, *Urbani Izziv* 29 S. 9-28; Tricarico L, Jones ZM, Daldanise G (2020) Platform Spaces: When culture and the arts intersect territorial development and social innovation, a view from the Italian context. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44(4-5): 1-22; Baraldi S, Salone C (2022) Building on decay: urban regeneration and social entrepreneurship in Italy through culture and the arts. *European Planning Studies* 30(10): 2102-2121.

32. Ferilli G, Sacco PL, Noda K (2015) Culture-driven policies and revaluation of local cultural assets: A tale of two cities, Otaru and Yubari. *City, Culture and Society* 6: 135-143.

33. Micelli E, Ostanel E, Lazzarini L (2023) “Wanna Be Provoked”: Inner Peripheries Generators of Social Innovation in the Italian Apennine. *Land* 12: 829.

34. Ostanel E, Micelli E (2021), Il profilo del rigeneratore: nuovi profili, nuovi planner. In Franceschinelli R (ed) *Spazi del possibile. I nuovi luoghi della cultura e le opportunità della rigenerazione*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 89-102.

35. Tricarico L, Jones ZM, Daldanise G (2020) Platform Spaces: When culture and the arts intersect territorial development and social innovation, a view from the Italian context. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44(4-5): 1-22.

36. McFarlane C (2011) *Learning the City. Knowledge and Translocal Assemblage*. Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester.

improving its internal cohesion.³⁷ Territorial capital is here intended as the set of localized assets —natural, human, artificial, organizational, relational, and cognitive ones— that constitute the competitive potential of a given area,³⁸ whose embeddedness influences the emergence of SI. As already mentioned by Ostanel and Micelli (2021), the territorial entrepreneur can be considered an evolution of the profile of the social entrepreneur, where the actor shows not just a tension towards improving social well-being, solving social problems and creating social value for the community³⁹ but also becomes the *interpreter* of a strong transformative attitude. He/she thus works to mobilize territorial capital resources and exploit their transformative potential for sustaining SI.⁴⁰ In the five projects, territorial entrepreneurs turned the space into a generator of socio-spatial relationships that answered to unmet social needs and created value for the local community. Space as a support for, respectively, the activation and empowerment of marginal and weak populations through culture and arts in the case of MET, the creation of new employment opportunities, synergies and networks for young talents in the cases of Lottozero and Spazio Franco, and the co-design of cultural activities to strengthen the community-culture nexus in the case of Imbarchino.

The fact that the territorial entrepreneurs as project promoters have not operated alone, but have shaped networks and platforms involving a variety of actors highlights the relevance that the network dimension has in ensuring the success of projects.

In conclusion, we want to underline two aspects that characterize the projects' network dimension.

The first is the *raison d'être* of the network itself, namely the reason or motivation why a network is formed and several actors decide to get together and collaborate within a common platform. The five cases demonstrate that the presence of a social or spatial problem in a given context and, more importantly, the recognition by a group of actors that this problem can be treated or solved by a collective effort is the real push for the emergence of the network.⁴¹ Accordingly, the disconnection between creative young people and the productive and cultural sectors in the case of Lottozero and Spazio 13, the scarce job opportunities for migrant populations in the case of MET, and the lack of resources and spaces for young creative talents and cultural workers in the case of Imbarchino and Spazio Franco are problematic conditions that motivate the creation of a multi-actor coalition for responding to that specific social need.

37. Lazzarini L, Pacchi C (2021) Local narratives and spatial configurations of territorial cohesion: some evidences from COHSMO Project. *DASU Working Paper Series*, n. 07/2021 (LPS.21).

38. Camagni R, Capello R (2013) Regional Competitiveness and Territorial Capital: A Conceptual Approach and Empirical Evidence from the European Union. *Regional Studies* 47: 1383-1402.

39. Tricarico L, De Vidovich L, Billi A (2022) Entrepreneurship, inclusion or co-production? An attempt to assess territorial elements in social innovation literature. *Cities* 130: 103986.

40. Ostanel E, Micelli E (2021), Il profilo del rigeneratore: nuovi profili, nuovi planner. In Franceschinelli R (ed) *Spazi del possibile. I nuovi luoghi della cultura e le opportunità della rigenerazione*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 89-102.

41. Ibid.

The second aspect concerns the diversity of actors belonging to the networks. This provides arguments for the assumption that urban regeneration *via* social innovation and cultural production requires the *assemblage* and combination of different actors, each bringing his/her own specific knowledge and expertise to the project. In other terms, we believe that the already mentioned territorial entrepreneur can act successfully only if he/she is able to build effective alliances of actors and activate what several scholars defined as platform spaces,⁴² namely multi-actor action arenas where different actors and networks collaborate, (co)produce and exchange knowledge via collective and creative learning. Tricarico et al.⁴³ defined platform spaces as “cultural and creative places where social innovation plays a key role in community engagement activities as well as generating horizontal/ collaborative interactions among different stakeholders and their interests while aligning with territorial development targets”. The five cases highlight that the importance of these spaces lies in their capacity to overcome the dualism between top-down and bottom-up approaches of SI toward a combination of the two, providing an intermediate space for actors from various sectors and levels to meet and implement regeneration objectives. Among these actors, a crucial role is played by the local administration who is always present in the network, being the actor that mobilizes the material assets utilized by projects as well as the one that pools expertise and visibility and that sets the right framework enabling the actors to develop the socially creative strategy.⁴⁴ Moreover, while the actors and organizations operating at the local level (city or neighborhood) are a recurring presence in the networks underlying the five projects, in some cases such as Lottozero and MET an important role is also played by national organizations and international networks whose contribution is aimed at scaling up project activities and at bringing expertise and knowledge in the local context. This is the reason why we have used the term “bottom-linked governance” to underline the complementary or even alternative role that these platform spaces can have to those of bottom-up governance.⁴⁵ The importance of these socially innovative spaces of action lies in their capacity to channel the local community’s effort toward answering to unmet social needs, empowering vulnerable populations, and addressing urban regeneration challenges.

In this article we have cross-analyzed five projects of urban regeneration *via* social innovation and cultural production, looking at their actors and networks, at

42. Tricarico L, Jones ZM, Daldanise G (2020) Platform Spaces: When culture and the arts intersect territorial development and social innovation, a view from the Italian context. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44(4-5): 1-22; Micelli E, Ostanel E, Lazzarini L (2023) “Wanna Be Provoked”: Inner Peripheries Generators of Social Innovation in the Italian Apennine. *Land* 12: 829.

43. Tricarico L, Jones ZM, Daldanise G (2020) Platform Spaces: When culture and the arts intersect territorial development and social innovation, a view from the Italian context. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44(4-5): 1-22.

44. Neumeier S (2017) Social innovation in rural development: Identifying the key factors of success. *The Geographical Journal* 183: 34-46.

45. Mehmood A (2016) Institutional forms of social innovation. *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development*, 10(3): 300-311; Moulaert F, MacCallum D, Van den Broeck P, García M (2019) Bottom-linked governance and socially innovative political transformation. In Schröder A, Kaletka C, Howaldt J, Zirngiebl M (eds) *Atlas of Social Innovation - A World of New Practices*. München: Oekom verlag, 62-66.

the assets used and their forms of mobilization, at the management procedures, and at the relationships with the local government. The contribution has highlighted the relevance that the network dimension and the mobilization of spatial capital have for the emergence of SI initiatives in urban neighborhoods as well as the role of culture as a catalyst for shaping new socio-spatial configurations and for reactivating and regenerating vacant or abandoned spaces.

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