

Whose Public Spaces? Neighbourhood Renewal, Conviviality and Place Making in the Milan Urban Fringe

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ABSTRACT

This paper will evaluate the *Urban Italia* regeneration programme in Cinisello Balsamo, a former industrial town in the Milan urban fringe. The programme, financed for the period 2003-2006 by the Italian government, was aimed at tackling social exclusion (especially of the Youth) and urban decay, by transforming three unused areas (a former industrial building, an ancient bourgeois villa under decay and an egg factory) in collective spaces for a convivial city. The term “collective space” refers to the programme’s goal of creating places, building and infrastructures for culture, education and recreation particularly targeted to non-individual use: spaces for sport teams, cultural associations, informal groups and other collective uses. The term “convivial city” – that was actually used as a slogan – refers especially to the purpose of creating opportunities for social encounters, recreations and creativity, as complementary activities of a vital and viable city.

The case-study analysis, drawing from a vast empirical material collected over ten months of full-time participatory observation, has shed light on several key issues both on the policy building and implementation phases:

- conviviality and conflicts among populations within the neighbourhood: what sort of collective places have been asked by the population participating to the planning phase, who have been involved and who excluded in the consultation, whose needs have been recognised
- neighbourhood spaces as city-wide resources? the issue of scale and the degree of exclusiveness in accessing and targeting collective spaces
- technical/practical knowledge, political opportunities, intersectoral collaboration: the constraints of the implementation phase.

Framing the discussion of these three issues within the structure-agency debate (Bourdieu, Giddens, Jessop-Moulaert), this paper will contribute to build a methodology for the policy transfer, decompounding the empirical material in its structural and conjunctural elements and identifying a number of strengths and constraints to human agency that should be taken into account and evaluated in any given contextual frame.

Key Words: neighbourhood renewal programme, convivial city, participation