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COMMON STOCKS: INTELLIGENT COMMUNITIES ENABLING PLATFORMS FOR PERIPHERIES REGENERATION

Barbara Lino

Department of Architecture, University of Palermo, IT

HIGHLIGHTS

- Recycle is a transcalar paradigm applicable to the multiplicity of forms of territorial disposal from waste material to buildings, to territorial systems as sequences of life cycles and geographies produced by the various metabolic settlement processes.
 - The fixed capital of disposal deposited on the territory as a result of the change in urban life cycles, offers itself as an instrument for re-signifying the existing heritage as a precious resource to support new social practices of innovation in the regeneration of peripheral contexts.
 - The case study of Periferca in Mazara del Vallo represents a first attempt to reflect on the necessity to overcome the fragmentation of initiatives and building a framework from which to guide processes, recognize, enable and involve the subjects that bring innovation.
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ABSTRACT

The huge stock of properties and territorial infrastructures that we have built in recent years, convinced that it was the most important development asset, capable of generating value, is today largely degraded, underused or dismissed. In Sicily, as in many other parts of Italy, some practices have allowed new spaces for public use and/or semi-public, and most cities have opened new development perspectives. This process of recycling seems to indicate a tendency to shift the development asset from real estate capitalization to a knowledge economy, in which abandoned assets offer themselves as enabling platforms for collective actions, space devices in which to channel innovation through recycling. This paper studies the process of common-stocks projects as part of sustainable strategies for peripheries regeneration. The study describes an empirical research conducted on the Sicilian case study of Periferica in Mazara del Vallo and investigates how overcoming the fragmentation of initiatives, guiding processes, recognizing, enabling and involving the subjects that bring innovation.

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1. PERIPHERIES URBAN REGENERATION

1.1 *Urban Question and In Transition Spaces*

The complex dynamics in place that impose rapid and profound global changes are reflected as reverberation, more than anywhere else, there where in cities are thickened growing problems of social inequality, polarization, and abandonment as consequences of interrupted life cycles produced by the various metabolic settlement processes.

"Friable territories" marked by complex and not easily orderable factors (Bianchetti, 2016) and by hybrid dynamics, peripheries are often considered as a space-problem that offers the most macroscopic outcomes of a "new urban question" (Secchi, 2013, p. IX).

As result, the representation of the periphery as a space-problem dominates media and political arenas through the narration of the most macroscopic outcomes of the increase in social inequality. Zen neighborhood in Palermo is an obvious example, but also the Corviale in Rome or Scampia in Naples. Years of stigma, the stratification of problems that revolve around the themes of legality (as in the case of abusive occupations) and around the themes of social justice: years of "therapeutic obstinacy" and ineffective urban policies.

But the simplistic attitude to the question of the peripheries crushes the debate on emergencies, often taking for granted the problems implicit in the word itself and in some way responding more to a media and political need rather than an analytical attitude capable of defining what the issues are things in place.

The peripheries are changeable and evolving and subjected to diversified trajectories of change (Zajczyk et alii, 2005) and are transformed under the effect of a combination of forces that "mix" with the forces of change brought into place by the proliferate in the arena of policies, projects and practices. As a transitional space, in mutation, they possess potentialities and conflicts that place it in a state of limbo and suspension, waiting for a project experimentation that places them within a new urban map of collective sense. Reimagining peripheries today means redefining them epistemologically, calling them as Maurizio Carta says "polipheries", a combination of the two words "pòlis" (city) and "phérein", intense places able to generate new forms of creative, intelligent, and equal cities (Carta, 2018).

1.2 *An Up-date on Urban Peripheries Public Policies*

The peripheries have been considered as a crucial policy challenge that has oriented policies and strategies at different levels of government. But over the years, the narratives on urban decline and on the theme of urban regeneration have changed and with them the style of action on the peripheries. To the area-based programs promoted by the national government such as the Pru (Urban redevelopment programs), Prusst (Urban redevelopment programs and sustainable development of the territory), Cdq (Neighborhood Contracts) were added the Pius (Integrated Sustainable Development Plans) or to the national editions of Urban I and II at the regional level initiatives such as the Integrated Programs for the Rehabilitation of the Suburbs—PIRP of the Puglia Region.

The initiatives of the European Union, such as the Urban Pilot Projects, followed the integrated planning initiatives present in the Urban Axis of several Regional Operational Programs (Por) with the Integrated Territorial Pacts (PIT) and other instruments for implementing the 2007-2013 PO FESR, such as Integrated Urban Development Projects (PISU).

The proliferation of these instruments has been joined by policies for economic development and support for technological innovation, urban policies for security (Protocols, local safety agreements) signed at the municipal level and the National Operational Program "Metropolitan Cities" (Pon-metro).

In the meantime, the picture of local public administrations has become very complex and has come to terms with progressive cuts in funding and the crisis in the real estate market that no longer offers itself as a resource to draw on for significant interventions to reduce costs. Six departmental structures deal with the theme of the suburbs: the Presidency of the Council of Ministers with the Department for Equal Opportunities for the Program of Degraded Urban Areas of 2014 and the General Secretariat for the Program of the suburbs of 2015; the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation for the home and public works; the Ministry for Economic Development for Energy; the Ministry of Heritage and cultural activities for contemporary art and architecture; the Ministry for the Environment for the related skills (Ombuen et al., 2017).

On the other hand, measures that stimulate local contexts to develop specific policies have assumed

an extremely episodic and unpredictable character in which the public debate on urban regeneration has remained largely dominated by that of extraordinary and emergency intervention on the peripheries.

In particular, after the 2012 city plan, the reference is to the last two cycles of initiatives that explicitly address the degraded and peripheral urban areas: the program for the degraded urban areas of 2015 and the program for the peripheries of 2016.

The call for the social and cultural redevelopment of degraded urban areas (d.p.c.m. of 15 October 2015 implementing Law No. 190 of 2014, article 1, paragraphs 431-434) allocates a budget of 194 million euro for the three year period 2015- 2017. The law n. 208 of 2015 (paragraphs 974-978) is the establishment of a Fund for the implementation of the extraordinary intervention program for urban redevelopment and the safety of suburbs dedicated to metropolitan cities and the provincial capitals with an availability of 500 million euro for 2016 (the call was approved with d.p.c.m. of 25 May 2016).

The approach taken by both initiatives is emergent, devoid of a real and authentic problem setting (Ombuen et alii, 2017) and intended to fuel a stigmatizing approach of the peripheries.

No experimentation is required of local administrations, but projects that are immediately feasible and, in the other hand, is required a role that is limited to a selection operation of the projects already available in drawers and the selection of project areas on the basis of criteria and indicators proposed by very strict calls.

2. RECYCLING PERIPHERIES

2.1 *Enabling Platforms of Innovation and Common Stocks*

Recycling offers itself as a transcalar paradigm applicable to the multiplicity of forms of territorial disposals, from waste material to the buildings and territorial systems. The huge wealth of properties and territorial infrastructures that we have built in recent years in the peripheries, convinced that it was the most important development asset, capable of generating value, today is largely degraded, underused or dismissed. The fixed capital of the divestment, deposited on the peripheries as a result of the change in economic and urban cy-

cles, offers itself as an instrument for the re-signification of the existing heritage and to rewrite the fundamental notion of heritage (Marini, 2015), proposes itself as a precious resource to support new social practices, new forms of production and use. The challenge presented is how to shift the development asset from real estate capitalization to a knowledge economy where disused assets are offered as enabling platforms for collective action, space devices in which to channel innovation through recycling.

The theme of welfare and the experimentation of new forms of collaboration propose the crumbling and reorganization of welfare in new forms open to experimentation, and places us before the possible rethinking of the modalities of public action. At a close look at the peripheries in last years, we recognize at a micro scale some "common stocks". If the programs promoted by the National Government in 2015 and 2016 have promoted an approach based on the executive projects and seems to have put aside the lesson of integration of the place-based projects of the 90s, a look at some experiences in progress reveals forms of re-appropriation, redemption, of "re-signification" of interstitial and abandoned spaces, new capitalization of unused public goods: emerging practices of building collective intelligence, public services co-realized to address the needs of local communities. We find very often private subjects, with various legal forms (associations, social enterprises, cooperatives or non-profit organizations) that are transforming neglected and abandoned building and peripheral areas by delivering services to the community. They are the figure of the change being made, the production of public services, in our daily care strategies individual and collective well-being, cultural practices and mobility.

The look at current practices seems to indicate a tendency to shift the development asset from real estate patrimonialization to an economy of knowledge, in which abandoned assets are offered as enabling platforms for collective action, space devices in which channel innovation through recycling. Thus, in the urban peripheries where there are ample margins for modification, a surplus of interstitial and marginal spaces, the proliferation of experiences open the field to a different way of transforming the cities, into a sort of local resilience to the crisis and the consequent lack of social welfare.

From the North to the South of the country, as a dotted one, different experiences appear but they

share similar elements: places previously abandoned often in marginal areas are transformed into flexible urban spaces, open and informal places, in some cases originally temporary and low cost, which pursue prospects of collective utility, through the form of enterprise and social innovation.

Just to mention some of the most famous and interesting experiences, we recall the reconversion of the Lorenteggio Market in Milan, the Neighborhood Houses of Turin that offer new social activities for the communities of the neighborhoods, INstabile Portazza in Bologna and the protagonism of the inhabitants for the reactivation of an abandoned civic center, Cascinet regenerates land that with a new agri-business has recovered and reactivated the Cascina Sant'Ambrogio in Milan.

And, much further in the South, the reconversion of an oenological plant that has been abandoned as a new community laboratory with Ex Fadda in Puglia, in San Vito dei Normanni, but also in Sicily the Ecomuseo Mare Memoria Viva and the new Cre.Zi Plus experience on business incubation at the Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa Cultural in Palermo. And again, neighborhood plots and the use of performing arts to regenerate the San Berillo

neighborhood in Catania, Farm Cultural Park in Favara and the use of contemporary art to regenerate an abandoned historic center and Periferica in Mazara del Vallo with the reactivation of quarry spaces on the outskirts of the city.

2.2 The Social Innovation Challenge

Faced with obvious disadvantages in terms of social, infrastructural and economic conditions, communities have managed to “diversify locally”. Working using an adaptive capacity through forms of local self-organization, they drew energy from the characters of the spatial and social context, (with new meanings) local identity resources (spaces, social capital, landscape and cultural assets) and, in some in particular, through a symbolic mediation operation, they have created shared value (economic, social, cultural), have stimulated the active collaboration of the communities, have modified the spaces, attracted new population and withheld the younger generations, becoming actors of urban regeneration.

The new organizational forms of the communi-



Figure 1: Farm Cultural Park in Favara: courtyards. Source: photos by the author, 2019.



a



b



c

Figure 2: (a) Farm Cultural Park in Favara: “PRIME MINISTER”: School of Politics for Young Women; (b) Cre.Zi Plus in Palermo: the co-working space; (c) Cre.Zi Plus in Palermo: the building, Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa. Source: photos by the author, 2019.

ties are declining resilience in its human dimension, giving an adaptive and positive response to the marginalization, indicating the way to a local resilience that is rooted in the territorial context, regenerating fragile contexts and assuming the characters key of the social innovation.

The reconstructions on the current debate on social innovation show very wide boundaries of the concept (Moulaert et alii, 2013; TEPSIE, 2013; Van Dyck and Van den Broeck, 2013) and a not always easy transfer to Italian and especially southern contexts. Further empirical studies and field analysis are needed to decline—and enrich—studies on the spatial dimension of social innovation, in the face of the interweaving of different disciplinary strands of research ranging from social studies, which focus on social innovation as a response to the lack of welfare and social cohesion, to the significant contribution of economic and management-based studies, according to which both the effects and the generative factors of social innovation are of an economic nature.

3. PERIFERICA, MAZARA DEL VALLO

3.1 *The Project Genesis*

In 2013, a private dismissed tuff quarry of about 3,000 square meters in the periphery of Mazara del Vallo in Sicily, in Macello neighborhood, was transformed by some young creative of Mazara in an independent cultural center named Periferica in which workshops and laboratories are carried out involving citizens, associations, universities and entrepreneurs, for the production of urban settings that rethink the dismissed space in the periphery of Mazara. In the same year, competing with over four hundred projects, Periferica won the First Prize as the best Italian project of sustainable urban regeneration in the national competition RIUSO banned by the National Council of Architects. And in 2015, together with the Nisseno Street Factory eClettica project and the Catania neighborhood Trame project, it won the “Boom Polmoni Urbani” competition designed to support new urban development models through a 120,000 euro grant fund. Periferica, with its “la Cava degli Umori” offers cultural, experimental and innovative initiatives that have the ambition to design a new life for the abandoned areas and buildings that characterize our cities, involving

the inhabitants of the Macello district in the definition of its new future. Today Periferica has been enriched with new spaces, like a co-working, a home-restaurant and a guesthouse. Periferica hosts artists, designers, videomakers and creatives to produce a work that converts a disused area into a center for art and culture.

3.1 *“Evocava” Project and the Local Institution’ controversial Role in the Urban Regeneration Project*

Periferica has finally won the 2017 edition of the Culturability competition with the project “Evocava - Evocative Museum of the Quarries” which aims to protect, enhance and promote the historical heritage of other quarries of Mazara del Vallo. The quarries in Mazara (from which derives the very name of the city - Maara, or “cave in stone quarries”), different for morphology, age, extraction techniques, define an extraordinary complex of parks, galleries, caves and gardens integrated into the city and covering about 100 thousand square meters. A heritage that, due to the absence of incentives or due to hereditary blocks, remains closed and abandoned and for which the owners pay huge burdens. The project involves the construction of a museum co-designed by university students and young professionals in architecture, design and communication. Thanks to “Evocava”, together with the area already converted by Periferica, the abandoned quarries of Mazara will be at the center of a territorial development project that offers itself as a cultural engine of the city, a network of places and people.

The main objectives of the project are two:

- the creation of a museum that evokes the underground Mazara in different areas (history, culture, nature, art, innovation);
- the activation of tourist itineraries that promote heritage through guided tours, activities in the gastronomic and experiential fields.

The project involves four different quarries for a total of over 30,000 square meters. The first, the “Cava degli Umori”, home of Periferica, will be the site of the museum, a cultural park and the base from which the routes will be developed.

The Museum, which will open in 2019, will be the result of several moments of co-creation coordinated by Periferica and supervised by experts, aiming to integrate the production of creatives, inhabitants and artists with that of designers.

The others three quarries involved in the project are also private areas that will have different roles thanks to a “Pact of the Quarries” signed with the owners as a manifesto that recognizes their historical and cultural value and sustainable and innovative uses:

- “il Giardino” is the largest green area of Mazara (20,000 square meters) currently used by the owners to grow citrus fruits. Probably used also for liturgical rites, it preserves a stone altar and votive engravings and dates back to 1887. It will be used for recreational spaces and outdoor activities;
- “il Cuore” is the oldest quarry of the system (1344) and presents in 3,500 square meters many traces of the hand-drawn extraction, engravings of Norman crucifixes and church elevations. During the Second World War it was used as a refuge by the inhabitants; today it is a group of workshops where carpenters and artists work and will retain this vocation also in the context of the project;
- “il Canale” is a 7,000 square meter quarry that

dates back to 1748 and is home to the Bee-keeping Laboratory and Slow Food Presidium to protect the Sicilian black bee for about thirty years. Articulated in caverns and open spaces, it preserves among others an ancient well that was used to irrigate the surrounding fields.

Evocava involves a wide range of subjects with different roles: the owners (also with the possibility of involving other proprietors and other areas to be included in the itineraries in the signing of the Pact), the University of Palermo as scientific partner that could explore the relation between the quarries and the neighborhood in terms of a more complex urban regeneration project, and other partners as associations and stakeholders (ADI SICILIA, OFL Architecture, Hypebang!, Associazione Idrisi, Farm Cultural Park, and others) with the aim to develop cultural activities or to give a contribution in the realization of the museum.

As evident both in the genesis of Periferica and in the structure of the Evocava project, one of the problematic elements is the involvement of the lo-

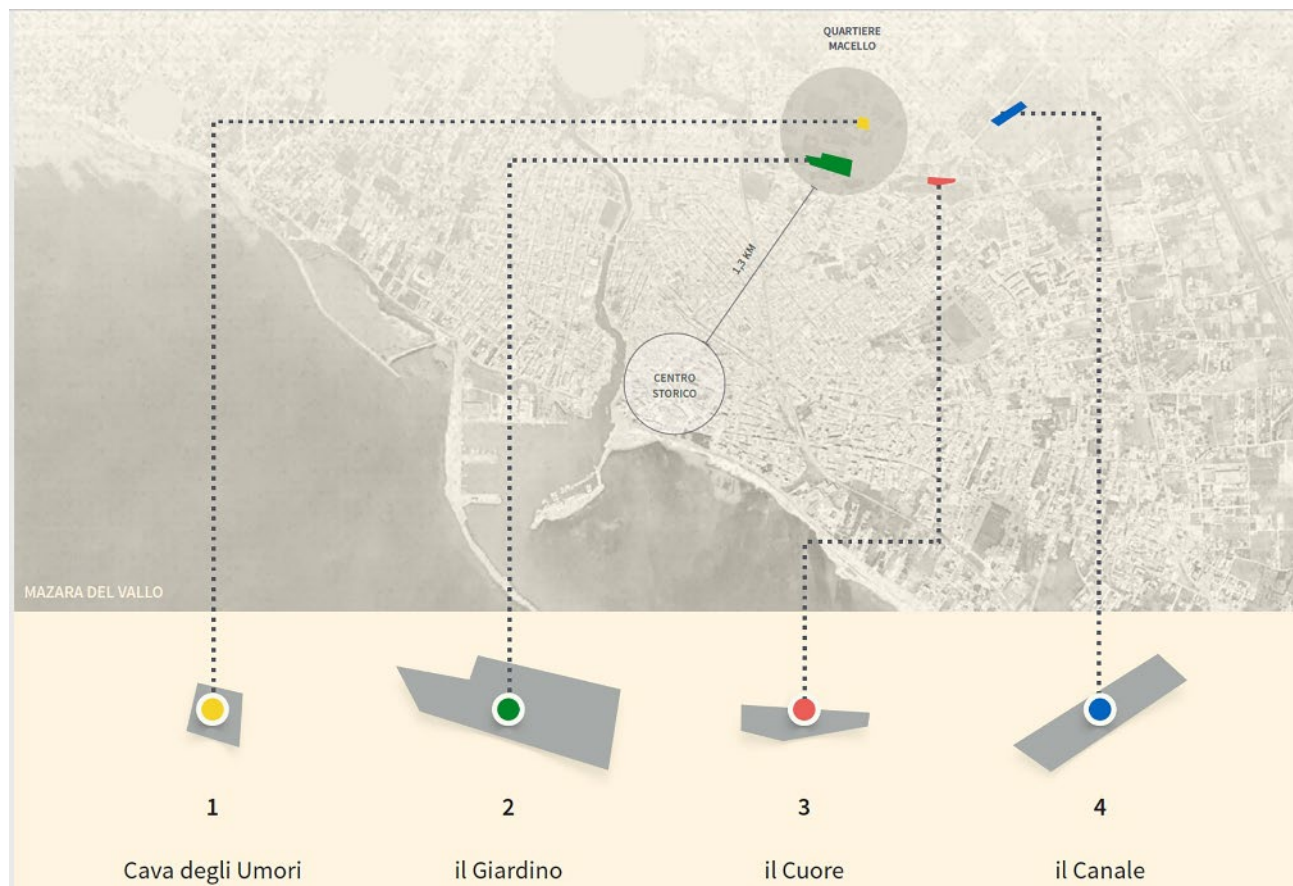


Figure 3: Evocava project: the four quarries involved in the project. Source: *Periferica*, 2018.



Figure 4: Periferica, the “Cava degli Umori”, murals. *Source: photo by the author, 2017.*

cal institutions that didn't interact in the process and that are not yet involved in the Evocava project.

This aspect clashes with the aim of the project to interact with a broader vision of urban development and asks for an interlocution with local in-

stitutions and synergies of intent: a vision of the future for Mazara shared by the entire community and supported by the institutions. Going beyond the practice's self-defense.

4. BEYOND SELF-DEFENSE

Faced with the diversity and richness of the individual stories, a recipe approach seems rather inappropriate and would seem to suggest a tentative and experimental course, encouraged by enabling initiatives that can certainly facilitate the emergence of innovative proposals and experimental devices (as has happened in the last years through the Culturability call, promoted by the Unipolis Foundation, or with the initiative “Boom Polmoni Urbani”).

It is also true, however, bottom up processes are a resource, but it is also necessary to go beyond “self-defense” operations (Barbera et alii, 2016): the disintegration and reorganization of welfare into new and pulverized forms open to experi-



Figure 5: Evocava project, Culturability initiative presentation by Paola Galuffo in Cre.Zi Plus, Palermo. *Source: photo by the author, 2018.*

mentation, should place us in front of the rethinking of the modalities of public action, avoiding the risk of continuing to relegate the role of the urban project to mere application of standards and indicators and asking for a more aware role of the public sector.

The hypothesis and experience framework allow to rethink ways and tools to modify space, moving from rigid plans with predetermined objectives to

open, incremental, multi-actor and participated processes, which abandoning the old approaches and questioning the consolidated role of the subject public, redesigning the project coordinates. The project is no longer the configuration of a predetermined final outcome, but rather synonymous with a process developed within adaptive, resilient and shared logics for the communities.

In the territories it is necessary to construct com-



Figure 6: Periferica, the “Cava degli Umori” space. *Source: photo by the author, 2017.*

plex, integrated and complex visions, capable of overcoming the fragmentation of practices and of constructing a framework from which to guide processes, recognize, enable and involve the subjects that bring innovation. Viewed through the territorial perspective, social innovation is a field of exploration for territorial policies: if social innovation is a territorially characterized process and the different innovation practices are nourished by the specificity of individual and collective local resources typical of territorial contexts in which they operate, territorial policies can be decisive with respect to the generative and successful relational factors of the context.

A risk to avoid, in fact, is to confine social innovation within the field of spontaneous initiatives, without recognizing the role, at least potential, of public development policies that must work in

synergy and not in contrast.

An example of a policy that favours the convergence of social enterprises, innovation practices and public policies should put in place actions aimed at using socially innovative spaces and public resources, giving back to the communities the management and access to local resources and encouraging the coproduction of innovative services: creating incentives for agriculture on unused land, facilitating the temporary use of empty spaces, modifying planning standards and regulations to help communities develop forms of social innovation, especially of an entrepreneurial nature. It means facilitating and rewarding the innovative use of space and resources for the benefit of young people and micro-entrepreneurs and to face the challenges of local development in a cooperative way.

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