

# 1                                    **Networks Cultivating Values:** 2   **Insights from Five Culture-based Regeneration Projects** 3   **in Italy**

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

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17       **Keywords:** *social innovation, urban regeneration, culture, creativity.*  
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## 20   **Introduction**

21  
22        Urban regeneration using culture in its broad sense has long emerged as a  
23        key feature of our cities. Several scholars highlighted that culture-based  
24        regeneration is crucial for the economic success of urban areas (among the  
25        many: Florida, 2002; Pratt, 2010). Alongside the large-scale and top-down  
26        development projects with cultural facilities, infrastructures and events having  
27        a central role, the past decades have seen the proliferation of small-scale  
28        cultural actions involving grassroots and community creative groups, that have  
29        framed arts and culture as catalysts for widening the usage of local amenities as  
30        well as for animating and/or revitalizing deprived urban neighborhoods. This  
31        has obviously given rise to tensions between top-down and bottom-up cultural  
32        initiatives that have pushed local administrations and policymakers to address  
33        critical issues but also to integrate culture into local plans and strategies  
34        (Tallon, 2013; Grodach, 2013).

35        Among the benefits generated by small-scale cultural practices, the  
36        capacity to sustain urban regeneration processes through the reconfiguration of  
37        social networks, the socio-political mobilization of marginalized groups, and  
38        the co-production of activities and services is emphasized by some authors  
39        (Ostanel, 2017a; Cerreta *et al.*, 2018; Bonini Baraldi and Salone, 2022). Due to  
40        its attempt to achieve responses to unmet social needs, strengthen  
41        empowerment and increase collective efficacy, community involvement in  
42        culture-based urban regeneration has often resulted in the emergence of social  
43        innovation (SI).

44        Within this framework, this contribution aims at improving the  
45        understanding of the conditions and dynamics that facilitate processes of  
46        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 (Vicari and Moulaert, 2009; Moulaert *et al.*, 2013; Ostanel, 2017a). 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 (Phillis *et al.*, 2008; Cajasanta, 2013; Ionescu, 2015). Despite remaining a suspicious concept in the eye of many due to its uncertain and vague demarcation (Mulgan, 2006; Bragaglia, 2020; Dobay, 2021) and the uncritical view – still dominant in the debate – that its broad effects are necessarily good (Brandsen *et al.*, 2016a), 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 areas (Bragaglia, 2020). Ostanel (2017a) 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 (Martinelli, 2012), 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

1 unmet social needs, empowering specific social groups, and modifying social  
 2 relationships in the light of social justice and cohesion, have also sustained and  
 3 promoted relevant processes of regeneration and revitalization of the existing  
 4 material legacy (Brandsen *et al.*, 2016b).

5 There is wide evidence in the debate that space is a critical dimension for  
 6 the emergence of social innovation (among the many: Ostanel, 2017b;  
 7 Brignone *et al.*, 2021). SI initiatives often take place in a physical space that is  
 8 empty, available, functionally flexible and that can be easily mobilized for  
 9 hosting new activities. Thus, the significant role that SI has for urban  
 10 regeneration depends on the presence of a stock of underused, unsold, or  
 11 abandoned material assets, that can be readapted to new uses with relatively  
 12 low effort and resources (Cerreto *et al.*, 2018). Abandoned properties can be  
 13 transformed into *commons* that public administration can grant to whoever has  
 14 the capabilities to initiate a socially innovative project (Soma and Vatn, 2014).  
 15 According to Mangialardo and Micelli (2017), this revitalization process has  
 16 produced a paradigmatic change in our cities which is both content and process  
 17 related. The aim is no longer to extract financial rent from properties but to  
 18 experiment with new forms of economic and social development. Moreover,  
 19 this change has pushed local authorities to formulate new legal frameworks for  
 20 the use of public assets by community groups that have allowed to explicit the  
 21 legal conditions, the arrangements and the resources needed for a public  
 22 property to become a support for SI.

23 As far as the process dimension is concerned, Ostanel (2017a) underlines  
 24 that SI projects can push toward the creation of innovative multi-level  
 25 governance arenas that may help to overcome the policy *silo* approach by  
 26 which local administrations usually approach urban regeneration, promoting  
 27 institutional learning, and innovating regeneration policies. In other words, SI  
 28 possesses a tension that can work to overcome the idea of urban regeneration  
 29 as a comprehensive and top-down approach of public policies leading to the  
 30 resolution of urban problems through sectoral interventions (Figueiredo *et al.*,  
 31 2022), toward a more critical and pragmatic interpretation. Urban regeneration  
 32 can thus be interpreted not only as a large-scale and public sector-driven  
 33 redevelopment approach focused on economic growth and property  
 34 development (Tallon, 2013), but rather as an incremental bottom-linked  
 35 governance process (Mehmood, 2016; Castro-Arce and Vanclay, 2020) that  
 36 can trigger an incremental socio-spatial change in the existing urban fabric,  
 37 modifying social relations between individuals and groups. In this vein,  
 38 bottom-linked governance can be seen both as an outcome of urban  
 39 regeneration and a socially innovative space of action where the local  
 40 community's effort toward addressing regeneration challenges can be  
 41 channeled (Moulaert *et al.*, 2019).

42 Culture is by no doubt an important driver for SI initiatives to trigger  
 43 urban regeneration (Campagnari *et al.*, 2022; Bonini Baraldi and Salone,  
 44 2022). Cerreto *et al.* (2018) describe two relevant aspects in relation to the  
 45 creative and SI practices linking culture and urban regeneration. The first  
 46 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.* (2020: 2) 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 (Ostanel, 2017a). 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 (Cerreto *et al.*, 2018).

## 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 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 (Franceschinelli, 2021), 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.

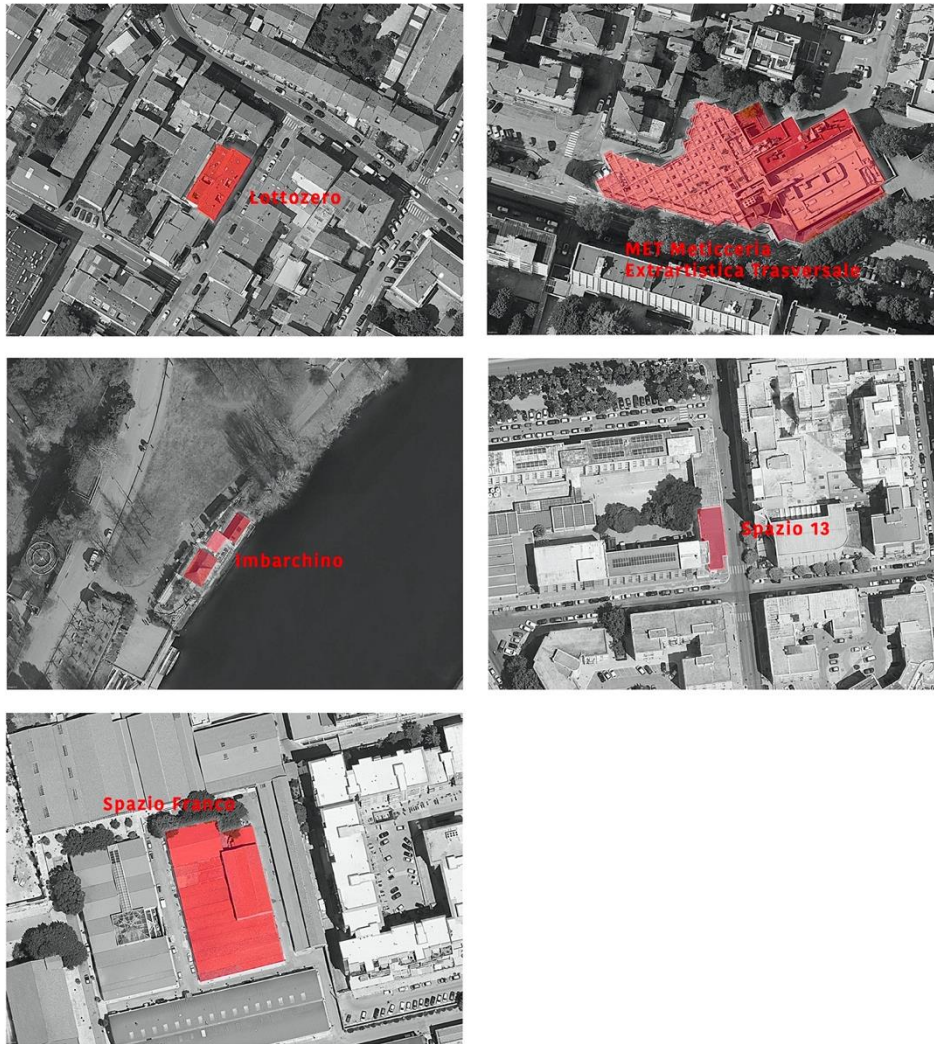
**Table 1.** *Background information of the five projects under investigation*

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

*Source:* Elaboration by the authors.

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 (Micelli, 2018; Micelli *et al.*, 2023). 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.

1 **Figure 1.** *Locations of the five projects in the urban context*



2  
3 *Source:* Elaboration by the authors on images extracted from Google Earth.  
4

5 The first project, “Lottozero textile laboratories”, consists in the  
6 transformation of an old shed located in an industrial neighborhood in Prato to  
7 create a new hub for young creative and talented entrepreneurs, sustaining  
8 research, experimentation, and networking in the field of textile design. MET is  
9 the second project investigated and it is promoted by an association involved in  
10 the production of theatrical performances in Bologna. The project has created  
11 in a peripheral neighborhood a center to valorize and transform the  
12 competencies of migrants and refugees into employment opportunities to be  
13 invested in the cultural and creative sectors. The third project is the  
14 “Imbarchino, uno spazio per vivere la cultura”. It sees an old embankment  
15 point along the river Po in Turin transformed into a space for social recreation  
16 and cultural co-design that strengthens the citizens’ participation in city’s  
17 cultural program, as well as offers new resources to young people to implement  
18 their creative ideas and projects. In Spazio 13, chosen as the fourth project, a  
19 group of cultural associations has taken over a former secondary school

1 building from the municipality, which has been readapted as a cultural and  
 2 social hub for activating, aggregating, and qualifying the youth resources of the  
 3 city linked to sectors of digital manufacturing, design, music, and photography.  
 4 The fifth and last project's mission (Spazio Franco) is the creation of a  
 5 laboratory for art production and for training and creating synergies between  
 6 young artists inside a pavilion located in a former industrial area (Cantieri  
 7 Culturali) affected by socio-spatial marginality in Palermo.

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

31 The data collected were analyzed comparatively in a survey carried out  
 32 following a common analytical framework [table 2]. The framework, readapted  
 33 and integrated from Campagnari *et al.* (2022), includes five dimensions: size  
 34 and ownership of the asset(s) involved in the project, their forms of  
 35 mobilization, management procedures and regulations, contribution of the  
 36 project to local/national/international networks, and relationship with the local  
 37 government. Findings from the comparative survey are presented in the  
 38 following section.

1 **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
<b>1. Lottozero, textile laboratories</b>	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.
<b>2. MET Meticceria Extrartistica Trasversale</b>	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 via 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 via 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).
<b>3. Imbarchino, uno spazio per vivere la cultura</b>	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.
<b>4. Spazio 13</b>	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 via a free-use loan.	The agreement provides that the association does not pay any rent for the use of the space. Bills are also	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.



			covered by the municipality.		
<b>5. Spazio Franco</b>	A 200sqm pavilion owned by the municipality	In 2017 the municipality has granted the pavilion to the association for 12 years (6+6) via 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.

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

## 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 (Sampson, 2011; Jørgensen *et al.*, 2020). 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.

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

6 Looking at the actors involved in the projects, it is interesting to notice the  
 7 diversity of the profiles present in each project. The local government is always  
 8 present, as well as several third-sector associations operating in or around the  
 9 regeneration area. In four of the five cases, the contribution of education  
 10 organizations is also relevant (from the art and craft schools to the  
 11 conservatory), due to the need to bring external expertise in the project as well  
 12 as to involve students among the target users of the initiatives, not just as mere  
 13 audience but as individuals actively contributing to the regeneration process.

14 The second aspect concerns the typology, size and ownership of the  
 15 asset(s) involved in the project, and their forms of mobilization. It is interesting  
 16 to notice that in four of the five cases investigated, the assets are publicly  
 17 owned, with the municipality owner of the building where the project takes  
 18 place. In the case of Spazio13, the building is a former welfare space (a  
 19 secondary school) that the municipality decided to grant to project promoters to  
 20 host cultural and social activities. In two cases (Lottozero and SpazioFranco),  
 21 the projects reuse vacant sheds and industrial pavilions that the private sector  
 22 left empty and that for their inherent features (large surfaces, wide functional  
 23 adaptability, good structural conditions, low real estate value) are particularly  
 24 suitable to be exploited for culture-based activities (Mangialardo and Micelli,  
 25 2017).

26 A mention of the dimensions of the assets mobilized by the projects  
 27 reveals that the majority of spaces are 200/500 sqm large, with just one space  
 28 1000sqm large (Spazio13). The prevailing medium size of the assets depends  
 29 on the specific matching between the projects, the resources that these can  
 30 mobilize, and the existing material legacy present in each city. Thus, what  
 31 counts is the capacity of project promoters to take advantage of the assets  
 32 available in the contexts where they operate, achieving a good balance between  
 33 social needs, project missions, and economic resources that can be mobilized to  
 34 reuse and/or restore the asset. These aspects have in turn an impact on the scale  
 35 of the regeneration process generated by the project. All initiatives focus on the  
 36 regeneration of one single asset due to the limited amount of resources in the  
 37 hand of the project promoters needed to restore or furnish it, even though three  
 38 cases (Imbarchino, Lottozero and Spazio Franco) show an emphasis on the  
 39 capacity of the project to generate positive impacts on the surrounding area or  
 40 neighborhood, activating local latent resources, improving the quality of public  
 41 spaces and triggering new practices and activities.

42  
 43 «It is a reality that we live much beyond our 200 sqm. We are the theatrical heart  
 44 of the Cantieri Culturali [...] Several relationships have already been born [...]  
 45 There are many things to do, and now we have to start doing small things  
 46 together, like getting out of our space and trying to figure out if our skills can  
 47 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 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 [fig. 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 (Cerreto *et al.*, 2018; Tricarico *et al.*, 2020; Bonini Baraldi and Salone, 2022). 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.* (2015: 136) 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 (Micelli *et al.*, 2023): 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» (Ostanel and Micelli, 2021), considering entrepreneurship as one of the vehicles by which SI can acquire a territorial configuration and contribute to shaping local and territorial development practices (Tricarico *et al.*, 2022). The relevant role of territorial entrepreneurs lies in their capacity to shape new territorial relationships and configurations, reassemble local expertise and assets (McFarlane, 2011), and produce with their activity a socio-spatial impact on the surrounding local community that results in improving its internal cohesion (Lazzarini and Pacchi, 2021). 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 (Camagni *et al.*, 2013), 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 community (Sastre-Castillo *et al.*, 2015; Tricarico *et al.*, 2022) 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 (Ostanel and Micelli, 2021). 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 (Ostanel and Micelli, 2021). 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.

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 (Tricarico *et al.*, 2020; Micelli *et al.*, 2023), namely multi-actor action arenas where different actors and networks collaborate, (co)produce and exchange knowledge via collective and creative learning.

Tricarico *et al.* (2020: 2) 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 (Neumeier, 2017). 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 (Mehmood, 2016; Moulaert *et al.*, 2019). 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 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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