

A GIS analysis reconstructing the regeneration programme of the Libertà neighbourhood of Bari

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Abstract

The future of the European Union is strictly linked to the living conditions of its urban peripheries. The aim of the article is reconstructing the programme theory of the urban regeneration implemented by the Municipality of Bari in the “Quartiere Liberta”. Liberta area is the old workers’ neighbourhood, born in the early twentieth century around some important economic activities such as the slaughterhouse and the tobacco factory. In the second half of the century trade activities took the place of the old factories; the economic decline started at the beginning of the '70s and is still ongoing. The neighbourhood has the features of the European peripheries post-financial crisis: unemployment, criminality, absence of public areas and parks, lack of integration of the migrant population, national populist protest movements, economic and cultural exclusion, high number of kids and minors. The neighbourhood is at the centre of the national political discourse: in September, 2018 the Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini visited the “Quartiere Liberta”, invited by a political association of the area concerned with the issue of the increasing migrant population and the economic and social decline of the area.

The Municipality is trying to revitalize this inner periphery with an integrated urban regeneration programme, using national and European cohesion funds. The programme consists on the improvement of squares and gardens, opening of welfare services mainly addressed to children and kids, labour market initiatives, establishment of two cultural centres and a branch of the National Council of Research. All the plan is implemented together with third sector organizations and partly concerted with the population.

The complicated and complex intervention is analysed with the realist approach to the evaluation, highlighting the relations between the context, the mechanism and the expected outcomes. Both the context and the programme logic are studied with a GIS, constructed reprocessing datasets of research institutions, and using a qualitative and quantitative investigation containing monitoring data of the interventions implemented and interviews to policy makers and key informants. According to the civic planners, the neighbourhood might become in the next future a middle class inclusive district, strictly interconnected with the local university, with a flourished creative, innovative and social economy and where the mixite could be the key resource for its local development.

Introduction

This paper describes a methodology for the anylisis of the regeneration interventions and, in particular, it is a preliminary study to create a geographic information system (Gis) reconstructing the rigeration programme of the Libertà neighbourhood of Bari.

Peripheries today are at the centre of the political discourse. Uneven development of Europe paved the way for the rise of far right movements and parties, as outlined by Rose s and Wolf (2018). Far from the centre of the EU, within the cities, peripheries are often no man’s lands where civil, political and economic rights have been forgotten for decades and where public investments failed (Rodriguez-Pose 2017). There is a new wave of try, in the agenda of many states and local authorities of the world, to invert this trend, but there is still an insufficient evidence about the effects of policies aiming at revitalizing these parts of the cities and improving lives of their inhabitants (Accetturo & De Blasio 2019, What Works Centre 2015). Libertà is the old workers’ area of Bari, where the factories closed and the trade activities took their place until the brave new world post financial crisis opened up.

Close to the railway station, it is the area of the city that has become home for newcomers coming mainly from Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. The neighbourhood, where organized crime has always been very strong, is today at the center of the local and national political debate and it represents the classical European "place that doesn't matter" (Rodriguez-Pose 2017). Former deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini visited twice the area invited by an organization of the area that addressed to him a petition that highlighted the issue of the immigrant population, the more and more difficult living conditions of the local population and the decrease of the real estate values.

In the Libertà area you find a stratification of people, urban culture and issues that concern today’s Italy and Europe: an area planned just to be residential with the plague of organized crime and the decline of the old economic sectors, where the impoverishment of people couple

with the difficult living conditions of the migrant population attracted there by the (relative) low prices of rents.

The Municipality is implementing in the area an integrated urban regeneration programme, financed mainly by national and European cohesion funds. The programme consists in public realm and environmental improvements, reinforcing of welfare services, labour market and business development initiatives, establishment of cultural centres and new urban attractors.

Participation and its discontents

Participation is seen today as a way to reinforce democracy, while there is a decline of trust in politics (Bobbio and Pomatto 2007). In the actual crisis of representative democracy, participation seems an antidote to the decreasing affiliation to political parties and the increasing integration of global economies and institutions that limitate the local autonomy. Moreover, participation is the mean used by public authorities to contrast the “populist backlash” (Rose s and Wolf 2018).

Beside and beyond the rhetoric of participation, the way it is used in the actual political context has some clear limits. Participation is often meant by public institutions as a mean to implement programmes and policies with more effective results, exploiting knowledge spread among the economic and social actors (Von Hayek 1945). One of the biggest issues is the self selection of participants (Bobbio & Pomatto 2007), that distorts the process since people involved lack of representativeness. Second, participation can as well be a consultative practice to have citizen approve choices already taken, with a clear top-down approach, what Arnstein (1969) called manipulation.

As in many other Italian and European cities, in Bari deliberative forms of participation are taking place. The Municipality is involving citizens in its project of transforming Bari in a Mediterranean and European economic and cultural hub. Various kinds of participative models have been adopted, situated in different rungs of the famous Arnstein's ladder (1969):

1. Consultation during the preparation of the General Urban Development Plan, when citizens were asked to express their opinion about mobility, landscape and public realm;
2. Informing, as in the case of the town board meeting held in the Redentore church of the Libertà neighbourhood on the 25/03/2015, when the regeneration programme was explained and discussed;
3. Utilizing “the knowledge of the circumstances” (Von Hayek 1945: 519) of citizens, as in the case of the transformation of the former Gasometer in a park, where the policymakers followed the requests of citizens' committee (interview with a policy maker, 26/02/2019);
4. Partnership, consisted in co-design of social interventions and actions for community development, with regard to the programmes called Urbis and Reti Civiche Urbane. At the origin of the approach, the idea that third sector organizations and social enterprises can mediate (and satisfy) social needs and can advocate for people's rights. Even if, in a poor context like the South of Italy, associations and other civic organizations seem to be more a way to earn a living, where the advocacy effort plays a less important role (Interview with activist involved in the programme Reti Civiche Urbane, 01/10/2019).

National populist movements often highlights the “exclusion bias” (Eatwell & Goodwin 2018: 242) of a consistent part of low-income and low-skilled workers, not taken enough in consideration by state planning and policies.

In the case of the Libertà neighbourhood, the national-populist reaction has taken the form of a petition addressed to the former Interior minister. The petition, prepared by a political movement of the area and signed by three thousand people, highlighted the issue of the integration of the increasing migrant population and the economic and social decline of the area.

Finally, participation is one of the key features of the qualitative Gis (Picone 2017), that “may help us recover the silenced voices of marginalized individuals and social groups” (Aitken & Kwan 2010: 289). This analysis has been constructed upon socio-economic open data (Istat and Osservatorio del Mercato Immobiliare) together with a qualitative inquiry conducted interviewing key informants (civil society and activists, people working for the implementing partners of the regeneration programme and policymakers). Often, as suggested by Jung (2017), relevant informations have been added as pictures to different Gis layers.

Towards a public Gis

Early in the morning, you see in the streets of Bari men riding a bike, with brooms tied to the crossbar and buckets hanging loose to the handlebars. They seem characters of the Italian neorealism. But the city has got also a modern economic sector with modern equipments and technologies. This contrast can be seen in the figure 1, that shows, for Bari, the Social deprivation index, that was used by the Italian municipalities to identify the objective areas of the “Periphery plan”, a programme launched by the government in 2015. The index is composed

by the unemployment and employment rate, the educational attainment statistics, compared with the average values for the whole country. In the following figure, the indicators have been compared with the mean of the city of Bari, to try to understand the relative position of the different neighbourhoods.

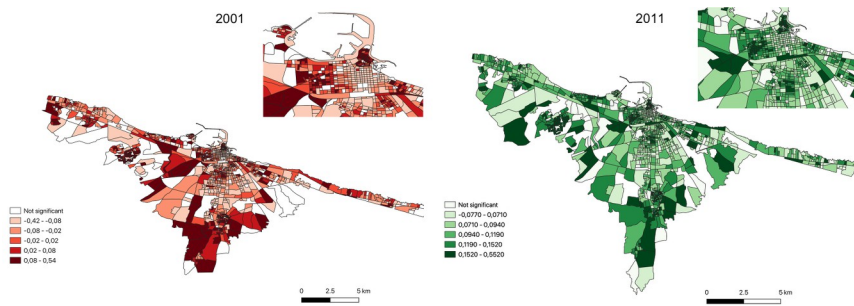


Fig. 1 Social deprivation index, quantiles (elaboration on Istat census data, 2001 and 2011).

The population of Libertà was classified using a cluster analysis (Vickers and Rees 2007, Istat 2017). The qualitative analysis was mixed with the quantitative one: in the cluster analysis, in fact, the qualitative research was fundamental for selecting the variables analysed and for choosing the number of clusters within the K-means technique of the Attribute based clustering Qgis plugin.

The indexes used to clusterise the population belong to the following groups:

1. Foreign residents;
2. Demographic indexes;
3. Employment and unemployment rates;
4. Informations on landlords and renters;
5. Educational attainments;
6. Household size;
7. Housing conditions.

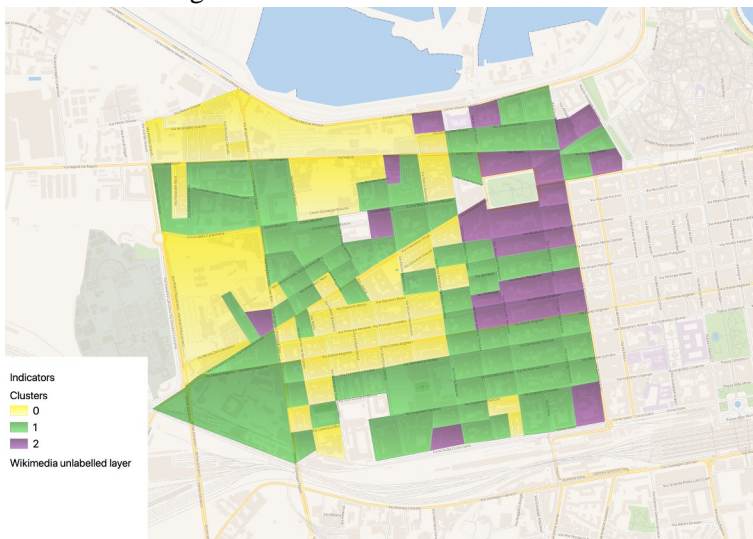


Fig. 2 Cluster analysis of the population of the objective area (elaboration on Istat, 2011).

The output areas (OAs) close to the city centers are the ones with the higher average age, better employment rate, better housing and education, and the lowest value of the household size. The opposite happens for the 0 cluster, composed of a young population, large families and a significant presence of migrants, together with the worst economic, educational and housing conditions. The third area, cluster number 1, has features in between of the other two groups.

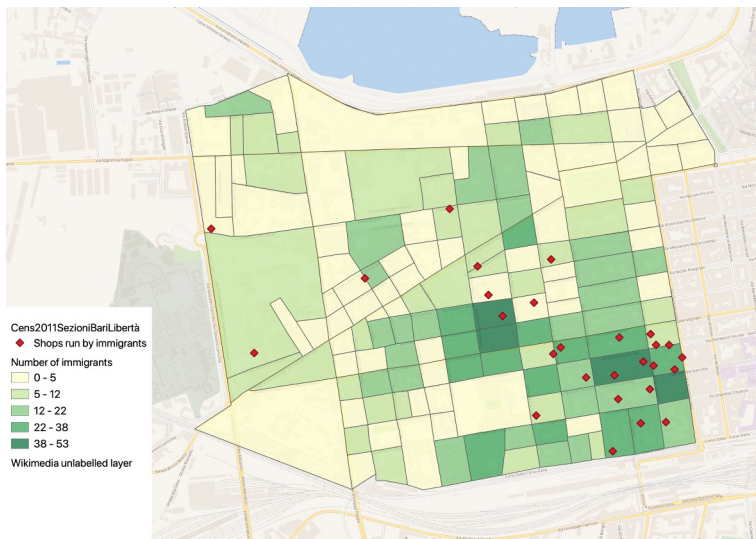


Fig. 3 Number of foreigners per output areas and shops run by foreign residents (source: Istat 2011, and observations and informal talks with shopkeepers and employees, October 2019).

Close to the railway station, Libertà is the neighbourhood that at the moment has the highest number of foreigners. The neighbourhood has been highly affected by the economic crisis and many of the shops once held by Italians, now have foreign clientele and owners. With the crisis the private sector collapsed. You can notice it from the figure 3, where histograms of the establishments and the employees of the area were linked, as a picture, to the attribute table of the Gis. Construction (coded 450-455, according to the Italian classification system Ateco), trade (500-526), railway trasport industry (601), together with professional firms (741-742), were the main private activities in 1991, when the area had more than 3.500 establishments and almost 11.000 employees. Twenty years later it had lost 300 establishments and 3.000 employees in the private sector.

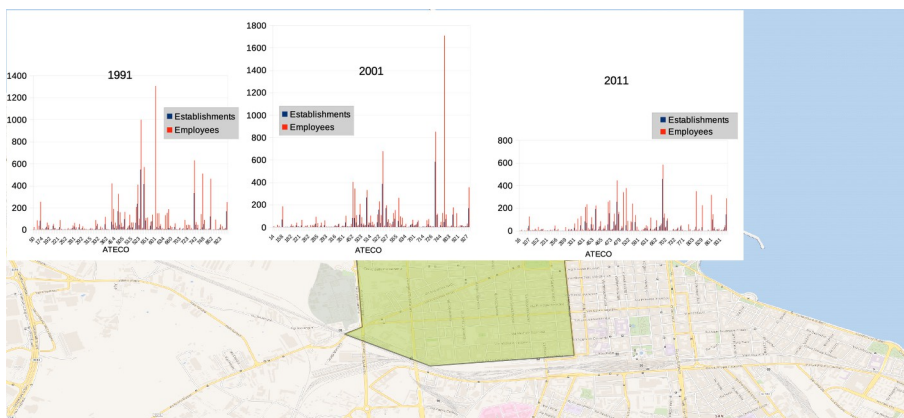


Fig. 4. Number of establishments and employees of the Libertà area, classified per Ateco system (Istat economic census, 1991-2001).

Via Manzoni is one of the sad symbols of the Libertà, that once was the “main street” of the neighbourhood, where the old shops have been substituted by small grocery stores owned mainly by Asian migrants.

The files containing economic census data (1991, 2001, 2011) have been linked, through the plug-in Select by relationship, with the vector file of the output areas surrounding via Manzoni. Thanks to it, it is possibile to query the layer of our Gis project.

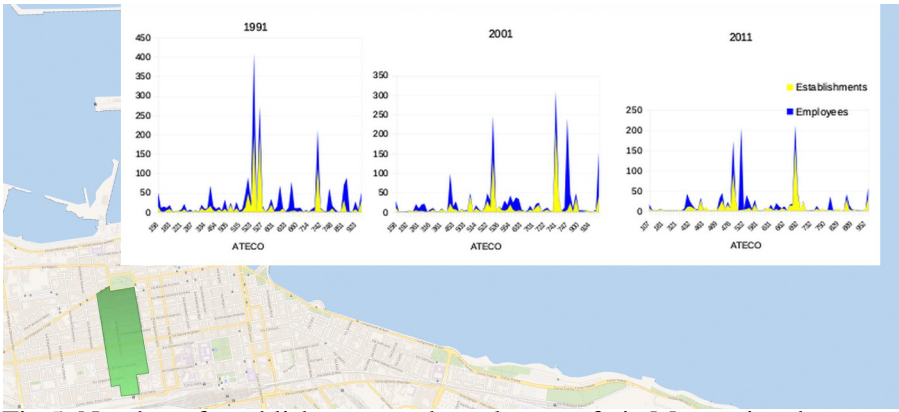


Fig 5. Number of establishments and employees of via Manzoni and surrounding areas, classified per Ateco system (Istat economic census, 1991-2001).

Real estate prices represents a key indicator for the regeneration interventions: first, the only result of the regeneration plans seems to be the increase of house prices (Accettura and De Blasio 2019, What Works Centre 2015), that often it is one of the goals of the intervention; second, concerns regarding urban justice arose in Western countries in areas where regeneration interventions had affected prices causing disruption of communities in poor and deprived districts (Fainstein 2014).

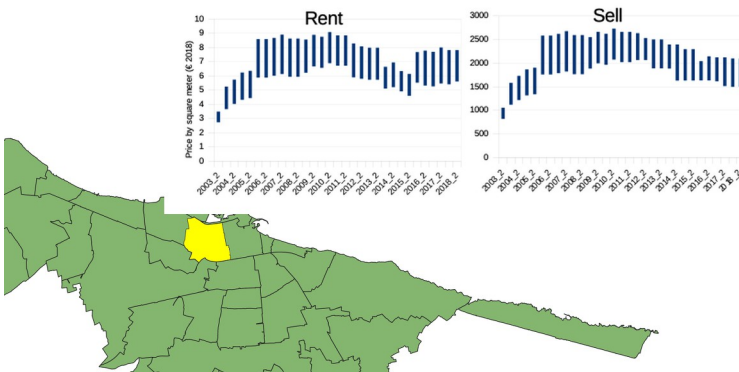


Fig. 6. Confidence interval of constant prices (2018) of housing in the Libertà area (elaboration on Osservatorio del Mercato Immobiliare, Agenzia delle Entrate)

The efforts of revitalizing the neighbourhood are in part neutralised by the fact that there is a plan to move the Court in another area. Until now, Court has represented the most important attractor of Libertà, where around 450 law firms have their offices.

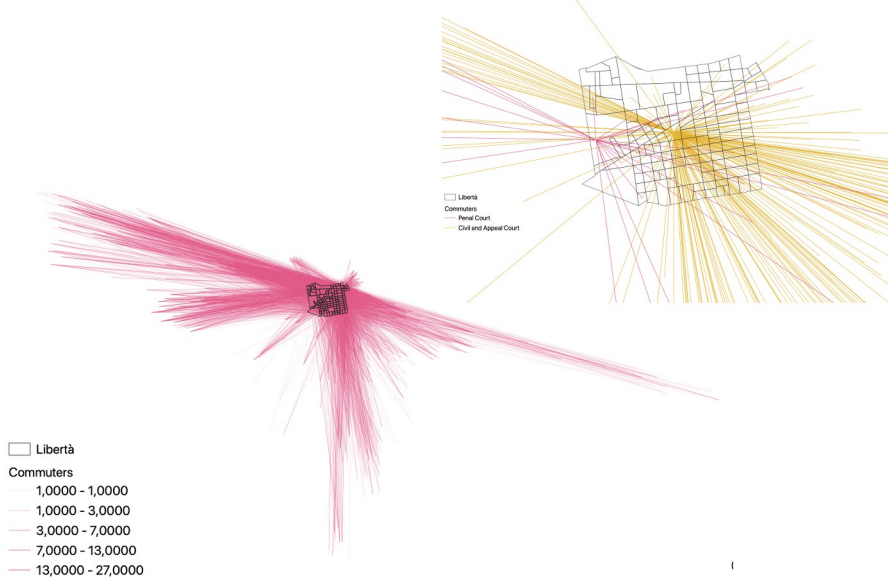


Fig. 7. Commuters going daily to the objective area from the rest of the city; in the small box the output areas of the penal, civil and appeal Court with the relative commuters' flows (elaboration on Istat, 2011).

The qualitative and quantitative analysis have been conducted concurrently, following a triangulation strategy (Creswell 2009) between the two methods: the quantitative analysis, based on secondary open data, has been used mainly to depict the context in which the regeneration programme takes place and to highlight phenomena described by the respondents. In the qualitative Gis, the labels have been used to show points of view of key informants on the interventions comprised in the regeneration plan. In the fig. 8, interventions have been categorized, and the results let the reader guess some relevant features of the programme theory and of the actions implemented in the area.

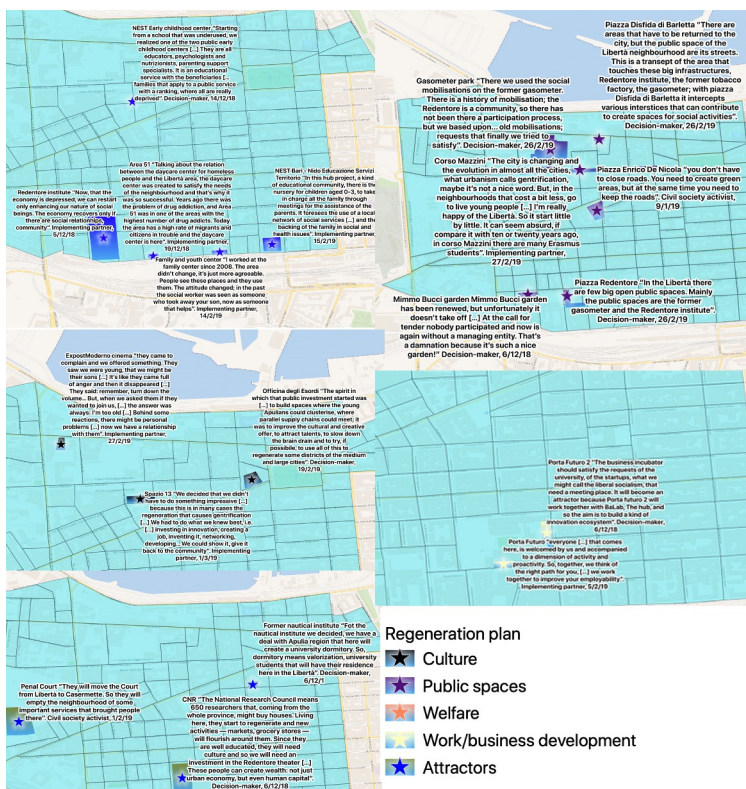


Fig. 8. Qualitative Gis of the regeneration plan.

The data so far interpreted, and the interviews analyzed, let us reconstruct the theory of change of the intervention, first step to evaluate such an emergent programme with multiple components

(Rogers 2008). As shown by fig. 9, the programme is an integrated regeneration intervention with different actions, multiple goals, ambitious expected results and some evident risks.

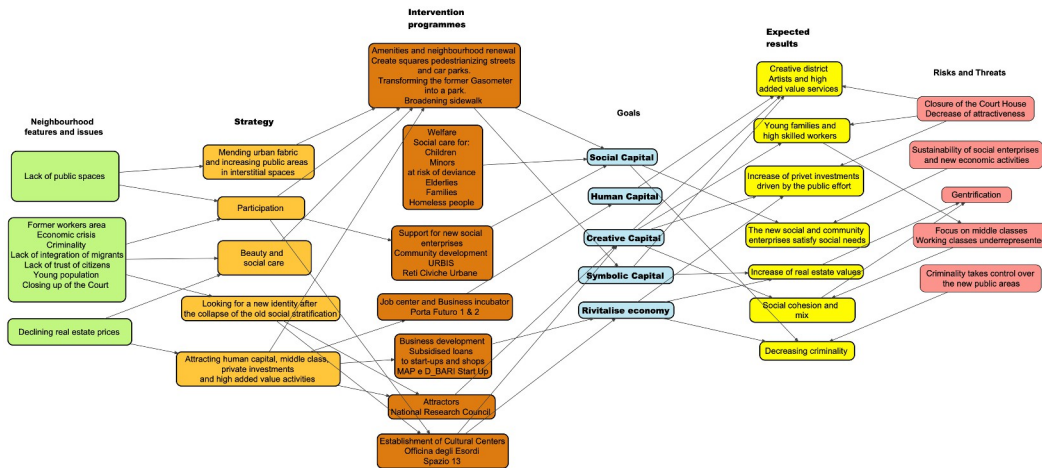


Fig. 9. Programme theory of the regeneration plan.

Conclusions

A Gis analysis reconstructing the regeneration programme of the Libertà area can satisfy three important needs:

1. simplify and visualize both the plan and the programme theory of a complicated and complex intervention, in order to evaluate it (Pawson & Tilley 1997; Rogers 2008; Moro 2015; Davies 2018);
2. provide informations on the programme and its logic, the strategy and the expected outcomes;
3. favour the participative process adopted by the public authority, facilitating the comprehension of the issues discussed.

The fieldwork is still ongoing. In the next months, the Gis will be uploaded to a website, in order to assure the dissemination of the results and to test the tool and the methodology developed in the present work.

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