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# **Mafia and urban policies: the strategies of Trust**

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Urban regeneration programmes are not common in Italy; in general, Italian urban policies do not offer a wide spectrum of such experiences. Only in the last twenty years, there has been an attempt to turn around the dilapidation of poor neighbourhoods, on one hand; and social exclusion, on the other. These two issues do not always coincide, and the historic limit of Italy's model of intervention is the superimposition (with poor dialogue) of initiatives of urban renewal and social support. Besides, the assessments are still partial, and outcomes have been weakened because the initiatives were discontinuous.

The limits of urban policies, like the policies for the local economic development in regions of the South, have been pinpointed since the beginning. The problems of the city emanate from traditional Italian dualism. One should note that the cities of Southern Italy are the poorest, with the highest rates of unemployment, and the most fragile economies in Italy. In other words, the State and the trust in institutions and collective actions are weaker, due by the way to the distorting presence of organized crime.

In these conditions, the establishment of programmes of urban regeneration is more than difficult. Therefore, it is worthwhile to question whether the same requirements and models apply, as those adopted by the other programmes to urban regeneration.

Therefore, the questions raised by the experience of Bagheria are both general and specific, but they have to be faced before moving on to the discussion of the case-study:

- the first question concerns the nature of the local programme and integrated actions, and asks if they can locally challenge general problems;
- the second question concerns the compatibility between sophisticated models of intervention expected for an urban regeneration programme, and the presence of distorted private interests, capable of guaranteeing 'omertà' – an agreement of silence – or even support, in a context where the legitimacy of collective action is weak;
- finally, the third question concerns the implementation of the integrated model to building renewal and social actions as requested by the Urban experience (and precedent programmes from different countries).

To address the first question, we must remember that the assumption of the local urban regeneration programmes, such as those for economic development, is to mobilize social capital.

This expectation is common to all the programmes aimed at promoting endogenous development, such as those aimed at the local economy sustained by Structural Funds.

In order to promote the social and physical regeneration of the city, the programmes aim to mobilize local participants and resources, and a beneficial circulation of the 'implicit knowledge' of the depositories. This activation allows 'dormant' local resources to be made available, and to create the cultural and social preconditions necessary to begin long-term development projects. In other words, it relies on the conviction that social regulations are unavoidable and decisive preconditions for development, next to and before material factors, the level of public investments, etc. By now, this conviction is commonly accepted as far as the

economic development of national economies is concerned; even more so, when it is applied in deprived neighbourhoods, or areas of social and economic disadvantage. Therefore, insufficient or bad social regulations affect the process of economic development, and become a major reason to work on social development. In other words, trust, a certain degree of order, the stability of expectations, and the certainty of rules, are components of social regulations as much as the legal system, infrastructure, credit, enterprises, etc.

Without negating this fundamental assumption, the process of implementing such programmes has shown some limits. The social processes that impinge upon the social capital are fragile and demanding. To get them started, urban policies have to guarantee a resolute and uninterrupted approach that is rare. In other words, all too often programmes happen in a crowded context of competing and diverse initiatives, not all of them fostering the activation of social capital. Often in fact, spending programmes spark the interests of entrepreneurial networks at the margins of legality, which have the capacity to pressure the political system and civil opinions. Likewise, also in this case one can affirm that bad money drives out good.

The first problem, therefore, would be to eliminate the bad money or, even better, the unfair competition among public initiatives aimed at different targets. The second, more pernicious, regards all mobilization initiatives, and questions the process of the internal generation of social capital. And here lies the problem. Where the economy is weak, and illegal circuits are strong, 'social capital' is limited to service dominant positions, and is captured by limited circuits. This perverse form of social capital is embarrassing: it rewards a limited group, and excludes everyone on the outside; it aims to reward egoistic behaviour, and does not represent collective interests.

According to available historic reconstructions, Southern Italy's history has been afflicted with a scarcity of universal and public social capital, while it has been characterized by an excess of particular capital, belonging to a small group opposed to the collective, which takes ownership of closed networks. A consequent issue would then be to promote the first and liberate the second, but this involves large political and cultural transformations, which a local programme probably cannot affect.

The response to the second question is connected to the first one. It is difficult to evaluate social capital in areas strongly penetrated by mafia organizations, because of the competition of criminal networks. Besides, the presence of criminal organizations erodes the standard supply of trust, which causes in turn disincentive for any virtuous behaviour, complying either with market or institutional rules. Often, these behaviours self-replicate and multiply, creating room for further deviant developments.

As a consequence, the absence of a specific assessment of urban policies (and of their various social, economic, and territorial outcomes) appears alarming connected with the control of the territory exercised by criminal organizations; as if it were not necessary to take specific precautions in promoting initiatives in areas marked by illegal economics. While, instead, the relevance of the real estate market and land-use is tantamount in mafia's investments; as well as the delicate position

of land-use developments in sparkling the interests of crime organizations either for 'logistic' purposes, or for money laundering.

A consequence of this observation is that reinforcing legality is a prerequisite of all actions of urban regeneration and development. However, legality is not consistent only with the introduction of normal, fair, and efficient rules, but also in the founding of simple and robust social regulation. Legality is a social practice, above and before a contract. It is constructed in the context made by social actors variously oriented, such as local decision makers, local policeman, civil servants and political parties, social actors and cultural or religious associations. In this broad sense, one can understand the already mentioned focus on the activation of social capital; both questions require a long term commitment to support local regeneration programmes (and not vice versa, as it happens now).

Finally, the answer for the third question is more general. The requirements of the integrated programmes have not been fully complied with in the implementation process in Italy (and presumably elsewhere). Rather, most of the programmes have often recorded many difficulties in integrating the initiatives. Integration does not mean only the concomitant realization of buildings, infrastructure and service operations, albeit desirable, nor only the balancing of various operations in a common strategic framework, a more difficult, yet preliminary requirement. These are all necessary, but not sufficient conditions, as they translate primarily in a model of inter-sector combination, nuanced according to various aims (functional, operative, partnership).

Another definition, perhaps closer to the original, intent of the integrated programme as a generative action, capable of producing new initiatives as well as accepting old ones; and as an action open to innovative actors (therefore, not only to the establishment), influenced by processes of participation and inclusion. Such initiatives have a double burden: they have to be implemented within constraints and deadlines dictated by exogenous, and non negotiable logics; at the same time, they have to connect such logics into a shared vision. Such a complex model insists on the dynamic control of the interdependencies between initiatives and subjects. Both models are highly demanding, more on the technical side the first case, more on the political the second one. Understandably, such requirements are not easily met by the implemented programmes.

In summary, the answers provided to the three questions cited before, suggest a possible critical contribution to regeneration programmes. Debating them would not only be timely, but necessary, in Italy as well as in Europe. In particular, a comparison is required between programme realization and results; and vice versa, the new issues of this historical moment should be addressed<sup>1</sup>. However, it is

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<sup>1</sup> The working Group activated thank to the collaboration between the Department of Urban studies, and the Urban Programme of Bagheria, has already produced some studies beside this report. See by M. Cremaschi, ed., *Tracce di quartiere, il legame sociale nelle città che cambia*, Milan, Angeli, 2008; "Limiti e prospettive dell'azione locale" ("Limits and Perspectives of Local Actions"), *Territorio*, 46, 2008, with contributions by Donzelot, De Leonardis, Tosi and Bricocoli; "Legalità debole, criminalità e periferie" ("Weak Legality,

necessary to pay a greater attention to the specific problems of the cities of Southern Italy.

From this point of view, the outcomes of this study – the first on Urban-Italia, and the first to investigate issues of development and legality in urban areas – offer a good starting point.

Some further comments can clarify the meaning to be drawn from this case-study. Urban Bagheria (as all the Urban Italia programmes) resembles the model implied by the Urban model less than expected; more precisely, it cannot pretend to be (only) an integrated programme. Comparing the Bagheria programme with the European Urban model, some differences strike one as obvious: the weight of infrastructure is predominant; the focus on economic and spatial development is limited; the initiatives fostering social cohesion are scarce, especially from a financial point of view.

But the problem is more general. The Italian 'translation' of the European Urban programme impinged upon building and infrastructure projects, rather than economic and social projects. One can doubt that this is the intended consequence of a political decision, rather than the interference of the Ministry for Infrastructure being the responsible of the programme; or the inexperience of the municipalities in managing initiatives that were not addressing building development. This element is certainly relevant, although not comforting.

Apart from these considerations, this report offers a deeper interpretation. The Urban programme of Bagheria was aimed at reconstructing elements of trust, and because of this it has privileged feasible yet incisive initiatives. About these, some features need to be remembered:

- the programme operated on the performances of the Public Administration (its transparency, and efficiency);
- it invested some exemplary dimensions, crucial to the local context, of the relationship between the public officers and citizens (land control, building subsidies etc.);
- it contributed to the repossession of public space, and parts of the cultural heritage (such as the Villas), not only for their economic value, but because they constitute symbolic moments in a bond of trust;
- finally, it contributed to the establishment and reinforcement of a few networks of conviviality and cultural exchange.

If accepted, this reconstruction may contribute to a wider evaluation of the outcomes of the programme.

The report illustrated the pragmatic meaning assumed by the programme, manifested in some significant outcomes among obvious and deep difficulties. Urban Bagheria demonstrates, in a case of relatively modest dimensions, the basic necessity to reconcile contradictory intentions: to favour visible works, but to commit to resolve grave problems; to address emerging problems, but to explore also those that are kept hidden; to restore transparency, and to simultaneously guarantee speed and efficiency of public investment; to give dignity to public officers contribution, while daily unraveling political quarrels...

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Criminality and the urban outskirts”), a section from a further issue of *Territorio*, with other contributions by Peraldi, Bagolini, Sales.

In general, local public actions clash with ordinary issues of administrative work. In their relative simplicity, they seem semi-insurmountable when they have to be dealt with in urgent conditions, political weakness, and media exposure. Activities such as handling bids, propagating directives, organizing audits and surveillance, are all preliminary operations to programmes such as Urban, that these programmes obviously cannot control, and rarely influence. Their efficiency is not a specific problem, but it becomes a crucial factor within time constraints and efficiency of the entire programme.

The second remark, a bit more significant, indicates that European urban regeneration programmes, of which Urban Bagheria is also a part, are difficult to interpret unless their hybrid nature is recognised. Such hybridization is the result of the 'neo-liberal inflection' of the welfare state, which leads to relatively new local consequences. In other words, it would be useless to compare the programme with a full scale long-term public investment, as those implemented in post-war times, or to the de-regulative actions adopted in the '90s, when every initiative was apparently left to market forces.

Therefore, these programmes show the gradual mix of the two models, with some unpredictable combinations: the state maintains an important entrepreneurial role, and the public intervention builds the institutional foundations of the market; yet, public actions recognize the market, while searching to bend it to collective interests to counterbalance its narrow economic focus; from the social point of view, in short, providing opportunities for individuals has become a higher priority than fostering aggregated development.

There are two principal conclusions to this study.

The first is that the lack of effectiveness of the integrated programmes, as well as of other local regeneration initiatives, depends greatly on aggregated national conditions, and has to be dealt with at that level.

The second is that through these special programmes, exemplary ordinary investments have been realised, a little paradox that invites a reverse look. Upon the small bit of capital offered by these realisations, it may be possible to build some strategic local programme: it will be possible to intervene on the urban environment for the reduction of energy consumption and of pollution; for the improvement of the public transportation system. It may also facilitate the social integration of immigrants, the extension of civil rights, the supply of social housing, for the development of cultural assets, resources, and tourist attractions, the improvement of labour capacities and, vice versa, the offer of advanced professional services. All these elements are largely influenced by the leadership put in motion by Urban, and if well adjusted, can contribute to the development and the competitive turn of the country.