

LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS AS FILTERS OF THE RENEWAL OF DERELICT INDUSTRIAL SITES A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BOVISA (MILAN) AND WESTERGASFABRIEK (AMSTERDAM)

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes two processes of renewal of derelict industrial sites, Westergasfabriek (WGF) in Amsterdam, and Bovisa (BVS) in Milan; and evaluates how the local institutional environment influenced the renewal and the cultural cluster formation. The analysis of the local institutional environments proves that the two renewal processes developed in starkly different contexts. In particular, evidence indicates that the local institutional environment can influence management practices, the degree of physical change, clusterisation of activities and the degree of involvement of the civil society. In general, it can be posited that *during the process of the renewal of a derelict industrial site into cultural clusters, a specific analysis of the local institutional environment represents a pivotal activity to be undertaken at the initial stage.*

KEYWORDS: governance innovation – cultural cluster formation – local institutional environment

INTRODUCTION

Derelict industrial sites are typically abandoned areas formerly used for manufacturing, gas stations, warehouses, dry cleaning establishments or large-scale logistic activities. They are also called brownfield sites. They are, in many cases, *underutilized properties whose redevelopment is complicated by either real or perceived environmental contamination*¹. The renovation of derelict industrial sites is a longstanding and widespread practice and has become more popular in the last decades of the 20th century. Concurrently, the urban areas in which those sites are located have themselves changed significantly. The process of abandonment of industrial structures, which are sometimes located in a context of urban development, represents a fascinating issue of urban research. The contrast between the old and the new and the challenge of the renovation has captured growing interest amongst academics and city users in general.

The strong relationship between the renewal of industrial sites and the emergence of cultural clusters has been widely recognized (Landry&Bianchini, 1995; Scott, 1996a; Santagata, 2002; Mommas, 2004). Public and private actors, institutions and organisations play different roles in different local institutional environments; the planning and management of renewal is a process that can be labelled as complicated because of the hidden difficulties and underestimated problems that each case presents. Widely employed *redevelopment formulas* for the support of the cultural field are generally considered influencing factors regarding the organization of creative urban activities. Two decades ago, the awareness about the connection between cultural economy and local economic development brought about the emergence of place-marketing and heritage industry as programs for local economic development (Harvey, 1989). According to these programs, many metropolitan areas seem to rely on a *development formula* (Scott, 2006a), based on the combination of new economy, investment in cultural resources and efforts to generate a vivacious urban atmosphere. Policymakers focus on re-imaging and city-branding activities in order to generally increase local economic activities, attract tourists and generate new investments. Moreover, cities try to encourage this progression by reorganising their internal spaces: districts are characterized by development of *place specific settings* (streetscapes, entertainment facilities, architectural patrimony), *social and cultural infrastructures* (museum, galleries, theatres etc.) and *industrial locations* (advertising, graphic design, audiovisual services, publishing etc.) (Santagata, 2002). Florida (2002) explores this issue in his research addressing the *creative class*. His advice, widely taken on board by many municipal councils all over the world, is to attract large numbers of creative workers by providing new urban dynamics based on the creation of attractive environments, variegated cultural amenities and diverse social compositions. The

¹ United States Conference of Mayors, 2008

effects of such strategies have been defined as the “theatricalization of the build environment where the city of work is the city of leisure” (Scott, 2004: 468-469); creative cities tend to show an inescapable development trend towards spatial configurations that are “typified by cultural amenities, luxurious shopping centres and fancy residential enclaves” (Scott, 2006: 4). Following this argument, it seems that the redevelopment of derelict industrial areas into cultural districts exemplify this tendency, which relies on the support of cultural industries to sustain the urban economy and to give new life to old abandoned spaces. Moreover, it seems possible to argue that urban industrial redevelopment processes are likely to show similar characteristics with regard to patterns of culture production and organization of the built environment. However, the idea of a convergence regarding the identity of urban areas dedicated to cultural and creative activities loses its strength when greater attention is paid to the relationship between the local context and historical and social traits.

Many aspects of cultural cluster formation and management in creative cities have been researched extensively. Especially regarding European cases, academic attention has focused on the relationship between public action and cultural cluster creation. In particular, in urban studies, attention has been paid to the analysis of different management strategies of the cultural cluster (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993; Hitters and Richards, 2002; Brooks and Kushner, 2001; Mommaas, 2004; among others). Alongside, a specific branch of literature has focused on the understanding of the influence of public policy in the configuration of cultural clusters (Whitt, 1987; Newman and Smith, 2000). Finally, other contributions have focussed more on the policy or market driven displacement of disadvantaged social segments, widely defined as gentrification (Mills, 1988; Brownill, 1990; Butler and Hamnett, 1994; Foster, 1999; Karsten, 2003) – a process which is obviously strictly connected with renewal projects and cultural cluster formation. These different analyses represent necessary research points in order to grasp mechanisms and causal relationships of urban, cultural and social conditions. However, although many researchers take into account case studies of industrial renewal, the literature tends to focus on cultural cluster formation as the most prominent subject. No studies have specifically addressed the problem of the relationship between the local institutional environment and the development of cultural clusters, especially in the case of the renewal of derelict industrial sites. *How do local institutional environments filter and re-shape the renewal process of derelict industrial sites into cultural clusters?* How do the local rules of the urban planning game and the actors influence the renovation process of the area? How has the area transformed during the time and how has this transformation been managed? And finally, to what extent can local institutional factors account for the different outcomes? This article is the synthesis of an extensive comparative analysis of two former industrial areas, Westergasfabriek (WGF) in Amsterdam and Bovisa (BVS) in Milan. The results of the research, which has been performed for the final thesis of the Master Metropolitan Studies at the University of Amsterdam, will show how during the process of redevelopment of old industrial sites into creative clusters, the role of the local institutional environment filters and re-shapes general similar changes in such a way that local outcomes are significantly different. It seems that this point of view will reveal a new corner in the analysis of cultural cluster formation, which will analyze the relationship between the urban process and the local context.

Hopefully, this research will be able to stimulate interesting discussions and rise critical points of view while defining causal relationships between the local physical and functional restructuring and the institutional context. Sometimes, this kind of structural renovation and functional reallocation is part of a global tendency to deploy culture, creativity and knowledge as raw materials for an urban development formula. By analyzing the institutional environment and contextualizing the process of renewal, it can be discovered that sometimes those processes are expressed through paradoxical attempts to be part of international tendencies, without any respect for the local set of circumstances.

SIMILAR PROCESSES OF RENEWAL IN DIFFERENT LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

Derelict industrial sites represent appropriate locations in which to accommodate cultural facilities. To look at this process, which takes place in expanding urban environments in which global tendencies, local actors and cultural facilities develop; two case studies have been selected. Westergasfabriek (WGF) in Amsterdam and Bovisa (BVS) in Milan.

WGF and BVS are considered similar in many aspects. From the general to the particular, there are

historical, economic, structural and functional reasons behind the decision to compare the two projects. WGF and BVS are both located in so-called *creative cities*², they followed similar industrial/post-industrial historical paths and their development is culturally driven (in the sense that creative and knowledge-based activities are meant to be accommodated). In addition, the selection of the two renewal projects has been made according to the kind of industrial use and its historical role in the development of the area. WGF and BVS are both former public owned gas industries of the city, which have both witnessed a period of abandon and have both undergone a problematic and long renewal process in which creative and knowledge are influencing (or have influenced) the allocation of functions. In particular, the two case studies are considered similar regarding the physical characteristics of the area and the kind of process that they are witnessing (or have witnessed). During the development of the same process, the two cases present similar problems or situations with regard to:

- The management of a complex process: the land reclamation issue, the change of functions and new cultural meanings, the preservation of the past and renewal of the buildings
- The sustainability of the process, both economic and environmental
- Problem of infrastructures as barriers and the condition of urban enclave.

Because of their similar characteristics, the two cases are expected to show similar paths of development and a similar allocation of cultural functions; the research will shed light on the differences regarding the renewal with the aim to show how local institutional environments operate as filters.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This research favoured an institutional approach. The *comparative case-study analysis* is the method useful for the purpose of elucidating mechanisms or relationships through an example (or few examples) of a larger phenomenon. The research design follows a general particular structure. The empirical analysis has been built around a *general-particular* perspective, which starts from a national analysis of the rules of the urban planning game, then focuses on the urban context and the development of the site. The analytical overview has been useful to understand how the local institutional environment influences the renewal.

Firstly, spatial, institutional and historical dimensions have been taken into account following the approach employed by the Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies, which is based upon the assumption that “institutions are a prism to view spatial issues and the study of institutions is generally organized around an actor-centred approach”³. Therefore, the empirical analysis of the local institutional environment takes into account the *rules that control the spatial planning game*, with specific attention given to the *actors with the power and the authority to intervene and shape different outcomes*. Then, in order to understand how the areas under analysis developed during the time, from historical, social and physical points of view, elements of *path dependency* (Storper, 2002) are considered appropriate to explain different potentials and different developments of cities or urban regions. In particular, different urban developments can be understood by taking into account the *economic structure, the socio-demographic composition, the built environment and critical events*.

Secondly, in order to analyze *how the renewal of derelict industrial sites develops into cultural clusters* two main approaches have been considered appropriate. Brooks and Kushner (2001) have developed a framework for the analysis of management practices based on four indicators: *the administration, the degree of public involvement, the degree of physical change and programming*. Meanwhile, the approach of Newman and Smith (2000: 11-12) is considered convenient in understanding how the development of a site can be defined by *land-use destinations* of the area and further the *way in which the cultural cluster is formed through patterns of distribution of the cultural products*. Those two approaches have been considered appropriate to complete the analytical overview and answer the main research question.

In conclusion, after the empirical analysis of the context, with specific attention to the local rules of the

2 ACRE Report 2007 (Accommodating Creative Knowledge – Competitiveness of European Metropolitan Regions within the Enlarged Union), a publication coordinated by the Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies (AMIDSt), which compares recent socio-economic development trends and development strategies in 13 metropolitan regions across Europe with the aim of analyzing “to what extent creativity, innovation and knowledge are indeed the keys to a successful long-term economic development” - <http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/acre/index.html>

3 <http://www.fmg.uva.nl/amidst/object.cfm/objectid=FA36A057-DDBB-4873-855B193D72B2BC99>

urban planning game, the analytical analysis will define specific patterns of management and cultural cluster formation. The findings, which will be briefly presented in this article, have been deduced thanks to the consultation of relevant sources.

DATA COLLECTION

The social unit under study occurs at a sub-urban level: the neighbourhood where the renewal is taking place and the analysis of the two case studies is organized around the collection of primary and tertiary types of data.

Primary data was collected through personal conversations with Real estate developers, academics, cluster managers and local authority representatives. Tertiary data was collected from reports and publications about the history, the social composition, the development of the area published till 2009. In Milan, information were collected taking into account different sides of the development: the political support, the transformation of the neighbourhood as a whole, public urban policies, the creative field in Milan and the management of the process⁴. Moreover, in order to access more general knowledge about the context, tertiary type of data was consulted: academic elaborations regarding the institutional environment and its chronologic development⁵. In Amsterdam, the majority of information about the process of renewal has been collected during a 3-months research period in the office of the Westergasfabriek project manager; thanks to the possibility to consult the database and long daily debates about the case, many aspects have been fully explored⁶. Regarding the general context in which the WGF has been developed, tertiary types of data have been taken into account⁷ and, finally, recent information have been collected through research of newspaper articles.

LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS, A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Taking the form of “a comparative case-study analysis is a detailed left to right looking across few cases” (Gerring, 2007), the analysis presented within this section will summarize the findings of the research work. A clear focus will be placed upon methods that specifically aim to address and understand the question of *whether, and in what manner, the local institutional environment represented a filter of the renewal by influencing its outcomes*. This section illustrates the result of the analysis taking into account specific indicators, such as the local institutional environments, management practices, the degree of physical change, cultural cluster formation, people based issues.

The analysis of the local institutional environments proves that the two renewal processes developed in starkly different contexts. Italy is not a country of strong planning traditions. Only in the last two decades has a renewal of the system of public administration brought about the definition of specific regulations with

4 Interviews with Paolo Simonetti (Director of the Development and Territory Department, Milan Municipality) and Matteo Gatto (Coordinator and project manager Territorial Plan of Governance, Milan Municipality); Francesca Cognetti, (PhD in Territorial Planning and Urban Policy, Polytechnic of Milan, in 2007 she published a research about the development of Bovisa);. Giovanni Padula (currently researching the creative class for the municipalities of Milan and Rome); Matteo Poli, the coordinator of a study about Bovisa Gasometri made by the AMO (institute of urban research of the Metropolitan Office of Architecture located in Rotterdam).

5 -“Milano incompiuta, interpretazioni urbanistiche del mutamento” (Unfinished Milan, urban interpretations of the change) by Goldestain and Bonfantini (2007); policy documents about the strategies and vision for the urban development of the city - “Documento di Inquadramento” (Framework Document) about Milan Metropolitan Area; cultural surveys on historical traits of the area - “Bovisa Gasometri. Contributi per un’idea di sviluppo sostenibile” (Gasometers of Bovisa. Contributions for a sustainable idea of development); and booklets collecting data and facts about the recent phase of development of the area.

6 Two interviews made by the American Environmental Protection Agency in 1998 have been useful in understanding the approach of the project leader (Evert Verhagen) and the vision at the district level (Ruud Grondel, Chairman of the District Council).

7 Conceptualisation of Amsterdam metropolitan area and the development of the Dutch urban planning game - booklet “Amsterdam Metropolis” published by the DRO (physical planning department) of Amsterdam in 2008; historical overview and ideas and visions sustaining the renewal of the area - “Ontwikkelingsplan voor de Westergasfabriek” (Development Plan for the Western Gas Factory); chronology of the process, with insights about management practices - Westergasfabriek Culture Park: Transformation of a Former Industrial Site in Amsterdam, published in 2004

regard to the planning and programming of complex urban projects. In Lombardy, those changes were regulated by the Regional Government in 2005, when the administration defined a number of specific tools and programs in order to achieve a more comprehensive control of the planning activities. Milan, having implemented those regulatory practices now bears witness to a series of new large-scale urban projects, which are redefining the identity of the city, in particular through the development of the north western axis, towards the two airports. However, during this latest phase of urban development of Milan, the administration of processes of renewal is still characterized by what might be described as an inadequate situation. In particular, in Milan, the level of transparency and involvement of inhabitants are still considered improper, whilst *appeals* are the main tools used by different stakeholders to manifest their disagreement with a specific process (Pasqui, 2007). This demonstrates that there are still clear problems with the management of conflict and with negotiation activities (Goldestain&Bonfantini, 2007: 56). With regard to the public support of cultural activities, Milan does not directly encourage creativity through a specific policy, but private entrepreneurship is considered to be well developed, especially in the fields of fashion and design. In Italy, the planning system is not as developed as in the other case study under analysis.

In Holland, the national planning system is generally considered a cardinal element in defining the structure and plans for the spatial development of the country. Urban governance is organized according to the *polder model* (Flaudi, 1991), based upon both network coordination amongst different bodies and a process of continuous consultation with stakeholders (Needham, 2007). The city of Amsterdam has recently promoted widespread programs of urban development aimed at expansion towards the water and, moreover, the city specifically supports the cultural-creative-knowledge sector in newly developing areas (Vreeswikk, 2008). The *I Amsterdam* model is the city-branding approach adopted in order to promote the creative image of the city in an international context.

Different local institutional environments have thus filtered the renewal of the two areas, defining their respective trajectories and strategies in a heterogeneous manner. The analysis of the two cases demonstrate that many aspects of the renewal process manifest in different ways in accordance with the specificities of the site and, importantly, of the institutional context. A specific overview of the way in which the institutional dimension has influenced those differences seems appropriate in order to confirm the hypothesis that this thesis sustains. Particular attention will be paid to management practices, the degree of physical change, cultural cluster formation and people-based issues.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND GOVERNANCE INNOVATION

Although the two renewal processes faced similar problems, it can be posited that the two different local institutional environments generated different solutions to both the management of the process and the land reclamation issue. By seeking to deepen insight into the management of urban renewal, it has become apparent that the two cases explored within this research present a clear difference. Whilst the Italian case focuses upon the elaboration of the plans addressing an area, the Dutch renovation was managed with particular attention paid to the process itself. In Italy, after the *Program Agreement* of 2007⁸, the Real estate developer commissioned the *Office for Metropolitan Architecture* located in Rotterdam to provide a new *Master Plan* for the area. The agreement amongst the involved actors does not indicate a particularly innovative approach to the management of the area, although it acknowledged that it is possible that this lack of attention to establishing suitable practices of governance relates to the stage at which the renewal process is currently at in the Italian case, which has not seen concrete implementation yet. It seems appropriate that, once the new *Master Plan* is approved, a selected group of public and private stakeholders organize themselves into a specific body than can dedicate its attention on a daily basis to the development and management of the process. In this respect, the Dutch case clearly demonstrated the importance of the creation of a body for the management of the process - the *special project team* coordinated the renewal of the area in an innovative way. The *team* managed three processes: the use of the buildings in an economic profitable way, the land reclamation process according to legally approved criteria and the park design. Freedom with respect to the contents (and plans) was compensated by the involvement of the citizens and the allocation of cultural entrepreneurs who provided ideas and steered the success of the renewal (Warnau, 1991).

⁸ The Program Agreement is the tool used in urban renewal projects in order to sign an agreement about the designation of the area among the owners. Different owners share their portion of land to create an unique development plan.

The land reclamation has been a problematic issue in both cases. Also in this respect it is posed that the local institutional environment acted as a filter. In the Italian case, the municipality was able to involve the European Community and to apply for the PRO.S.I.DE project⁹. The fact that the national regulation addressing the subject changed just after the presentation of the results of environmental impact assessment created a delay in the definition of new uses for the area. In contrast, in the Dutch case, a strong collaborative approach between the residents' organizations and the municipal council brought to the proposals for innovative and more flexible practices of land reclamation, which were sanctioned by a new national regulation.

CHANGING BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

Analysis of the degree of physical change also demonstrates that way in which the two different contexts produced individual and heterogeneous outcomes. In BVS, the quarter as whole can be seen to be witnessing a process of spontaneous re-allocation of functions to the small-scale industrial buildings present upon the site (Cognetti, 2007a). This process began when the academic institution located a new department in the area and connectivity issues in the quarter were ameliorated as the result of improvements to the transport system (Cognetti, 2007b). The renewal area, however, is still an urban void; this can be seen as the outcome of some deficiencies typical of the last phase of Milanese urban planning history (D'Uva, 2006). In the Dutch case, the management of the process has been undertaken with continuous consultation with the associations that represented the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. This approach brought about the definition of a set of recommendations, which supported the creation of an active park, with playgrounds for children, athletic facilities and recreational fields.

CULTURAL CLUSTER FORMATION

The differences in the relationship between the functional renovation of the area and the support of cultural practices represent one of the most visible expressions of the way in which the local institutional environment influenced the process.

In the renewal of Bovisa area, the Polytechnic of Milan acted as the promoter in the initial stage, later transforming into a node in a network of private companies and public bodies. The system of production responsible for the development of the area has been established through a strong collaboration between the University, private enterprises and foundations; those actors support a cluster of activities characterized by business start-ups and research, across a number of different fields. The probable future creation of *the Knowledge Hub* in the Bovisa area finds its roots in the strong relationships among those actors.

The Dutch *cultural policy* and the Amsterdam *creative city initiative* represent the institutional effort to sustain the creative economy both at the national and local level. In particular, the creation of the WESTERGASFABRIEK.BV is highlighted as a further example of the special attention paid to process-related planning. The WESTERGASFABRIEK.BV is a body for the management of cultural activities which promoted (and still promotes) *diversity* as a concept or a claim to sustain the allocation of cultural activities. Innovation is promoted through culture, producing practices through what has been labelled as a *post-modern management* (Koekebakker, 2004: 98). Essentially, in the WGF case, culture is produced, promoted and consumed thanks to the promotion of diversity. This diversity is expressed in the selection of the tenants and tenures of the buildings, the events presented and the kind of target groups of consumers, which the area aims to attract. In the view of this study, this approach has been really successful. As BVS presents a more complex situation, similar approaches cannot be advised with regard to the Milan case study. In particular, more owners are involved in the renewal there, and cultural production is connected to knowledge-based activities based on the collaboration with private companies. It is still posed that the creation of a specific body for the governance of the process could be appropriate in order to support the structural development, the production of knowledge and the functional allocation of new activities.

9 "PRO.S.I.DE Promoting Sustainable Inner urban Development", a cross-countries project on the study of sustainable renewal of Brownfield areas. The aim of the project was to apply an innovative method for the analysis of the area in order to provide sustainable suggestions for the owners and the possible developer.

PEOPLE BASED ISSUES

Differences in the level of involvement of civil society can be defined as rooted in the socio-cultural composition of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and in the practices of decision-making process related to the local institutional environment.

In Milan, the historical inhabitants of the area have always perceived the redevelopment area in Bovisa as an urban void and consider the renewal as separate from the everyday life of the quarter. Whilst the new regulation of renewal practices defines an involvement of the citizen at an initial stage of the process, there is no evidence of this practice in the BVS case. As a consequence, it can be said that in Milan, involvement is not encouraged by the institutions and also not manifested by the stakeholders of the quarter themselves. However, this lack of attention to the needs of the population of the surrounding neighbourhoods is partly compensated by the actors involved in the renewal: the Polytechnic of Milan seeks to create an area in which academics and young professionals can be welcomed through the provision of tailored facilities, while the Municipality is commissioning research targeted at addressing the needs and demands of the cultural entrepreneurs of the area.

Differently, in the WGF case, the residents and their organizations played an essential role in the redevelopment of the area. Neighbourhood associations became essential, especially at the beginning of the project, when the land reclamation process was effectively stopped. The idea to use more flexible solutions was put into practice as a result of the collaboration of residents and the City Council. Moreover, another typical characteristic of the case, which can be related to the Dutch planning system in general, is the ability to divide managerial and political responsibilities at different levels. In particular, the *portfolio holder* and the *project alderman* have been critical in the coordination of different stakeholders' needs and demands at the local level while directing the renewal from a higher perspective.

CONCLUSION

The hypothesis that this research seeks to explore holds that local institutional environments represent filters of the renewal of derelict industrial sites when turned into cultural clusters. Through the overview of the different rules of the game that regulate the planning discipline in an international context (in particular in Holland and Italy), it has been possible to understand that regulation creates specific circumstances, which brought about different outcomes in the cases selected.

As the result of the methodology applied in this research, it has been possible to elucidate a series of mechanisms and relationships, which lie behind the process of the renewal of derelict industrial sites. The detailed "left to right looking" across the two cases (Gerring, 2007), brought about the definition of a series of similar aspects and confirmation that local institutional environments *do* act as filters of the renewal process. In particular, evidence indicates that the local institutional environments can influence management practices, the degree of physical change, clusterization of activities and the degree of involvement of the civil society. In general, it can be posited that *during the process of the renewal of a derelict industrial site into cultural clusters, a specific analysis of the local institutional environment represents a pivotal activity to be undertaken at the initial stage*. Moreover, during the definition of programs aimed at organizing the promotion of cultural activities, a redevelopment formula based upon a fixed list of *best practices* can bring about a costly and ineffective use of public resources.

Although the two renewal processes presented herein had similar starting points - comprising similar historical paths, similar locations, similar types of actors involved and a similar proposal for the area (the creation of a cultural cluster), this research has demonstrated that national and local frameworks and specific circumstances play a pivotal role when a program of urban renewal aimed at supporting cultural and knowledge-based activities is under development. In the cases analyzed, national frameworks influenced the legal structure in defining appropriate regulations, especially with regard to the *land reclamation issue*. Local frameworks were more important in the definition of appropriate tools and a managing body for the control of the development. Providing a clear example of the importance of such local frameworks, the analysis of the Amsterdam case demonstrated that specific attention was paid with regard to the *process management*, whilst in Milan local attention focused primarily upon the *plan development*. The two cases thus employed vastly different management strategies. In particular, in Milan the strategic action that brought about a definition of a new designation for the area was the ratification of the *Program Agreement* of 2007, a tool for

urban governance, which coordinates the collaboration of private and public actors. In Amsterdam, the definition of a sub-local level of public administration, the *district Council*, is of crucial importance. At this level, public negotiations with private actors were processed by a *Special Project Team*, which was also consulted local of neighbourhood associations. The distinction between the approaches adopted by local institutions in the respective cases demonstrates that analysis of the local governance framework is crucial, especially at the initial phase of a project development.

The research also demonstrates that the specific set of local circumstances (rooted in the historical and social traits of the area) represent a critical element in defining the needs and the possibilities of a project. The most visible example of this can be found in the degree of involvement of civil society in the process. In Amsterdam, the local population had access to the policy making and, as a consequence, the final designation of the area was strongly dependent on the needs of the inhabitants. In contrast, in Milan, citizens did not participate at the initial stage of the process. The evidence formed by these cases teaches that a preliminary analysis of the cultural and social traits can be relevant in the definition of appropriate strategies and in the avoidance of blockage behaviours.

Finally, this analysis demonstrates that, during the renewal process of derelict industrial sites into cultural clusters, if a fixed set of *best practices* are employed without taking into account the institutional, historical, social and cultural/economic conditions of the area under redevelopment, it can be predicted that problems may well manifest with regard to management practices, public governance and decision making processes.

It should be noted that this research has examined only two cases and the results do not imply that similar characteristics could be found in a larger range. In particular, the two case study areas under analysis are both publically owned, and as such the observation that renewal processes in which the land ownership is mostly private are less dependent on the local institutional environment is difficult to prove without further research. However, regardless of land ownership, it is noted that large-scale renewals are usually influenced by public permissions and framed by city planning development documents. In that sense, the present research is still considered relevant to cases of renewal exhibiting different land ownership patterns. In conclusion, the study has addressed causal mechanisms related to local institutional environments, while other explanatory causes have been avoided. Further research is needed in order to test if the hypothesis might be confirmed in other cases. Particularly, further analysis of the renewal of industrial sites in a similar institutional environment to those considered within this study, could be useful in order to discover if their development differs, and, in that case, to determine the key differences and their causal mechanisms.

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