

LIVING OR LEAVING? REGENERATION POLICIES IN MULTI-ETHNIC CONTEXTS IN NORTH ITALY

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The paper examines the regeneration strategies carried out in the last 10-15 years in three multi-ethnic areas in Brescia, Genoa and Turin (North Italy). These cities have all been important industrial centres and, in recent years, the economic restructuring of the post-industrial age has led their leaderships and policy makers to invest in visitor economy. The paper aims at rendering problematic an assumption circulating among academics and planners stating that, in these contexts, regeneration and urban renewal policies have been addressed only at the immigrants' expulsion from the cities' more central areas. In fact different approaches could be found in the different cities according to the peculiarities of their development strategies, to the public debate on immigration proposed at local level, as well as to the more or less strategic role given to integration policies of the disadvantaged groups, independently from their national origin.

Introduction

The paper examines the regeneration strategies carried out in the last 10-15 years in three multi-ethnic areas in Brescia, Genoa and Turin (North Italy). All these contexts have always been working class areas as well as gateways in their cities for immigrants – both the ones coming from South Italy in post-war age (from 1950s), and the ones coming from less developed countries in more recent years (from the 1980s).

Brescia, Genoa and Turin have all been important industrial centres and, in recent years, the economic restructuring of the post-industrial age has led their leaderships and policy makers to invest in visitor economy. The physical and socio-economic transformation of their sometimes anonymous, sometimes deprived city centres has been part of these strategies. All the considered contexts – the Carmine neighbourhood in Brescia, Genoa's Old Town, Porta Palazzo in Turin – are located in central and peri-central areas involved in the regeneration strategies, the real estate pressure becoming higher, rendering inclusion/exclusion objectives of policies clearer.

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Moreover, in the last years the immigrants’ presence in these areas has led stigmatization processes to arise: in a recent past these were no go areas for some and a no exit zones for others. Regeneration initiatives have changed this situation, sometimes dealing directly with the immigrant presence, sometimes even not mentioning it, sometimes trying to consider the social integration issue both from the immigrants’ and from the natives’ point of view. This last point is quite relevant as, until now, very common phenomena that could be found in other countries such as the ethnic enclaves, or the immigrants’ groups concentration or segregation in specific neighbourhoods, are unusual in Italy. Multi-ethnic settlements are “really” multi-ethnic as people from different countries live in these places, including Italian citizens (Tosi, 1998; Cozzarini, 2007).

It’s important to underline that immigration is still a relatively new phenomenon in Italy, and that planning in multi-ethnic contexts still remains a relatively unexplored field. Despite this, a prejudgment is already circulating among planners and academics stating that regeneration and urban renewal policies have been addressed only at the immigrants’ expulsion from the cities’ more central areas (Crosta *et al*, 2000).

The paper aims at rendering problematic this assumption, arguing that planning is not expressing only its “dark side” (Yiftachel, 1998), and that different approaches could be found in the different cities, according to the peculiarities of their development strategies, to the public debate on immigration proposed at local level, as well as to the more or less strategic role given to integration policies of the disadvantaged groups, independently from their national origin. This approach is legitimized by the fact that, despite a quite aggressive public debate against immigrants at a national level (Rivera, 2009), literature on the “Italian way” of dealing with immigration has pointed out that a “local and adaptive” model of integration can be recognized (Caponio, 2006). This means that while immigration policies, defined through the national laws, have mainly been aimed at controlling the flows of people, integration policies have been completely devolved to the local level, especially to the municipalities and to the third sector’s initiatives. In this general context, urban policies/planning at local level may also establish some kind urban labs where “out of the mainstream” approaches could be explored (Pastore, 2007).

The paper is based on three case-studies that have been realized directly through a field research, as well as through a review of the existing literature on the main development and planning strategies adopted by the different cities.

As already underlined, planning in multi-ethnic contexts is still a relatively unexplored field in Italy. For this reason, the work has tried to focus on some key-research questions that have been “tested”, sometimes changed, during the field research. For this reason, the research aimed also at establishing a sort of “starting point” for other contexts to be explored and analyzed. Moreover, as the immigrants’ settlements seem to represent one of the core fields to explore both the regressive as well as the progressive potentials of

planning (Yiftachel, 1998), the work has focused on some open questions for further research on the role that spatial policies may play in post-industrial cities to “give a place” to disadvantaged groups to settle and live.

1. Color blind social control? The “Progetto Carmine” in Brescia

Located within the Lombardy Region, Brescia is the fourth economic centre of Italy and counts 191.000 inhabitants. Despite a still quite strong industrial tradition based mainly on metallurgic industries, in recent years the city has seen a significant process of development of the tertiary and finance sectors. Moreover, an effort to promote visitor economy as well as to enforce its university could be recognized (Granata *et al*, 2010).

The Carmine neighbourhood is located in the historic heart of Brescia, and has always been a working class area, as well an hosting place for the newcomers coming from the mountain valleys close to the town in the 19th century, from the south of Italy in the 1950/70s, and from the less developed countries of the world starting from the 1990s. Social exclusion phenomena, deviance and prostitution have led Carmine to be considered one of the most problematic areas of Brescia (Grandi, 2008).

The arrival of the most recent immigrant groups occurred at a critical point in the history of the area: local population reducing and ageing, residential dereliction, public spaces declining, closure of shops and businesses, presence of illegal activities. This situation favoured the immigrants’ settlement in this part of the city from the 1990s when abandoned buildings were used as living and working places. The migrant population grew from 8% (over a population of 4412 inhabitants) in 1992 to 40% (over a population of 4650 inhabitants) in 2008. Between 2002 and 2006 the enterprises run by immigrants groups increased from 20 to 100.

These dynamics generated an informal real estate market with high rental prices despite the houses’ state of decay, cases of severe overcrowding, and economic or other types of exploitation between Italians and foreigners but also between co-nationals. These new urban trends, even though characterized by informality/illegality, contributed to slowing down the process of decline in the area, allowing new uses for the urban space and new forms of social relations. Despite this, foreign migrants have always been seen mainly as the problem of the neighbourhood.

The national political debate as well as the local press facilitated the emergence of hidden tensions and unspoken conflicts. Also for this reason from 2001 the Municipality promoted a Piano di recupero (Urban Rehabilitation Plan) for the Carmine neighbourhood that has already brought about radical transformation of the economy and living spaces of the area.

It's important to underline that, covering around ¼ of the overall surface of Brescia's historical centre, the Carmine neighbourhood is a core territorial resource for any kind of development strategy based on visitor and city users' economies.

The major problem for the neighbourhood's recovery project was to deal with the fact that the majority of the buildings in the area were privately owned. For this reason, it was established that the physical renewal of the residential buildings would be compulsory: the plan implied a series of agreements between the Municipality and the private owners, provided incentives for housing renewal, and established severe measures such as expropriation if the buildings were not restored.

This process was supported also through a number of actions carried out directly by the Municipality aimed at changing the perception of the area and at rendering it more attractive. These actions included the public space's improvement as well as the introduction or relocation of a number of institutions and general services of the city into the neighbourhood: some departments of the university, a library, a nursery school, a police station and student housing.

The social consequences of this project on immigrants', old and poor people's life was not considered directly by the Rehabilitation Plan, their problems being totally devolved to the social services that followed “emergency based” forms of intervention. People who could not afford the raise in rent prices (including regular immigrants) were helped to move to more peripheral areas of the city, especially in the Council housing neighbourhood of San Polo (Grandi, 2008).

An univocal evaluation of this process isn't simple as, even if the recovery strategy stimulated a gentrification process forcing immigrants and weaker groups to leave, there is no doubt that the situation of overcrowding and unsanitary condition of the dwellings had to be faced. At the same time, the strategy implied a form of social control also over the private owners as the cycle of the mostly illegal informal market characterized by high rental prices for the poor housing was broken. Despite this, there is no doubt that, if the owners managed to rent or sell the dwellings to wealthier people after the renewal process, the gains for the weaker groups were not so granted for everyone as gentrification processes forced a lot of people to leave.

If the housing renewal strategy had a role in the immigrants' moving to other places in the city, a different process was related to the commercial activities: in fact, despite some traces of commercial gentrification, the Carmine neighbourhood still hosts a number of services for migrants such as ethnic groceries, shops and call centres. For this reason the area still represents a meeting point for the migrants, especially during the week-ends. At the same time, some of these activities – for example, low-cost ethnic meals vendors – have demonstrated a “compatibility” with the city users now attracted in the neighbourhood such as university students and tourists. This means that, from the users' point of view, the place is still “ethnically and socially

mixed”. At the same time, there is no doubt that the presence of new users attracted by the university and other relevant functions has contributed to change the perception of the Carmine neighbourhood as a no-go area, even if immigrants are still a visible presence and spend a lot of time in this place. At the current state of the regeneration process it’s difficult to evaluate if this mixed reality will persist in the future or if the gentrification process as well as the immigrants’ and poor groups’ expulsion will affect commercial and public spaces as well.

2. A spontaneous social mix? Genoa’s “Old Town” regeneration

Strategically located on the sea, Genoa represents – as well as Milan and Turin – one of the vertices of what is commonly known as the “industrial triangle” of the country. Traditionally a port and an industrial centre, after the 1970/80s crisis and the harbour reorganization, the city’s great effort to manage a transition towards a diversified economic reality based also on tourism, culture and leisure has been widely recognized (Gabielli S., 2005). Nowadays the city counts 132.000 inhabitants.

With its surface of 113 hectares, Genoa’s old town is one of the largest historical centres in Europe. This part of the city has always been the gateway for the newcomers, and has always been characterized by marginality, social exclusion, crime and illegal activities (Dal Lago, Quadrelli, 2003). Until the 1990s it was the “dark side” of the city: a “no go” area for the middle and upper classes that tended to settle in the hills zones outside the old town. The small alleys (*carugi*) that characterize this historical centre, the buildings’ state of decay and the decline of the public spaces, fostered the perception of a dangerous place. From the ’80 the arrival of immigrants from less developed countries contributed to enhance the negative perception of the old town. From 2000 the immigrants’ presence in the old town was estimated around 22,1%, even if in some areas (*rioni*) such as the so called “ghetto” the percentage is up 40%, in other it is less than the average.

Genoa’s waterfront has been for centuries occupied by the docks, and until the 1990s the city had “lost” its relationship with the sea. The docks were “a wall” between the city and the sea. Hemmed in between steep mountains and the sea, Genoa didn’t have so many territorial resources to develop its new economic strategy based also on tourism, culture and leisure. This strategy implied an investment on the regeneration of an highly stigmatized historical centre and on its reconnection with the sea (Bobbio, 2008).

The early 1990s saw the large-scale deployment of resources to activate processes of urban regeneration for the old town and the waterfront, redefining their image and identity, promoting the visitor economy and improving the urban facilities and spaces for leisure.

Three main families of integrated actions and policies made the regeneration process of such a huge area possible and sustainable: a series of “great events” that played a core role mobilizing large-scale resources;

some architectural and urban design interventions that contributed to attract new city users in the historical centre, changing the perception of a “dangerous place”; last but not least, an integrated system of regeneration and renewal initiatives carried out through European, national, regional and local funding programs.

From the great events’ point of view, a core date to understand the city’s new development strategy is 1992 when Genoa (Columbus birthing place) hosted the Colombiadi – an international exposition celebrating the 500th anniversary of the discovery of the Americas. The exhibition played an important role especially for the old harbor renewal: Renzo Piano’s project for Genoa’s port implied the restoration of a number of existing buildings, as well as the construction of new buildings such as the aquarium and the harbor offices.

In 2001, the G8 summit conference allowed a number of interventions for the old town renewal, including large-scale actions of “urban maintenance” involving streets, historical buildings’ façades and public spaces.

Finally, in 2004 Genoa was awarded European Capital of Culture: this event implied actions of urban maintenance and redevelopment of public spaces and façades of the historical buildings, strengthening of the museums functions, environmental redevelopment projects for the central area and the waterfront, organization of cultural events, promotion of the city’s image but, most important, played a core role to make the new touristic vocation of Genoa well known at an international level, and to foster a new identity and a sense of pride for the city in its own inhabitants.

In fact in 2006 the “Strade Nuove” – that lay in a pivotal position between the middle ages streets of the old town to the south and the modern traffic system to the north – and the related system of “Palazzi dei Rolli” – private residences belonging to the city’s aristocratic families that in 1536 started to host the distinguished guests of the Republic of Genoa – were included in the Unesco World Heritage List, confirming and strengthening the new touristic vocation of the city.

Before 1992 (during the 1980s) a number of architectural and urban design interventions played a core role in the old town recovery process: the restoring of the city’s main square, Piazza de Ferrari; the transformation of Palazzo Ducale into a cultural and exposition centre; the re-opening of the Carlo Felice theatre, the local opera house. These places are not in the historical centre, but may represent a sort of “clasp” between the old and the new town. Moreover, in the same years the Faculty of Architecture was moved from an upper class neighbourhood on the hills to the historical centre. The new faculty building was realized on a former monastery bombed site. This was a quite relevant choice both from the symbolic and from the substantial point of view: on one hand, the moving of such a relevant urban function in a former stigmatized site represented the new will of the city’s leaderships to invest on a long-time forgotten place; on the other hand, the university presence stimulated first generation of gentrifiers – students, artists, creative class – to come and live in the old town (Gastaldi, 2009).

Finally, a number of plans and projects funded at European, National, Regional and local level, were developed in the different areas of the historical center:

- Urban Renewal Programs (Programmi di riqualificazione urbana) – implying the public space and built environment rehabilitation and improvement in the Carmine, Porta Soprana and Darsena areas;
- the so-called Neighbourhood Contracts (Contratti di quartiere) – integrated urban regeneration initiatives for the Giustiniani-Porta Soprana and for the Ghetto areas;
- Genoa’s PRUSST – Programma di riqualificazione urbana e di sviluppo sostenibile (Urban Rehabilitation and Sustainable Development Program) involving a number of regeneration projects for the historical centre – implying also the municipal dock’s and the Parodi bridge’s transformation to perform new urban functions;
- Integrated Street Centers (Centri integrati di via) – where European Objective 2 Funds aimed at strengthening the commercial environment through the public space improvement have been used;
- the European Initiative Urban II that implied actions of renewal, economic and social revitalization in the old town, the historical docks buildings’ restoration and promotion for tourism and cultural purposes, as well as the public space’s and built environment’s improvement;
- Organic Programs of Intervention (Programmi organici di intervento) – public and private actions for housing renewal, where the public funds were spent to improve the public space environment.

In Genoa, the public space’s renewal and the primary services’ improvement had a core role to create a condition of reliance between the public administration and the private owners whom started to invest on their buildings’ restoration. Among these, primary public works regarding water, drains, electricity and gas supply networks were carried out; the stone streets surfaces, the lighting system and the alleys’ cleaning were improved.

Incentives addressed to the private owners for housing renewal were provided by different initiatives for the old town. As described by Bruno Gabrielli, an academic who was Alderman for Urban Quality during the recovery strategy implementation, these policies aimed at raising the real estate values (Gabrielli B. *et al*, 2006). At the same time, as in Brescia, they could be seen as a form of social control, as the state of decay of the old town had generated an informal market characterized by high rental prices, cases of overcrowding, unhealthy living conditions, and economic or other types of exploitation between Italians and foreigners.

A policy aimed at raising the real estate values leads to gentrification processes. As also the most “socially oriented” programs (for example the Neighbourhood Contracts) have not provided strong initiatives to cope with these phenomena, the old town social mix is preserved only thanks to a spontaneous market process as

wealthy people don't buy dwellings located in the first floors of the old buildings because the lighting is not good (*ibid*).

It has been widely acknowledged that the Genoa's recovery strategy was successful: the city has been reconnected with the sea and the historical center, mainly in the part that lay east of Via San Lorenzo, thanks also to the Faculty of Architecture's and other urban functions' presence, has become a place to visit and stay for city users and tourists. In this way, the urban space is less dominated by the immigrants' and social excluded people's presence: visitors and city users feel “safe”. In the last years the results of this process may be seen also thanks to the arrival of second generation of gentrifiers, that includes also people from the upper classes previously living in other areas (Gastaldi, 2009). Some major problems remains in the Maddalena area that results only partially gentrified, and in the Ghetto and Prè areas, still characterized by deprivation, social exclusion and high presence of immigrants.

3. Beyond Safety? An integrated project for Porta Palazzo in Turin

Turin is located in the Piedmont region of north west Italy and represents one of the vertices of the “industrial triangle” of the country. Nowadays the Municipality counts around 900.000 inhabitants, and Turin is Italy's fourth largest city.

Since the Second World War, the industrial triangle has always been one of the most prosperous regions of Italy, and it has become one of the main destinations of immigrants from the less developed areas of the south of the country. The economic base of Turin has always been dominated by the mechanical engineering sector, and especially by the FIAT car manufacturing industry. The relevance of FIAT for the city – actually a symbol of all the country's post-war economic boom – has been underlined by a wide range of studies that have defined Turin as a “one-company town” (Bagnasco, 1986).

The mid-1970s Europe-wide economic decline, affected the industrial triangle as well: all the main cities had to face de-industrialisation and urban decline, losing population and employment (Petsimeris, 1998). Turin has been affected by the crisis and by its social consequences severely, mainly due to the presence of a single industrial sector, and to the dominance of one single firm within it (Bagnasco, 1986).

The 1980s have been for Turin a starting point for a slow and incremental process aimed at overturning its traditional image, improving a quite anonymous city centre, promoting the local cultural tradition, and investing in visitor economy (Dente *et al*, 2005).

From the town planning and urban policies' point of view, three main tools have been set up during this recovery process: a new Piano Regolatore Generale (Urban Masterplan) adopted in 1995 to replace the

existing one dated from 1959; two strategic plans, providing from 1998 the main guidelines for the economic development strategies (the 1998-2000 plan was the first strategic plan carried out in Italy) (Winkler, 2008); and from 1997, the Progetto Speciale Periferie (Special Project for “Peripheral” Areas²) that tried to connect and integrate a number of regeneration initiatives at neighbourhood level carried out by the Municipality using European, National, Regional and local funds. Over recent years the project has managed three Urban Rehabilitation Programs (Programmi di recupero urbano), a Neighbourhood Contract (Contratto di quartiere), and the Turin Urban 2 program. It has also promoted many other initiatives in various areas of the city, seeking to activate [...] participated local development actions (Governa & Saccomani, 2004). The special project’s experience led to the set up of a dedicated Unit within the Council, the Peripheral Neighbourhood Unit (Settore Periferie).

From the urban policies’ point of view, it’s really important to emphasise that Turin has been one of the first cities in Italy able to develop strong relationships with the European Union, acceding to an international network of realities that had to face similar problems, exchanging know-how and experiences. These relationships brought also a wide range of resources for urban renewal and regeneration, as well as for socio-economic development (Dente *et al*, 2005). Moreover, as the city successfully took part in the 1999 bid to host the 2006 Winter Olympic Games, this exceptional mega-event contributed highly to reinforce the city’s re-positioning strategy at national and international level, and to boost the its tourism capacity and reputation (Guala, 2007).

Despite the crisis, Turin is still one of the most important cities in Italy, and lies at the centre of one of its most prosperous and industrialized regions. For these reasons, from the mid-1980s it started to attract thousands of immigrants from non-European less developed countries. As with other immigration countries, the newcomers tend to settle mainly in poor and deprived neighbourhoods where the cost of living is not too high. In the Italian biggest towns these characteristics could be mainly found in the outskirts, where the post-war working class public housing estates lie, but in Turin some popular peri-central areas – in particular the Porta Palazzo and San Salvario areas – were able to attract the immigrants as well.

The main square of Porta Palazzo hosts everyday one of the largest open air markets in Europe. The market is a good place to find a (legal and not legal) job for the newcomers. For this reason Porta Palazzo has always been a traditional “port of entry” in the city for all immigrants – both the ones coming from the south of Italy from the 1950s, and the ones coming from the non-European countries in more recent years.

² An appropriate English translation of the Italian term “periferie” is difficult to find. One term could be “outskirts”, but this definition omits inclusion of the “inner cities” areas economically, physically and socially marginalized, that were part of the Turin special project as well. For a theoretical analysis of this term, and of its use in the Italian contest see: Governa & Saccomani (2004).

The increasing number of immigrants in Porta Palazzo led in 1995 to a hard movement of protest by the Italian citizens. The protests’ roots could be found not only in “white” racism, or in the scarce level of integration between Italian and foreign people, but also in the low level of social integration of the Italian citizens living in the area. The “crisis” made clear that the answer shouldn’t have been based on any kind of affirmative action, as problems of social justice could easily raise (Allasino *et al*, 2000).

Even though in 1994 a Council Survey on the Porta Palazzo area had suggested an urban regeneration integrated approach to face its emerging problems, all the initiatives were carried out in a fragmentary way until 1996 when, thanks to the second European Union bid to finance Urban Pilot Projects, the Municipality had the opportunity to set up a more coherent strategy for the whole place. The project was significantly named “The Gate³. Living not Leaving” clearly stating its main “integration” objectives. After twelve years this initiative is still the only experience of an urban policy expressly focused on the immigrants’ integration issues in Italy.

Due to its gateway character, people are always moving in and out the neighbourhood. Considering the presence of illegal immigrants, an accurate evaluation of the population living in the area is really difficult: the official data is close to 10.000 inhabitants (The Gate, 2002). When the project started almost 6% of the population in the area was composed of immigrant groups. The percentage increased to 19% when the initiatives started to work, and has reached 23% at the present time.

The project implementation started in 1998 and ended in 2002. Its main theme was “inclusion” (living not leaving), considering this issue both from the immigrants’ and from the natives’ point of view. This means that all the community involvement strategies have been addressed to the overall local population, considering shared problems and not shared ethnicities as a base for action. Moreover, even if the security issue that dominates the Italian public debate on immigration was considered, it never had a core role in the project agenda, and was developed in an innovative way, not only by reorganizing the Police presence or improving the area’s street lighting, but also by investing on social initiatives focused especially on young people, to support them with issues such as unemployment and deter them from criminal activities or drug addiction.

The Gate has tried to set up a general framework able to integrate its activities with more traditional planning initiatives. The prevailing actions focussed on the social and economic integration of both market vendors and residents. In particular, the project included 19 actions related to five main areas of intervention:

³ “The gate” is an English translation for the Italian word “porta” which is commonly used to indicate any kind of door, but that also refers, as in the Porta Palazzo area, to the ancient gates of the historical town walls.

- Business incubator (economic development and work opportunities);
- Safety net (social initiatives);
- Liveability (addressing the urban degradation, improving the housing stock and the built environment);
- Sustainability (environmental protection, especially related with the market activities which produce 15 tons of waste everyday);
- Link-ability (related to mobility and transport issues, as well as aimed at establishing relationships between people in the neighbourhood, and at “building bridges” between the area and the rest of the town).

Despite the end of the European funding, the committee has continued its activities in the area, thanks to a wide range of partners’ support such as the Municipality, a number of bank foundations, voluntary and third sector initiatives. The project has been updated with an innovative series of continuing initiatives and, thanks to its twelve years activity, The Gate office, settled in a building facing the market square, has become a point of reference for the communities living in the area, and a place for local people, workers and entrepreneurs to meet, identify their main shared problems, and looking for collective solutions.

The Council’s High Official in the International Relationships and European Policies Unit, Ilda Curti, played a core role in this process: she was director of The Gate’s committee from 1998 to 2006; after the 2006 elections she was asked by the Mayor to become the Alderman for Urban Regeneration and Immigrants’ Integration Department. This department didn’t exist before in the Municipality, and its institution reflects a quite innovative approach in Italy, as the immigrants’ integration issues are usually devolved to the Social Services Department. Moreover, in the same years the majority of the Italian cities set up a “Safety issues” department to deal with immigration, confirming a negative way of seeing this phenomenon (Naletto, 2008).

For this reasons, it’s possible to argue that the Council’s innovative approach in dealing with immigration and integration issues through regeneration initiatives, as well as The Gate experience that established a sort of “urban laboratory”, could be both seen as part of a mutual learning process that has led to a change in the public institutions’ culture and organization. The program’s main innovation in the Italian context is related to the choice to use an urban regeneration integrated approach to deal with integration issues, as well as to deal with immigration from a more general perspective based on inclusion, considering the neighbourhood’s liveability and its economic development (Briata, 2009).

Porta Palazzo has always been a very central area. The Town Hall is just a few minutes of walk from the market square. The recovery strategy that has lead Turin to promote its visitor economy’s potentialities has

given a new life and strategic position to the city centre as well. The so called “quadrilatero romano” area, just off the south side of Piazza della Repubblica, has recently experienced a very strong gentrification process, becoming one of the “coolest” areas of Turin (Semi, 2004). This means that nowadays Porta Palazzo is even more central than 15 years ago, and that the gentrification threat is around the corner.

The Gate has tried to cope with this problem in different ways, for example including in its partnership the most relevant real estate owners of the area. At the same time, as the Municipality has set up a number of Urban Rehabilitation Plans (Piani di recupero) in Porta Palazzo that work on the residential buildings’ physical improvement, The Gate has provided funds aimed at establishing forms of cooperation and agreements between tenants and owners, in order to maintain the current residents in the area.

Moreover, The Gate has always been included in the Progetto Speciale Periferie and it’s important to underline that only a very strong strategic approach for the whole town and the “peripheral” areas seems to be the best chance for realities such as Porta Palazzo to survive. From this point of view, despite the Neighbourhoods Unit becoming in recent years a model for the management of area-based urban regeneration projects in Italy, in 2007 its scope was reduced and its budget cut by the Municipality (Governa *et al* 2008). Nowadays the Unit is under the responsibility of the new Urban Regeneration and Immigrant’s Integration Department, and a major reorganization of the “peripheral areas project” has been announced, but the outcomes of this process cannot yet be evaluated.

Conclusions

All the examined cases deal with situation in which “forgotten” central and peri-central places of the cities become more “central” given their strategic role in the city repositioning in the post-fordist economy. These places’ space has become luxury due to the new development strategy of the cities. The Carmine neighbourhood represents a key territorial resource for the new development strategy of the city focussed on visitor economy: a part of the city that cannot be left to disadvantaged people and social excluded, even if it has been a gateway for centuries. The same could be said for Genoa’s old town that is a key territorial resource for a post-industrial city hemmed in between the mountains and the sea.

Both the cities pursued Municipality-led gentrification strategies to change the perceptions of these places from outside, and to bring new inhabitants and users in these areas. Two main families of strategies may be recognized from this point of view. On one hand, the regeneration/renewal programs work on public spaces through initiatives aimed at “breaking up these areas’ established territorialities” (Yiftachel, 1990). In particular, some new functions such as universities, libraries, restaurants and coffee shops are introduced to attract students, young people, businessmen, new city users in general. In this way the space is less dominated by the marginal groups’ presence, first of all the immigrants’ ones, and appear safer for people

coming from outside. On the other hand, a series of programs have been promoted for housing renewal. These forms of intervention are not simple to be evaluated as the dwellings on which they work are usually decaying, overcrowded, unhealthy. At the same time, the recovery process leads almost automatically to gentrification, especially in cases like Brescia or Genoa that worked on the historical centre's renewal. In this way, the weaker groups, including immigrants cannot afford to live in these places and are forced to leave. That is to say that even if the cities' new development strategies are successful, these processes have a hard impact on deprived and social excluded populations as their main outcome is usually the displacement of problematic groups in other more peripheral neighbourhoods.

In these cases the problem is thus to explore if and how the cities have provided any form of “compensation” for the gentrification's side effects. From this point of view, the examined cities are quite different: Brescia provided a compensation by relocating disadvantaged groups in a peripheral neighbourhood far from the city centre and from their established social networks; Genoa seems to be satisfied by the (weak) argument that the local real estate market makes possible a spontaneous condition of social mix as wealthy people don't buy houses located at the first floors of the houses. Turin is the city that has tried to work more on these aspects, as The Gate tried to establish forms of cooperation between tenants and owners, stimulating forms of agreement in order to maintain the residents in the area after the renewal processes. It has been underlined that this way of dealing with the problem is also related to the fact that Turin has tried to set up a strategic approach not only to support the new economic vocation of the city (through the strategic plans), but also to deal with the most deprived areas (through the special project for the peripheral areas). In this way Turin has tried to “give a place” also to disadvantaged groups, trying not to displace them even when their presence is in the city centre.

From the immigrants' integration issue point of view, Turin's choice to deal expressly with the newcomers' presence – even if not considering only their problems but also the weaker groups' ones in general – is without any doubt a cultural choice as well as a challenge in a country that still deals with immigration as a temporary emergency or mainly by considering the security issues. Without denying the unavoidable rhetorical dimension of this choice, its rather provocative role in the mainstream discourses on immigration should be considered, highlighting its cultural value. The new Urban Regeneration and Immigrants' Integration Department tries in some way to make evident that – among any rhetorical discourse – integration means also “territorial” integration – giving people a place to live (Briata *et al.*, 2009). From this point of view, Turin's case is interesting also because it shows that also spatial policies may contribute to build up a different public discourse on immigration in a Country dominated by an aggressive debate against the newcomers at the national level.

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