

MAIN SECTION

The Cultural District Between Planning and Spontaneity: The Agglomeration Dynamics in Manifattura delle Arti in Bologna

Liola Urso – Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, Erasmus University, The Netherlands
Contact: liola.urso@outlook.com

Valeria Morea – Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, Erasmus University, The Netherlands
Contact: morea@eshcc.eur.nl

ABSTRACT

Cultural clusters are renowned to bring many benefits in terms of agglomeration and therefore they are often employed as catalysts of urban regeneration. Policymakers attempted to recreate this phenomenon through top-down strategies. However, it has been observed that clusters often arise naturally without direct intervention from local governments or policy incentives. Therefore, the policy dilemma of whether it is possible to plan something that tends to emerge spontaneously arises. Drawing on urban and cultural policy issues, this article aims at investigating the agglomeration dynamics within the planned district Manifattura delle Arti in Bologna. Through 14 interviews with the key actors involved in the district, two main findings are unveiled: the presence of a spontaneous subcluster of bottom-up organizations within the planned district and the civil society as an engine of regeneration and inclusion.

KEYWORDS

cultural districts; cultural planning; spontaneity; agglomeration dynamics; urban regeneration; Bologna

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Introduction

The recognition of cultural industries as drivers of economic growth and urban revitalization has led policymakers to focus on using them in a variety of urban regeneration initiatives at different scales.¹ One type of such initiatives aims to create cultural districts through top-down strategies which mimic the phenomenon of economic clusters.²

Santagata theorized four models of cultural districts. The first, the Industrial Cultural District operates similarly to Marshallian districts, being self-organized without reliance on governing institutions. Then, the Institutional Cultural District relies on established institutions to protect property and brand rights. The other two categories are referred to as “Quasi-Cultural Districts”. The “Museum Cultural District” centers around museum networks in historic art towns, requiring government intervention to balance productivity and tourism. Finally, the “Metropolitan Cultural District” is employed to regenerate economically declining areas, promoting artistic development to establish a new city identity.³

However, economic clusters, which are geographic concentrations of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and associated institutions in a particular field or industry, fostering innovation, productivity, and competitiveness within a region, have emerged mostly spontaneously, without government intervention or incentives, following the dynamics and benefits of agglomeration and knowledge spillover among professionals.⁴

This article aims to contribute to the discourse on cultural districts and provide insights for policymakers and urban planners engaging with culture-led regeneration initiatives. Moreover, it delves into the dilemma of top-down and bottom-up strategies in cultural planning. Policymakers face challenges in finding the right approach to implement culture-led regeneration interventions, frequently focusing on desired outcomes without adequately considering how the policy process may affect them.⁵ Although these policies have successfully generated positive results in various aspects, they have often neglected to recognize the potential negative consequences inherent in their own designs.⁶ According to the literature, planning creativity appears contradictory, as its value lies in its

1 David Bell and Kate Oakley. *Cultural policy*. (London: Routledge 2014).

2 Walter Santagata. “Cultural Districts.” In *A Handbook of Cultural Economics*, ed R. Towse, 2nd (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing 2011).

3 Santagata “Cultural Districts, Property Rights and Sustainable Economic Growth”. *International journal of urban and regional research*, 26(1) (2002), 9-23.

4 Alfred Marshall, “Principles of Economics” (Cambridge: C. W. Guillebaud 1890). Michael E. Porter, “Location, competition, and economic development: Local clusters in a global economy.” *Economic development quarterly* 14.1 (2000): 15-34.

5 Christina Lidgaard, Massimiliano Nuccio, and Trine Bille, “Fostering and Planning Urban Regeneration: The Governance of Cultural Districts in Copenhagen.” *European Planning Studies* 26.1 (2018): 1-19

6 Valeria Morea and Francesca Sabatini, “The Joint Contribution of Grassroots Artistic Practices to the Alternative and Vital City. The Case of Bologna and Venice (Italy).” *Cities* 135 (2023): 104234.

perceived novelty and potential for innovation. Contrasting this perspective, the case analyzed in the present study shows that the planned district incited the development of a subcluster of bottom-up organizations, therefore, stimulating spontaneity and innovation. Moreover, it highlights the pivotal civil role of grassroots organizations in the requalification of the neighborhood.

This research explores the mechanisms of agglomeration dynamics within one cultural district in Italy, focusing on how policymakers can foster and support spontaneous order and subcluster formation. After this introduction, this article will delve into a review of the main literature (Section 2), specifically focusing on two strands: districts and agglomeration of firms as beneficial for the firms themselves, and the use of districts to benefit regional growth, considering the consequences of these urban interventions/policies. Section 3 will describe the methodology and context of the case study Manifattura delle Arti (MdA), while the findings will be presented in Section 4. Finally, Section 5 will discuss the major implications for urban planners and cultural policies that can be drawn from our case study.

Literature Review

Local and urban development are typically conceived as a process that in many cases follows economic dynamics of capital accumulation and distribution. From an economic geography perspective, regions acquire an economic advantage by means of economic agglomerations, of which the Silicon Valley and the Hollywood are textbook examples.⁷ Agglomeration brings the benefits of sharing, matching and learning³ within and between firms, in a mix of competition and cooperation. Geographic proximity facilitates knowledge dissemination, promoting innovation and production improvement. This mechanism is based on economic convenience and, as such, is a typically spontaneous phenomenon. In urbanized contexts, it has been seen how the agglomeration process deals with innovation and creativity, more than with vertical specialization.⁸ This explains why certain cities become “creative” in a broad sense, like *fin de siècle* Vienna, pre-war Berlin⁹ or New York City in the 70s and 80s, where artists would converge and exchange ideas, contacts, and human resources within and across cultural industries.¹⁰

Santagata attributes to tacit knowledge the role of essential driver of such

7 Allen J. Scott “The other Hollywood: the organizational and geographic bases of television-program production.” *Media, Culture & Society* 26.2 (2004): 183-205.

8 Mark Lorenzen, and Lars Frederiksen. “Why do cultural industries cluster? Localization, urbanization, products and projects.” *Creative cities, cultural clusters and local economic development* (2008): 155-179.

9 Peter Geoffrey Hall, *Cities in civilization*. Vol. 21. (New York: Pantheon Books 1998).

10 Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, *The Warhol economy: How fashion, art, and music drive New York City-new edition*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

agglomeration, that he defines as “districts”. Tacit knowledge refers to an information system that possesses characteristics like those of a local public good or commons.¹¹ In cultural districts, information and knowledge circulate unrestrictedly and are communicated through implicit channels.¹² Bathelt et al.¹³ define the dynamic information and communication environment as a “buzz” that sparks from face-to-face interactions, the physical coexistence of individuals and businesses in the same industry and location. In addition, specific information, continuous updates, intended and unexpected learning processes occur during organized and serendipitous meetings. Actors within the cluster actively contribute to and benefit from the dissemination of information, exchange of rumors, and sharing of news simply by being present in that environment. These districts associate cultural products with specific places, enhancing their reputation and positively impacting the local economy.¹⁴

While historically this process did not originate from planning (e.g., New York as described by Zukin and Currid-Halkett), soon enough policymakers realized that the positive externalities could have been internalized in urban and cultural policies with the aim to gentrify specific neighborhoods. In this view, cultural districts can emerge from top-down planning or organic growth from the bottom up. Thus, while Hollywood emerged spontaneously and with a variety of joint causes¹⁵ and Soho in the 70s was a progressive and lively area thanks to artists who relocated to vacant former industrial warehouses to live and produce¹⁶, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao¹⁷ is a famous case of a top-down cultural district in which culture is used instrumentally to revive a post-industrial city. In this view, cultural districts can emerge from top-down planning or organic growth from the bottom up. This raises the question of whether successful cultural districts develop organically or if they necessitate intervention and support from public policies, both during their initial development phase and in the long term.

According to Florida, economic growth and urban development hinge on the agglomeration of brilliant individuals, whom he refers to as “Creative Class”. Among these talented are scholars, scientists, engineers, writers,

11 Mariangela Lavanga. “The Cultural District” in *A Handbook of Cultural Economics* ed. Ruth Towse, Trilce Navarrete Hernández, 3rd (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing 2020).

12 Walter Santagata. “Cultural Districts”.

13 Bathelt, Harald, Anders Malmberg, and Peter Maskell. “Clusters and knowledge: local buzz, global pipelines and the process of knowledge creation.” *Progress in human geography* 28.1 (2004): 31-56.

14 Harvey Molotch. “Place in product.” *International Journal of urban and regional research* 26.4 (2002): 665-688.

15 Scott “The other Hollywood: the organizational and geographic bases of television-program production.”

16 Sharon Zukin, “Gentrification: culture and capital in the urban core.” *Annual review of sociology* 13.1 (1987): 129-147.

17 Witold Rybczynski, “The Bilbao Effect. Public competitions for architectural commissions don’t necessarily produce the best buildings.” *The Atlantic* (2002): np.

novelists, painters, performers, actors, designers, and architects.¹⁸ Firms go after creative people, or in most cases are established by them. As a result, all types of creativity may develop and grow in an interconnected environment. These special milieux can be traced from ancient Athens to Silicon Valley today.¹⁹

The theory of Florida has been perceived in different ways. On the one hand, it positively impacted the decisions of policymakers since it focused on creative people as a key factor in cities' economic growth.²⁰ On the other hand, it has been employed as a popular justification for planned cultural districts and gentrification operations, even in cases in which the ultimate policy goals dealt more with profitability and cleaning than support to the artists and livability.²¹

Indeed, urban renewal and its implementation are intertwined in a complex debate that is closely related to the concept of gentrification. As stated by Klunzman: "Each story of regeneration begins with poetry and ends with real estate."²² Various regeneration initiatives have favored urban growth at the expense of certain target populations, leading to gentrification, segregation, and exclusion²³. According to Leslie and Catungal, Florida's concept of the "creative class" is interconnected with class inequalities in various aspects. It perpetuates and worsens class, gender and racial disparities.

After several years of intense debate, in his most recent book, "The New Urban Crisis", Florida recognizes that some of the most significant detrimental consequences, such as gentrification and inequality are caused by the very same element that spark lively cities, such as the creative class.²⁴

However, Florida's creative class theory is still implemented by many governments as a key urban economic development policy.²⁵ Some scholars have noted that the concept of the creative class theory does not aim to cultivate talents broadly but rather serves as a policy blueprint catering to the privileged segment of society.²⁶ Florida's creative strategies are

18 Richard Florida. *The rise of the creative class*. Vol. 9. (New York: Basic books, 2002).

19 Eric Weiner. *The geography of genius: A search for the world's most creative places from ancient Athens to Silicon Valley*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016).

20 Eleonora Redaelli. *Connecting arts and place: Cultural policy and American cities*. (Cham: Springer, 2019).

21 Ann Markusen. "Urban development and the politics of a creative class: evidence from a study of artists." *Environment and planning A* 38.10 (2006): 1921-1940.

22 Klaus Klunzman. "Keynote speech to Intereg III Mid-term Conference, Lille." *Regeneration and Renewal* 19 (2004): 2.

23 Deborah Leslie and John Paul Catungal. "Social justice and the creative city: class, gender and racial inequalities." *Geography compass* 6.3 (2012): 111-122.

24 Florida, "The new urban crisis: How our cities are increasing inequality, deepening segregation, and failing the middle class-and what we can do about it".

25 Carl Grodach "Cultural economy planning in creative cities: Discourse and practice." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37.5 (2013): 1747-1765.

26 Jamie Peck. "Struggling with the creative class." *International journal of urban and regional research* 29.4 (2005): 740-770.

perceived to prioritize the commercialization of arts and cultural assets rather than enhancing urban development through culture.

City and regional leaders use Florida's measures and indicators to shape their development strategies, leading to the inference that any city aspiring to become a creative hub will achieve that status by simply adopting identical strategies and policies.²² But how can we talk about creativity within this "copy and paste" process? Peck suggests that Florida's "creativity strategies were in a sense pre-constituted for this fast policy market" (p.767). Indeed, these policies support groups of influential people who aim to bring the convenient ideas of creativity into reality, often without considering their local context. Despite claims of being authentic to local needs, such strategies often reinforce elitist forms of city governance and tend to repeat the same policies within tight budget constraints. In particular, creative clusters are one of the key elements of this process.²⁷ Following the discussion on planning creativity, the question arises about whether successful cultural districts develop organically or if they necessitate intervention and support from public policies, both during their initial development phase and in the long run. According to Mommaas, these projects are often initiated by urban planners who seek to regenerate urban neighborhoods or boost the local creative economy. Among the most famous examples are the Museum Quarter in Vienna, the Temple Bar in Dublin, and the textile district of Ticinese in Milan²⁸. Cooke and Lazzaretti²⁹ suggest that the initial development of a cluster must occur organically, and while supportive conditions can be facilitated, they cannot be artificially created through top-down approaches of the potential role of arts and culture. Similarly, Stern and Seifert³⁰ maintain that clusters may be "cultivated [but] not planned", and investments in the development of a planned cultural district always face the possibility of failure. They distinguish planned cultural districts from "cultural clusters". While planned districts regard cultural venues and large audiences, cultural clusters are about the dynamic interactions within the contemporary art scene. Cultural clusters have the potential to revitalize urban economies by regenerating neighborhoods, stimulating civic engagement and social cohesion. At the same time, they may cause tensions and frictions, such as displacement and exclusion of the local community and gentrification of the area³¹. How can policymakers support and foster these clusters without stifling their unique characteristics and creativity? Scholars have

27 Tommaso Cinti. "Cultural clusters and districts: the state of the art." *Creative cities, cultural clusters and local economic development* (2008): 70-92.

28 Hans Mommaas. "Cultural clusters and the post-industrial city: Towards the remapping of urban cultural policy." *Urban studies* 41.3 (2004): 507-532.

29 Cinti. "Cultural Clusters and Districts: The State of the Art."

30 Mark J. Stern, and Susan C. Seifert. "Cultural clusters: The implications of cultural assets agglomeration for neighborhood revitalization." *Journal of planning education and research* 29.3 (2010): 262-279.

31 Beatriz García. "Cultural policy and urban regeneration in Western European cities: lessons from experience, prospects for the future." *Local economy* 19.4 (2004): 312-326.

proposed different ways to navigate this delicate endeavours. Looking at cases in Berlin, Marseille, and Lausanne, Andres and Grésillon³² distinguish between top-down or bottom-up urban interventions based on the different impact they have in the surrounding environment. They refer to the “branding cultural brownfield” as the approach designed to regenerate derelict spaces on the path of the industrial district type of gentrification, in which culture is integrated into the strategy of branding and promoting cities³³. On the contrary, the “alternative cultural brownfield”, is developed from bottom-up movements and, therefore, it appears to be the most impactful for the community. Leslie and Catungal³⁴ report the case of some organizations in Toronto which, as voluntary and non-profit activities, represent an example of alternative approaches to the capitalistic framework of the “creative city”. These grassroots organizations are explicitly politicized and focus on addressing complex issues related to social marginalization. Similarly, Haghighat³⁵ argues that independent artist-run project spaces within neighborhoods serve as venues for discussion and the initiation of collaborative efforts. Kravagna³⁶ raised concerns about artists who involve themselves with marginalized communities under the guise of education. Finally, Lidegaard et al.³⁷ propose a governance matrix (**Figure 1**) in which they distinguish between top-down initiatives, driven by publicly dominated agencies, and bottom-up efforts led by private actors operating independently. Explicit strategies have defined objectives, while implicit ones embrace spontaneity and self-growth. They suggest that a blended approach should be advocated for, combining elements of both top-down and bottom-up strategies in cultural planning, to leverage the benefits of spontaneity and mitigate the potential setbacks of gentrification and inequalities.

Thus, a tension persists between acknowledging the benefits of co-locating artists and creatives for local development and the potential drawbacks when such phenomena are not spontaneous. This highlights the need for research to explore potential solutions. The next section will illustrate how this research aims to address this gap through a case study.

32 Lauren Andres, and Boris Grésillon. “Cultural brownfields in European cities: a new mainstream object for cultural and urban policies.” *International journal of cultural policy* 19.1 (2013): 40-62.

33 Franco Bianchini, “Cultural planning for urban sustainability, in *Culture and Cities. Cultural Processes and Urban Sustainability*, Louise Nyström & Colin Fudge. (Swedish Urban Environment Council 1999).

34 Leslie and Catungal, “Social Justice and the Creative City: Class, Gender and Racial Inequalities”.

35 Leila Haghighat, “Hegemonic struggles in the city: Artist-run spaces and community art in the anti-gentrification movement.” *European Journal of Creative Practices in Cities and Landscapes* 3.1 (2020): 73-94.

36 Christian Kravagna. “Arbeit an der Gemeinschaft. Modelle partizipatorischer Praxis.” *Die Kunst des Öffentlichen* (1998): 28-46.

37 Lidegaard, Nuccio, and Bille, “Fostering and Planning Urban Regeneration: The Governance of Cultural Districts in Copenhagen.”

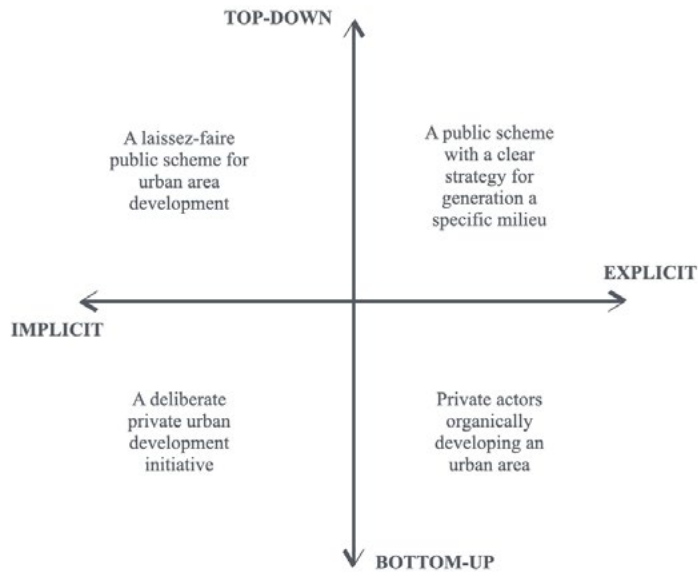


FIG. 1

Governance dimensions in urban clusters. Source: Adapted from Lidegaard et al (2017).

Methodology

The previous section has discussed culture-led urban regeneration and cultural planning, highlighting the general disagreement on approaches and objectives in theory and practice. Exploring the mechanisms of agglomeration dynamics within cultural districts, this research inquires into how can policymakers foster and support spontaneous order and subcluster formation, regarding the case study of Manifattura delle Arti in Bologna?

A case study approach was employed to conduct an in-depth analysis of the area. The context of Bologna is suitable for investigating the top-down bottom-up dilemma, as the city shows a strong emphasis on culture both from a policy and a civil society point of view. Indeed, on the one hand, the city shows a high density of associations and grassroots initiatives. On the other hand, the municipality shows great interest in cultural and urban regeneration policies, demonstrated by high spending on cultural initiatives.³⁸ The data collection is based on 14 semi-structured interviews with the key actors working in the cluster, such as directors, cultural employees and stakeholders involved in the governance of the area and the municipality. A purposive sampling approach was adopted. To determine the population for this research, a comprehensive mapping of the district Manifattura delle Arti was conducted. First, the institutional and founding organisations of the district were selected, these are MAMbo, Cineteca,

38 Morea and Sabatini, "The Joint Contribution of Grassroots Artistic Practices to the Alternative and Vital City. The Case of Bologna and Venice (Italy)."

Damslab and Cassero LGBTQIA+ centre. A snowball sampling approach was then employed to identify participants with direct knowledge of the case study, allowing the researcher to familiarise with the district and gather a larger sample of organisations and perspectives. This resulted in 14 semi-structured interviews with individuals with several years of experience within the sector and in some cases within the district. This provided a historical perspective on the transformation of the district and the main milestones that led to the creation of the Manifattura delle Arti. Furthermore, belonging to very different organisations and having various experiences provides a variety of views on the topic. The interviews have been conducted between April and July 2023, mostly in person and always according to the preferences of the participants. Interviews lasted on average 45 minutes. The researchers have followed an interview guide that entails the perception of the district, social dimension, and cultural policy (see **Appendix**).

	ORGANISATION	SINCE	SETTING
R1	Fondazione Innovazione Urbana	2017	Offline 13/04/2023
R2	DAMSLAB	2019	Offline 17/04/2023
R3	LOCALEDUE	2014	Online 19/04/2023
R4	MAMBO	2018	Offline 19/04/2023
R5	BAM - strategie culturali	2012	Online 21/04/2023
R6	CINETECA	1993	Offline 21/04/2023
R7	Fondazione Innovazione Urbana	2019	Online 26/04/2023
R8	MAMBO	2017	Online 28/04/2023
R9	CASSERO LGBTQIA+ CENTRE	1995	Online 04/05/2023
R10	GalleriaPiù	2013	Online 09/05/2023
R11	ANT- district researcher	2005	Online 10/05/2023
R12	DRY ART	2007	Online 22/05/2023
R13	PARSEC	2020	Online 21/07/2023
R14	PARSEC	2020	Online 21/07/2023

TAB. 1 Sample's overview

Finally, a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was performed using the software Atlas.TI to identify patterns and themes within the data. The thematic analysis resulted in two main themes which, together, answer the research question: (1) The planned district incites a spontaneous order and a subcluster and (2) The civil society as an engine of regeneration and inclusion. **Table 2** shows the themes and their adherence to the reviewed literature.

Secondary themes	Description	Literature
THE PLANNED DISTRICT INCITES A SPONTANEOUS ORDER AND A SUBCLUSTER	The spontaneous district follows the dynamics of agglomeration; in contrast, there is a lack of identity and synergy in the planned district.	Andersson (1985) Bathelet et. Al (2004) Florida (2002) Hall (1998) Lavanga (2020) Lidegaard et. Al (2017) Marshall (1890) Mommaas (2004) Montgomery (2003) Porter (2000) Santagata (2002) Scott (2004) Stern and seifert (2010)
THE CIVIL SOCIETY IS THE ENGINE OF REGENERATION AND INCLUSION	The bottom-up organizations involve the community while the institutional district is perceived as less accessible by the residents.	Andres and Grésillon (2013) Florida (2017) Garcia (2004) Jacobs (1961) Leslie & Catungal (2012) Morea & Sabatini (2023) Peck (2005) Redaelli (2019) Rich (2017)

TAB.2

Overview of the themes. Source: Author's elaboration. Source: Elaboration of the authors.

Case study: Manifattura delle Arti

Manifattura delle Arti is a planned cluster implemented in the early 2000s, during Bologna 2000 European Capital of Culture. The transformation included funds from the municipality, the region, the university and the European Union and costs more than 500.000.000 Euros. The strategy entailed converting a former trade fair building into a cultural district by bringing together various cultural institutions that were previously located in other parts of Bologna. Manifattura delle Arti includes: the Ex Manifattura Tabacchi park, which has been renamed Parco 11 Settembre, the renowned Cineteca (Bologna's Film Archive) situated in the former tobacco factory, along with its theatre, library, and archives. Additionally, the former slaughterhouse complex houses studio spaces for the University of Bologna's Department of Music and Performing Arts. Other components of the MdA include the University of Bologna's Department of Communication Studies, in the former Mulino Tamburi, the Museum of Modern Art (MAMbo) situated in the former municipal bakery, and the national headquarters of Arcigay, Italy's leading organisation for LGBTQIA+ culture and rights, which is housed in the former salt storage building. Furthermore, the district incorporates a 550-space underground parking facility, a nursery school, a community centre called "Casa di quartiere CostArena", student housing, and municipal low-income housing (Porto15). It is worth noting that the MdA was intentionally designed to merge cultural institutions with social welfare establishments³⁹.

39 Aiello, "From Wound to Enclave: The Visual-Material Performance of Urban Renewal in Bologna's Manifattura Delle Arti."

Results

Two main themes have been developed from the analysis of the interview data. The in-depth interviews revealed that (1) the planned district incites a spontaneous order and a subcluster and (2) civil society is the engine of regeneration and inclusion. The former regards the dynamics inside the district, and the latter the relation with the territory.

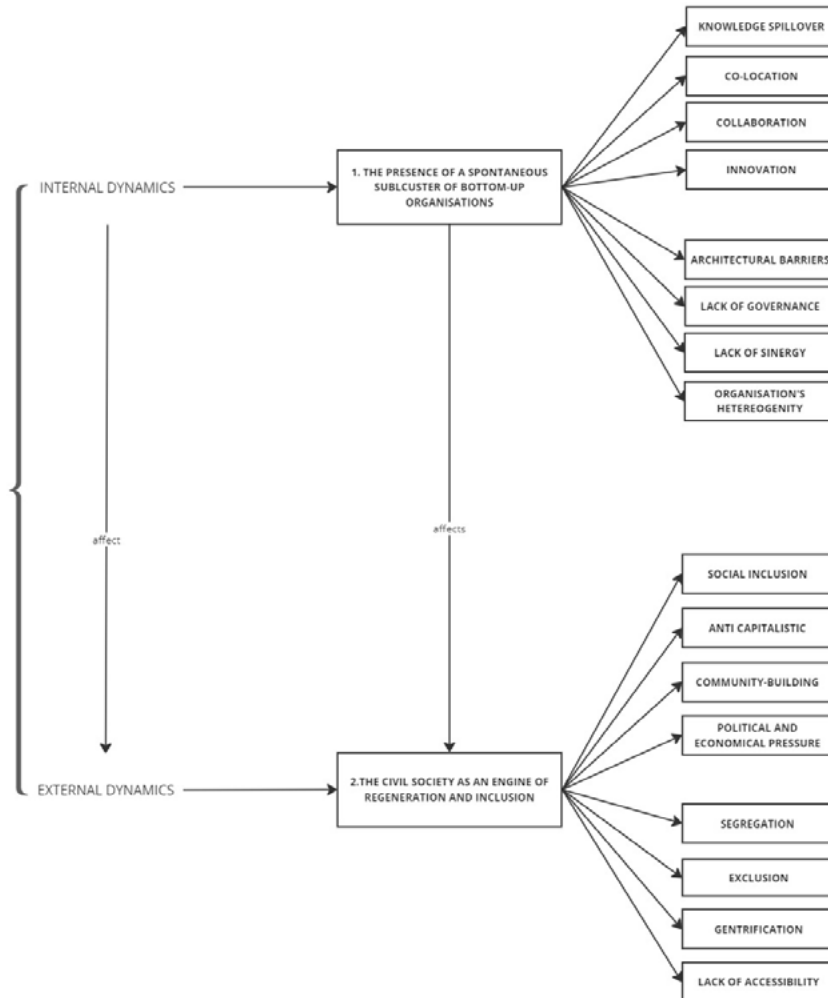


FIG. 1 Data structure. Source: Elaboration of the authors

Within the planned district, the presence of a spontaneous subcluster of bottom-up organizations was unveiled. Friction between the two souls of the district, with consist of the founding institutions and the spontaneous cluster of galleries and private organisations, emerged. Such tensions also results in a lack of synergy between the institutional and the spontaneous actors and it is also echoed by the local community. Ultimately, it appears that civil society is the key engine of regeneration and inclusion.

Figure 2 presents a summary of the secondary themes and the primary codes, such as the coding three applied in this analysis.

The planned district incites a spontaneous order and a subcluster

While MdA is a project of cultural planning and culture-led top-down urban regeneration, the interviews highlighted distinctly that what here works as a cluster is not something that was planned. Instead, a subcluster developed spontaneously, following the dynamics of agglomeration and clusters. The director of one art gallery posits: "I was the third private commercial reality to open in the area and the intentions were to act as a corollary to the MAMbo, later there were three other non-profit spaces that opened in this area as well." The high cultural density and the resulting resonance effect present in the district emerged as determinant factors for co-location. As stated by interviewee 6: "There is a resonance effect. If you carry out an initiative within that area, it's an area that has its own name and prestige." According to Molotch,⁴⁰ associating cultural products and businesses with a particular place, area or building has demonstrated the ability to create a positive image and enhance the reputation of the actors involved over time. Moreover, in the disclosed cluster of bottom-up activities, it is possible to recognize the importance of proximity, strong collaboration, and knowledge spillover. As stated by respondent 8: "Working together with other organizations allows you to increase your audiences and also mix professional knowledge." As testified by the owner of one of the galleries located in the cluster: "I wanted to open my gallery precisely to be close to the realities with which I absolutely speak the same language". In line with Florida, the creative class follows some trends, such as the tendency to cluster in specific places which the author calls "creative centers". Florida⁴¹ pointed out many reasons why these exceptional individuals decide to locate themselves and their creative activities in these places, among which openness to all types of diversity. Moreover, tolerance is seen as a catalyst that promotes openness and encourages the flourishing of artistic communities.⁴² Considering this, Bologna in general is renowned for being an inclusive and tolerant city,⁴³ but specifically the context of the district is also such. For example, thanks to the Cassero LGBTQIA+ Centre, many activities are carried out under the banner of inclusion. As confirmed by respondent 11: "In that area there is an absolutely strong theme of integration from the point of view of gender preferences, which are seen as bearers of value." However, basing this association within the district was not at all random, rather, it was a conscious intervention along the guidelines of the "creative city" model. Indeed, as stated by Florida: "cities must attract the new "creative class" with hip

40 Molotch, *Place in Product*.

41 Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class*.

42 Franco Bianchini and Michael Parkinson, eds. *Cultural policy and urban regeneration: the West European experience*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

43 Morea and Sabatini, "The Joint Contribution of Grassroots Artistic Practices to the Alternative and Vital City. The Case of Bologna and Venice (Italy)."

neighborhoods, an arts scene and a gay-friendly atmosphere."⁴⁴

For these reasons, it can be said that the subcluster of galleries was stimulated by the originally planned district, as a high-density cultural reality and an open and stimulating environment were created from above, attracting other cultural businesses to the area. This can be seen as a success of cultural planning, which provided an opportunity to foster spontaneity and innovation. Indeed, especially in the creative industries, smaller enterprises are considered the primary drivers of innovation⁴⁵. Furthermore, Porter's idea of localized competitive advantage as a powerful motivator for innovation is also reflected in this environment, since the cluster of contemporary galleries has a strong predisposition for innovation and is home to some of the most experimental contemporary galleries in Italy, such as P420: "P420 gallery has always done incredibly niche work, but incredibly explosive in terms of both research and market" (Interviewee 3). Further, the director of one of the galleries stated: "We have made a difference in terms of the very scene of contemporary research in the city over the last 10 years" (Interviewee 9). In line with Florida (2002), the high density of creative people results in a high density of innovation and provides significant evidence of regional vitality. Moreover, according to Stern and Seifert,⁴⁶ spontaneous cultural clusters emphasize the dynamic interaction within the contemporary art scene, as confirmed by the case study. Indeed, as reported by the director of one of the main galleries located in the district: "On many occasions we manage to open the galleries in a synergetic way". Again, proximity and co-location emerged as beneficial factors which favoured the generation, dissemination and exchange of knowledge and network creation.⁴⁷ Through face-to-face interactions, the physical coexistence of individuals and companies in the same sector and place has created the 'buzz' referred to by Bathelt et al.,⁴⁸ in contrast to the institutional district, where a lack of communication emerged. The curator of an independent exhibition space added: "When they (the other galleries) first moved to where they are today, they were clearly in dialogue with us, forming what was called the MAMbo zone. The average tour if visitor of the Bologna art scenewas Galleriapiù, CARDRDE, localedue and then P420". The combination of these factors resulted in a ferment of artistic and cultural activities, not only the galleries mentioned above (Galleriapiù, P420, CARDRDE), but also many grassroots initiatives. Furthermore, during the interviews several references to these bottom-up organizations came out, often referred to as the most active and interrelated in the

44 Florida, "The rise of the creative class: and how it's transforming work, leisure, community, and everyday life."

45 Towse, *A Textbook of Cultural Economics*.

46 Stern and Seifert, "Cultural Clusters: The Implications of Cultural Assets Agglomeration for Neighborhood Revitalization."

47 Lavanga, "Cultural Districts."

48 Bathelt, Malmberg, and Maskell, "Clusters and Knowledge: Local Buzz, Global Pipelines and the Process of Knowledge Creation."

district. Those that have been mapped are the association Dry Art, the art collective PARSEC, the independent space Localedue, and the centre for artistic experimentation and research DAS. It was particularly significant for the research's objectives to discover that bottom-up organizations exhibit superior effectiveness in their relationships, in contrast to the lack of synergy observed among institutional organizations. Indeed, the main attempts at networking in the district and collaboration come from the bottom-up organizations, "between those who were talking to each other" (interviewee 3). The director of one of the main galleries in the district affirmed: "Certainly the relations among us private businesspeople are very good, we have a continuous dialogue." In addition to that, interviewee 2 claimed: "There is a bottom-up attempt to actually try to create a network within the Manifattura while not directly involving the main actors of Manifattura itself." It is precisely from the Dry Art association, for example, that the initiative called 'Made in Manifattura' was born, which consists of a showcasing and networking event of the organizations of MdA to work on a shared agenda.

A difference between the two souls of the district, meaning the one represented by the founding institutions and the spontaneous cluster of galleries and private organizations, emerged. This duality is reflected in a different degree of relationship and synergies between these two levels. On the one hand, the identity of the planned district is not perceived and a lack of synergy among the institutional organizations has been pointed out. Indeed, the founder and institutional organisations of the district do not recognise the actual existence and functioning of the district. As stated by interviewee 12: "there is little awareness of belonging to such an important area." This aspect of "knowledgeability"⁴⁹ can be communicated by many tools, such as brochures, press releases or fliers. The only attempt to state the identity of the district as a synergic network was made by the museum MAMbo consisting in a panel with a map of all the organisations located in the district. Successful cultural districts exhibit a design ethos, often reflected in architectural homogenization. However, many interviewees highlighted specific elements, such as the entrance totems of the Manifattura delle Arti, as examples of failure in creating and communicating the district's identity (**Figure 1**). As stated by respondent 5: "Around the district there are ugly tall glass totems with the words Manifattura delle Arti written on them, which are 20 years old and falling apart, nobody is taking them down, restoring them, or doing anything with them, and they are testimony to the fact that right now nobody is interested in talking about this project."

Moreover, among the reasons for the lack of interaction between the district's founding organisations emerged the issue of architectural barriers.

49 Montgomery, John. "Cities and the Art of Cultural Planning." *Planning Practice and Research* 5, no. 3 (1990): 17–24.



FIG. 3 Glass totem in Manifattura delle Arti (Copyright: Liola Urso).

Indeed, 5 respondents mentioned a disconnection among the organisations due to the physical disposition of spaces. Interviewee 8 argued: "The district itself on an architectural level was also designed and conceived as a bit of a barrier, it is a small ghetto." In particular, many interviewees complained about the situation of Cavaticcio Park, the park which all the institutions overlook and that should act as a link between them, but which in fact acts as a dividing element. The Cavaticcio, a historic canal, had remained buried for almost a century until the regeneration project brought it back to its original form and visibility. As claimed by the director of one of the main organizations in the district: "From an architectural point of view, however, it can be said that the project Manifattura delle Arti is somehow unfinished because this bridge, which was supposed to connect the two banks of the Cavaticcio and thus directly link Mambo and the Cineteca to Damslab, was never built, and this certainly causes disconnect since, although there is this physical proximity of the institutions, they all look outside the Manifattura delle Arti, not inside." Interviewee 2, who works in Damslab, explained: "The Cavaticcio brings us all together, but until we don't think about that as a common place and a common

good of this reality and begin to see what is inside this place and begin to invest in this place as a space on which we can actually create synergies it will be difficult to overcome these difficulties.” This perception is aligned with another consideration elaborated by interviewee 7: “A first consideration that has to do with urban planning, when the restructuring was considered, the park was not considered as a connecting element of passage and exchange. So, this is an initial point that has to do with urban planning and how much urban planning also conditions the use of spaces.” Indeed, this issue pertains to the physical layout and spatial arrangement of urban functions which influence relationships and interactions in the district. According to Jacobs,⁵⁰ a creative environment necessitates infrastructure that provides for permeability and accessibility, whereas the former refers to good internal and exterior possibilities for personal transit and communication. In this regard, the lack of a governance model to coordinate the various organizations and strengthen synergy was complained of by many respondents. As interviewee 3 claimed, “It was never possible to create a real network between the spaces. Partly because the resources were not there, in the sense that there was perhaps a lack of a higher element that could coordinate it both conceptually and economically”. This aspect is reflected in the lack of relations and synergy among the institutions within the district. Furthermore, the director of one of the main organizations claimed: “The various institutions are often left to themselves, there is no specific project. So, if you leave it to these institutions to organize themselves, they won’t do it on their own, they have no reason to set up a permanent round table, perhaps they don’t see the point”. Interviewee 5 summarized the issue at hand: “We are talking territorially about something quite unique, but it is not interpreted as a district, it is not narrated as a district, and it does not work as a district, the individual organizations that are part of this territorial neighborhood are left to their own initiative to build things.” The perception from many interviewees is that the district was planned from above, but dropped without detail and without curated interventions that would strengthen the identity of the district and foster synergy between the actors. Recalling the governance matrix elaborated by Lidegaard et al.⁵¹ (figure 1) it can be inferred that in the case of Manifattura delle Arti an explicit top-down approach was employed, with an emerged, possibly not intended, laissez-faire scheme. As stressed by Lidegaard et al., bottom-up tactics are governed by a laissez-faire attitude and frequently evolve and raise spontaneously, allowing for ‘self-grown’ and experimenting. Furthermore, according to Stern and Seifert⁵², spontaneous cultural clusters have the

50 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. (New York: Random House 1961).

51 Lidegaard, Nuccio, and Bille, “Fostering and Planning Urban Regeneration: The Governance of Cultural Districts in Copenhagen.”

52 Stern and Seifert, “Cultural Clusters: The Implications of Cultural Assets Agglomeration for Neighborhood Revitalization.”

potential to revitalize urban economies by actively engaging residents and revitalizing neighborhoods. What emerged from the interviews is indeed that bottom-up initiatives, such as galleries, associations, and nonprofit spaces, stimulate civic engagement and contribute to social cohesion with a greater degree of openness and permeability to the community compared to the institutional ones. The critical aspect relates to a possibly unclear position of the public planners, whose *laissez-faire* approach might have not been intended, or at least declared, which might explain why the organizations of MdA complain about a lack of support. This theme leads the way to the relation between the district and the territory.

Civil society is the engine of regeneration and inclusion

There is a strong connection among clusters and the territory in which they developed and operate.⁵³ Cultural districts establish significant associations with the specific location, encompassing their community and historical background. As mentioned in the previous section, a stronger community involvement has been observed by the bottom-up sphere of the district. Similarly, the relations with the neighborhood are also animated and sustained by mainly grassroots forces. Thanks to their nature of experimentation and openness, in fact, these bottom-up initiatives have succeeded in engaging the inhabitants and frequenters of the neighborhood. For example, the curator of one of these independent spaces said that during some events they “had people from the neighborhood sleeping inside the space.” And furthermore, respondent 3 explained: “When we did the strangest events, we involved the community. I mean, it’s not that we were trying to involve the community and we had as a goal to involve them, simply certain things that we did naturally involve them.” Thus, also the association Dry Art, promoted with the festival Made in Manifattura “Activities of various kinds dedicated mainly to the inhabitants of the area and therefore also very accessible in economic terms” (Interviewee 12). Thanks to their volunteer and no-profit nature, these organizations overcome the traditional capitalist framework of the “creative city.”⁵⁴ Many respondents mentioned Mercato Ritrovato (a sustainable farmers’ market) as the main form of aggregation and of community inclusion in the neighborhood. The initiative was raised as a requalification action: “precisely with a proposal for the redevelopment of the two main squares where the market takes place, which are Piazzetta Pasolini, and the one inside the former slaughterhouse complex” (Interviewee 6). In general, it has emerged from several testimonies that the main work on community and regeneration is done from the bottom-up. It is worth

53 Lavanga, The Cultural District. In Towse, R., & Hernández, T. N. (2020). *Handbook of Cultural Economics*, Third Edition. Edward Elgar Publishing.

54 Leslie & Catungal “Social Justice and the Creative City: Class, Gender and Racial Inequalities”.

noticing that in this case, following that spontaneity with which associations are permeated, we are not facing the issue of “othering.”⁵⁵ Kravagna criticized artists who engage marginalized communities under the hat of education, drawing a parallel between these artists and evangelizing missionaries. The grassroots organizations which operate in MdA involve the community without stigmatizing “the other.” Simultaneously, a lack of adherence between residents and the institutional district was also mentioned as problematic, mostly because of economic issues. For instance, the admission ticket constitutes a serious barrier which stresses “the lack of permeability between the neighborhood and thus the residents, between the cultural institutions and the community.” This perspective was confirmed by one of the employees of the MAMbo: “I often wondered how much the museum was visited by the residents of this neighborhood and in my opinion not so much, there are many people who have never been inside the museum.”

In line with previous research,⁵⁶ city revitalization efforts frequently encounter issues such as disconnection, distortion and lack of community involvement, resulting in a lack of identity and long-term viability. This feeling of exclusion and disconnect was noticed by a few of the respondents, for example, interviewee 3 argued: “We have gone from a peaceful disintegration, i.e., where different subjects cohabited the territory while not talking to each other, to a time when under the umbrella of dialogue there has been an exclusion of certain subjects.” Moreover, despite the urban revitalization efforts undertaken during the establishment of the district, significant disturbances and deterioration persist within the vicinity. Many respondents referred to drug activity and danger, especially in green areas, such as Cavaticcio Park and 11 Settembre Park. This partially disproves the perspective of cultural policies as a vehicle for community building and requalification. On the contrary, the responsibility of keeping the area alive seems to be left to grassroots organizations and civil society associations. Among the founders’ organizations of the district, the one that acts most on the community and neighborhood is the Cassero LGBTQIA+ association. As stated by interviewee 6: “Cassero plays a very important role in the area since they provide so many services to the community. (...) For instance, they offer support for gender violence, psychological support, and first assistance for homeless people. So, it certainly has an important impact from a social point of view.” And again, a worker of Cassero added that they “try to leave the world a little better than we found it and believe that bringing artistic experiences as close as possible to people’s lives is what then generates a real impact by seeing the audience not as a passive subject, but as an active participant in the dynamic of fruition and participation in the cultural work.”

55 Kravagna, “Arbeit an der Gemeinschaft,” 31.

56 García, “Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration in Western European Cities: Lessons from Experience, Prospects for the Future.”

MdA is a significant illustration of how urban renewal solidifies the influence of advanced capitalism.⁵⁷ Moreover, as Klunzman observes, every tale of urban regeneration commences with artistic expression and concludes with real estate.⁵⁸ Indeed, 7 respondents out of 14, referred to an increment in the house pricing. As stated by interviewee 6: "(...) the residential properties that exist in the surrounding area obviously had an increase in their value." Thus, in line with Markusen,⁵⁹ the Creative Class can lead to gentrification, indicated by real estate prices. Indeed, according to respondent 12: "There has been a radical change in the perception of this neighbourhood, which has also changed the cost of flats nearby. It has gone up a lot." This was confirmed also by interviewee 10, who looks at the sense of place: "Before, this was actually a working-class neighborhood, so in the early periods this redevelopment plan was not so well received because it raised drastically the rents and some people also had parts of their land expropriated because of the Cavaticcio redevelopment." While these quotes do not prove any correlation between the MdA and the real estate prices, the perception of the neighborhood as increasingly gentrifying seems to connect to a larger city-wide phenomenon of which our participants seem well-aware: "In Bologna, house prices are skyrocketing, and it is not that it is Manifattura delle Arti that has affected them so much in that area, it is others who are responsible" (respondent 3). However, in response to the housing crisis, within the MdA project, the first entirely public co-housing initiative in Italy, called Porto15, had been implemented by the municipality. The project traces back to its beginnings in 2009, and it ended in 2017. The ambitious plan involved two main stages: firstly, developing the housing project, and secondly, establishing a cohesive community of residents to inhabit it. As explained by interviewee 12: "The municipality's objective would be to extend this model throughout this district, which would have the perfect characteristics to be a pilot to test how this melting pot between different social situations can generate integration."

According to some respondents, this is as an attempt to camouflage gentrification processes created by top-down policies, echoing a trend that has been empirically investigated elsewhere.⁶⁰

Overall, a *laissez-faire* approach emerged which encouraged spontaneity such as grassroots initiatives and associations. These realities are seen by the municipality as pivotal in promoting social interaction and facilitating

57 Giorgia Aiello, "From wound to enclave: The visual-material performance of urban renewal in Bologna's Manifattura delle Arti." *Western Journal of Communication* 75.4 (2011): 341-366. Leslie and Catungal, "Social Justice and the Creative City: Class, Gender and Racial Inequalities"; Peck, "Struggling with the Creative Class".

58 Klunzman "Keynote speech to Intereg III Mid-term Conference, Lille, in: *Regeneration and Renewal*".

59 Markusen, "Urban Development and the Politics of a Creative Class: Evidence from a Study of Artists".

60 Meghan Ashlin Rich. "Artists are a tool for gentrification: maintaining artists and creative production in arts districts." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 25.6 (2019): 727-742.

the development of human and urban flourishing⁶¹. However, the associations active on the territory feel that the municipality is somehow using them to “do their job and solve social issues without adequately repaying them for this service” (respondent 14). Thus, the role of planning as enabler and facilitator, as exemplified by Lidegaard et al, cannot be seen as a solution but, rather, as a starting point for public administrations, which will still need to engage actively with the local civil society.

Conclusion

The question whether it is possible to plan something that by nature tends to arise spontaneously, and what this entails is the subject of this research. Specifically, this article has attempted to answer the following research question: how can policymakers foster and support spontaneous order and subcluster formation, with regard to the case study of Manifattura delle Arti in Bologna?

Using a case study, this article addressed the research question in order to inform effective policy approaches. The study was conducted through 14 interviews with key actors working in the cluster, such as directors and cultural employees in the organizations and institutions of the district and other stakeholders involved in the governance of the area and of the municipality.

The research unveiled two main results: the presence of a spontaneous subcluster of bottom-up organizations within the planned district and the civil society as an engine of regeneration and inclusion. The study contributes to the dilemma of top-down and bottom-up strategies in cultural planning. The results support Lindgaard et al.'s advocacy for a *laissez-faire* approach, as it instigates innovation and creativity reflected in the spontaneous cluster of bottom-up organizations, as well as social inclusion and requalification promoted by the associations operating within the district. However, as emerged from both themes, such an approach needs a sustained support from local authorities, so to avoid tensions within the spontaneous cluster and between the cluster and the territory that may hinder social, economic, and cultural innovation. Recalling Andres and Grésillon⁶², in the case of MdA, the “branding cultural brownfield” strategy has been implemented without considering the community and without long-run planning. Therefore, this has given space to an “alternative cultural brownfield”, which has developed a strong social and community focus while suffering from political and economic pressures. At the same time, these grassroots activities risk disappearing as a result of the incapacity to respond and cope with the external economic, cultural and

61 Morea and Sabatini, “The Joint Contribution of Grassroots Artistic Practices to the Alternative and Vital City. The Case of Bologna and Venice (Italy).”

62 Andres and Grésillon, “Cultural brownfields in European cities: a new mainstream object for cultural and urban policies”

political pressures.

Normatively interpreted, these findings suggest that policymakers should embrace *laissez-faire* but with a sustained enabling and supporting role. Understanding the efficient practices and policies that have emerged after 20 years of *Manifattura delle Arti* is crucial, especially in light of upcoming projects such as *The District of Creativity* officially initiated in the adjacent area by the municipality of Bologna with an investment of 57 million euros of public funds.⁶³

Nevertheless, some limitations in the research can be pointed out. First, a single case-study restricts the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Additionally, our qualitative approach, employing thematic analysis of interviews with 14 organizational representatives involved in the *MdA*, limits the scope of the perspectives captured. Importantly, the exclusion of residents, citizens, and neighboring organizations from our sample may have overlooked valuable insights and perspectives crucial to understanding the project's broader impact and reception within the community. Furthermore, our study did not delve into potential causes or external factors influencing the phenomena under investigation, which may have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the project's outcomes. Future research might expand on this, possibly with a multi-case approach.

63 Comune di Bologna. (29 March 2024). *Area ex Ravone passes to the Municipality of Bologna* [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.comune.bologna.it/notizie/area-ex-ravone-passa-comune-bologna> (last accessed: 12 May 2024)

Liola Urso holds a degree in Cultural Heritage Studies from the Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna. She pursued a master's in Management of Artistic and Cultural Resources at IULM University, Milan. In 2023 she obtained a Master's degree in Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship from Erasmus University Rotterdam. This article is based on her Master's thesis.

Valeria Morea is assistant professor at the Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication in Rotterdam, where she teaches courses in cultural economics and cultural management. Her research examines the cultural civil society from economic and institutional perspectives. Her previous work has explored collective action and artistic entrepreneurship in Venice and Bologna, the realization of values in the arts, and art in public spaces.

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Appendix A Interview Guide

Personal Questions

- Demographic information (name, age, gender, etc.)
- Could you briefly summarise your function, activities and responsibilities?
- How long have you been working within the cultural organisation/foundation?
- As a cultural worker, was there a particular reason you chose to work with/in the Manifattura District? If yes, what was it?

Perception of the District

- How would you describe the Manifattura District?
- Could you describe the main changes you have noticed in the Porto district since the Manifattura project was implemented?
- What are the main functions of this space in your opinion? And what are the main benefits for the organisations operating there?
- Do you perceive the District as a synergy, do you feel part of a cluster?
- Do you feel that the Cultural District has an influence on the surrounding area and community?
- What are the main problems you encounter in your organisation or in relation to others?
- Why do you think there are such difficulties?

Social Dimension

- Who are the main actors involved in the functioning of the District?
- Could you describe the type of relationships you have with other organisations in the District? Do you usually collaborate with other cultural organisations? If yes, could you tell me which ones and on what occasions?

Cultural Policy

- Do you think that the municipality supports the organisations within the Manifattura? If so, through which instruments?
- In your opinion, does the municipality cooperate with the organisations present in the District, including those of a non-institutional/private nature? If yes, in what way?
- Do you think that the community is actively involved in the cluster and its initiatives? If yes, in what way?