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Ambivalent Quality: the Neighbourhood as a Space of Intensities

1. *Introduction*

Starting from the urban renewal projects that have involved numerous metropolitan areas in the last twenty years (Governata, Saccomani, 2004), this contribution aims to propose a reflection on the emerging quality of public space that considers the agency and the everyday practices of the actors involved. More specifically our (open) research questions are: what kind of quality of space emerges from the urban regeneration processes? Can we always talk of quality when we talk about requalification? As Carmona (2010) points out, in the literature emerging definitions of quality refer to terms which are related, overlap, and often incorporate a disciplinary-oriented idea of it; in other cases, they are contrasted or become repositories to which almost everything fits.

Looking for a more sociological definition of the quality of public space and refusing a conceptualisation of it as an a-priori assumption, we rather see it as a multifaceted, contextual and emergent concept. In this sense, the concept of spatial *Re-Figuration* has stimulated our reflections because it exactly: «interrogates the change in quality of social processes and relations, including power relations» (Knoblauch, Löw, 2020, 266). It is an intrinsically relational and spatio-temporal concept which draws attention to the question of how the current social order is being transformed because of social tension between the different logics of four spatial figures: territorial, trajectorial, network and place. Here logic: «is understood in the sense of a structure of the social, which permeates everyday actions, emotions, and imaginations as well as institutions and objectivations» (*ibidem*). As the scholars argue, the forces at play, the tensions and subjective reactions that intervene in the creation, conflictual coexistence or overlap of the different spatial logics (figures) must be investigated empirically to be understood.

Accordingly, we choose the Neapolitan neighbourhood of Scampia as a privileged observation point to analyse the ambivalent logics in action through the actors' gazes involved in the regeneration processes. We are well aware of the existence of an already 'saturated' field of study that has dealt with that neighbourhood from various points of view: urbanistic, sociological, political, socio-historical, etc. Thus, Scampia – also

well-known beyond national borders as the neighbourhood ‘to be regenerated’ – plays the role of stimulating our exploration of some processes similar to others urban regenerated contexts.

Therefore, firstly, we briefly sketch the main traits of Scampia’s urbanistic history that have defined it as a *public city* type of urban periphery (Lepore, Berruti, 2009). Secondly, we analyse the social processes that have crossed its history: from the heart of the Camorra’s power into a virtuous model of activism and practices of re-appropriation of space ‘from below’; from a highly stigmatised space into a commodified periphery. Finally, compared with other studies, we critically reflect on the intrinsic ambivalences produced by some urban regeneration processes in terms of the quality of public space. They establish the neighbourhood as a “space of intensity” (Vazzoler, 2015), i.e. a processual assemblage of affect and perceptions, «a vortex of forces and intensities that pass through and relate all kinds of actors, human and non-humans, in all kinds of combinations of action» (Amin, Thrift, 2013, 123). In this frame, *space* is not only the inert background where relationships between people, structures and practices are intertwined; it is also constituted as the outcome of synthesis and positioning practices (Löv, 2008), giving rise to often unexpected results.

The empirical data was collected by listening to the different ‘voices’ of the neighbourhood. Through a snowball sampling, the research work is based on six in-depth interviews and five informal interviews with cultural operators of associations involved in pedagogical and educational projects (*Mammut. La Gru di Legambiente*); fifteen in-depth interviews with headteachers and teachers of secondary schools (two vocational institutes and a classical high school); five informal interviews with students and four with parents, ethnographic observation and notes collected in the classroom and at the school exit in a secondary school with different disciplinary paths (professional, technical, and musical lyceum) selected as a case-study, fifteen in-depth interviews with students aged between 14 and 19 and with young people aged between 20 and 25 involved in associations aimed at recovering public spaces; observation carried out in the neighbourhoods, schools and associations under study; in-depth interview with the former director of the Naples City Council’s urban planning office; three in-depth interviews with some of the ‘pioneers’ of the mobilisation in Scampia; focus groups with female students of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli, who live in Scampia.

2. *The context*

Many previous works have analysed the history and urban development of Scampia (see Gianni, 2017). Here we limit ourselves to a brief

description of a few transformations central to the neighbourhood and useful for a spatial analysis aimed at investigating the emerging quality.

Historically it was a vast, uncultivated green area. With its enormous voids to fill, it became the ideal urban space for experimenting with models and ideas of living typical of the *public city* to solve the issue of housing that emerged as one of the principal social problems to be addressed. In the '60s the area was included in the Naples Public Housing Plan, becoming the periphery of public housing, the so-called 'zone 167'¹. The vast esplanade chosen for the 167 – being close to the hills on the edge of the urban core of Naples – was designed to create a residential suburb with varied social composition. But the logic of the social housing allocation chains failed to achieve social integration. Instead, it generated a reality of social dispersion, isolation of families and individuals. In terms of *spatial figures*, the neighbourhood constituted at the same time a *trajectorial* space, separated from the city and differentiated formally and functionally (Vinken, 2008), and a *territorial* space, a confined area that reduced complexity by creating an “outside”, but also an “inside” that accepted this condition (Knoblauch, Löw, 2020).

Certainly the earthquake was, as in other cities such as Palermo (Fava, 2008), one of the main causes that changed Scampia's trajectory, reinforcing ongoing processes of *territorial stigmatisation* (Wacquant, 2008) and its figures of trajectorial and territorial space. Accordingly, in 1980 left-wing politicians proposed the Urban Recovery Plan for the Peripheries to make the most degraded neighbourhoods liveable. Although the construction of the district seemed to be going according to the initial plans, on 23 November 1980, Naples and much of the region were struck by a devastating earthquake (with its epicentre in the province of Avellino) that irremediably damaged many historic buildings and exerted a strong impact on the residential, social and also political structure of the city. Many of those displaced by the earthquake began illegally occupying the apartments still under construction in the brand-new residential area. This abusive wave particularly affected the famous *Vele* (sails) of Scampia, which witnessed a very low-income population rise from 4% to 86% in just a few months (Mudan Marelli, 2021). Through the Extraordinary Residential Building Plan of 1981² the housing situation seemed to improve significantly with the so-called building 'parking houses': a sequence of towers and small prefabricated buildings.

Nevertheless, more than half of the 167 remains empty: it hosts vast blocks of flats, with no services, full of wide, fast-flowing roads and internal connections inspired by the romantic myths of the neighbourhood

¹ “Zone 167” is the name given to many areas designated by municipalities for social housing pursuant to law no. 167/1962.

² Law n. 219/81.

(Giannetti, 2022). Afterwards – in 1995 – an integrated redevelopment programme began, which had the demolition and reconstruction of the *Vele* as its pivot (and its media label). It responded with physical interventions to provide, according to the municipal offices in charge of the project, ‘more humane’ residential settlements. This programme aimed at achieving two main objectives. Firstly, to provide permanent housing for the current residents of the *Vele* with the demolition of these buildings and the construction of new replacement public housing units. This choice followed the struggles of the neighbourhood inhabitants who formed committees and the vast movement of opinion that they managed to catalyse by making the degradation of the *Vele* visible worldwide. Secondly, to activate a process of urban redevelopment and socioeconomic revitalisation through a set of integrated initiatives and interventions (Scampia Urban Redevelopment Programme, 1994-2000)³. It includes, for example, the recovery of unused public buildings, including the introduction in the *Vele* area of relevant facilities: above all, the new headquarters of the Biotechnology Centre of the Federico II University. Moreover, since 2016, 94 housing units have been allocated to as many families living in the *Vele*. Between 1997 and 2020 four *Vele* were demolished. Two are still waiting to be bulldozed, while the so-called ‘vela blu’, is to be redeveloped to house offices for the metropolitan area.

Like many suburbs of the *public city* type, Scampia represents a heritage of a finished ‘modern experience’. It is a difficult heritage to go ahead with: firstly, as in the case of the *Vele*, for the bad conditions of the buildings; secondly, for the social and environmental decay that this type of functionalist utopia has too often generated (Wolfe, 2001), leaving physical – and therefore social – huge voids. These voids are almost impossible to fill except with illegal or para-legal activities that exploit desolation to take the place of the State and exercise violent power (Sciarone, 2011; Brancaccio, 2017).

Research conducted in 2001 by Lepore and Berruti on the perception of urban insecurity in Scampia depicted the maximum explosion of Camorra violence. Uninhabited spaces and the absence of ‘vital’ and aggregation places created the ideal habitat for Camorra power and the drug market. Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, the (Camorra) ‘System’, in fact, managed to occupy every void left by the State: welfare services, economic activities and social services. As the (R)*Esistenza Anti-Camorra* association’s president recalls:

Even if you needed a doctor, the Camorra helped you. The most evident change was denying every freedom. Until 2006, drug dealers had the keys to

³ <https://www.comune.napoli.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/1109>.

the gates of apartment blocks. If you had to pass through the courtyard of your building, you had to ask permission from them first.

Alongside *locational segregation* (Picone, 2016), the bad publicity also began in 2006 with the best-seller of the Neapolitan writer Roberto Saviano and later through the movie and the TV series Gomorrah. The “Gomorrah brand” has spread nationally and internationally by a set of narratives that, in their expansion across multiple media, have given rise to «what can be defined as a transmedia storytelling or narrative ecosystem» (Benvenuti, 2017, 7). What is being put into circulation, in essence, is the image of a specific Neapolitan reality, whose key symbol is visually given by Scampia’s *Vele*.

Hence, this narrative ecosystem started an ambivalent process of both territorial stigmatisation and commodification of territorial stigma (Colletti, Rabbiosi, 2021; Mudan Marelli, 2021). Scampia continues to be considered ‘the *Vele* suburb’. It is automatically associated with violence, social deviance and crime. This stigma seems to weigh on everyone, although the neighbourhood is socially variegated, along with its housing conditions. In addition, the stigma has become a global, exportable brand as an interviewee dramatically observes:

Think of the building where you live and imagine seeing it every day on television when it comes to murdered deaths, when it comes to drugs, you have nothing to do with it, but they use your house all the same for the news, fiction, for book covers. Your house, your clothes hanging, your father who maybe is smoking a cigarette outside. Just search ‘degradation’ on Google and your home appears among the images. You can’t do anything, maybe you resign yourself to the fact that you deserve to live there (F. 20 years old, unemployed).

Actually, since the second half of the 2000s, the neighbourhood’s situation has improved. As another young resident brings out:

Gomorrah devastated us. Scampia is not like that. In Scampia, you walk peacefully. Nobody has ever stopped me because I’m wearing a helmet. That may be true in one *riione*, but it is impossible to generalise. 90% are decent people. In 2004 the problems were related to the clash between important ‘families’, but the good people, even if they were hiding, were the silent majority (A. 22 years old, student).

The mobilisation of the inhabitants has been continuous: a solid collective effort to produce a new image of the neighbourhood. Thus, Scampia is experiencing a real rebirth, thanks to participatory processes of re-appropriation and re-signification of its places. The choral effort to transform its history creatively emerges in the intersection of active re-appropriation of public spaces, forms of resistance and mobilisation of associations and the world of education, innovative practices of deep-rooted

cultural mediators, and attempts by those in government to valorise a complexity perceived as richness.

It is now represented and narrated as a place that is energetically reclaiming its spaces (physical and symbolical). It has become one of the city's most creative open-air laboratories (Braucci, Zoppoli, 2005). Since 1981, the mobilisation instances have been channelled along some paths: the languages of street art, struggles for decent housing, football, environmental knowledge and sustainable practices. A more 'elitist' volunteerism of the first generation has then been replaced by the active participation of increasingly varied actors and social classes, symbolically and emotionally overwhelmed by the desire to redeem its negative image. Scampia has been transformed into a factory of activism with a heterogeneous political connotation, giving rise to the so-called "Scampia model" (Berruti, Palestino, 2016).

Currently, more than 120 associations operate in the area, and 50 'recovered' public spaces have been created. These realities have increasingly involved the inhabitants, generating atmospheres, thickening emotions and mobilising an ever-growing sense of belonging. In this sense, they have reaffirmed the definition of the neighbourhood as a space of intensity made up of social interactions, diversity of activities, density of exchanges, traces, feelings and perceptions.

On the side of local institutions, however, contradictory elements emerge. If in the early stages of the 'rebirth' these had opted for a sporadic presence, made up exclusively of repressive interventions against crime, since the district came to international attention in the 2000s, interest has grown exponentially. More generally, at the level of local politics, the just-ended populist decade also seems to have focused heavily on strengthening the creative identity of the suburbs. As 'emergencies' at the centre of national and local political agendas, they have become the focus of various institutional interventions. In the case of a 'symbolic' suburb such as Scampia, this centrality is made even more evident, as one of the headteachers interviewed emphasises: «Today it is a first-class suburb because it is at the centre of the attention of the institutions of the State: it is much richer because all those who want to do experiments, choose it».

3. Which qualities for Scampia?

We agree with the studies that argue that associating the geographical distance from the centre with an idea of discomfort is now obsolete and misleading (Lepore, Berruti, 2009). Periphery is rather defined by a social condition of marginalisation, from specific characteristics of the inhabitants and the logics that move their crossings, and also from the modalities of relationship with the city centre and the State and the positioning they occupy in collective imaginaries.

Thus, we have chosen to focus on the relational space activated by multiple actors, on the practices aimed at urban regeneration, but also of resistance, in an attempt at physical and symbolic reappropriation of the space. By adopting a spatial perspective, our aim is to grasp the logics of emerging *spatial figures*, any conflicts and tensions between them, and what kind of qualities emerge from these processes of *Re-Figuration*.

We considered three areas to be particularly relevant in highlighting how urban regeneration processes develop through tortuous paths in which infrastructures, actors and policies often move in a heterogeneous way in the constitution of space: the main public housing complex (the *Vele*), one of the schools present in the area, and the associations strongly active there.

In the unfolding of the renewal project of Scampia, the relationship between the architectural dimension of the infrastructures and the actors involved has determined a space crossed by contrasting logics. A focal point of the debate is, in fact, related to the fate of the *Vele*, considered by the residents – gathered in the *Comitato delle Vele* – and from a vast movement of opinion, the material and symbolic artefacts of decay. In response to the pressure exerted on local and national institutions, the municipality of Naples launched *Restart Scampia*, a project that identifies the regeneration process in the demolition of the *Vele*. This partial and incomplete response, has animated a heated debate over time, as well as in other cities affected by similar processes (Reale, 2012). The supporters of the demolition opposed scholars, such as architects and economists, who believed in the economic, environmental and social non-sustainability of the demolition. According to these scholars (Paris, Bianchi, 2018; Catalano, 2019; Gresleri, 2020), regeneration projects in public housing districts cannot focus exclusively on the demolition of buildings. Rather, the great heritage of public housing must be protected and enhanced through redevelopment processes that start from the existing one. Thus, two opposing quality concepts emerge: the first focuses on the relationship that is established between actors, practices and material artefacts in the constitution of the space; the second more oriented by values such as economic sustainability and aesthetics.

Between ‘demolishing monsters’ and ‘saving from bulldozers’ (Merlini, 2008), it should be noted that in many cases even the inhabitants themselves have not identified in the demolition the answer to a necessary regeneration of the space. As one young activist tells us:

If a young man who lives in Scampia sees such beautiful buildings, and sees that they are abandoned, not taken care of, and the police come here only to repress [...] when I see all this I think that the State has failed! The *Vele* are beautiful, we associate them with Gomorrah but they are beautiful. It also costs a lot to knock them down [...]. I saw the interview with those men from Northern Italy on TV [...] their project is called “Resto a Scampia” and they

would like to redevelop the remaining Vele. It costs much less than demolition! You can even sell the houses afterwards (Young Scampia inhabitant).

The project, despite some stops, is moving forward but, as we will see, the impact on the quality of the overall public space remains an unresolved question.

The second space considered is a secondary school which offers different disciplinary paths: professional, technical, and for a few years now the musical lyceum. To face the imminent danger of closure and supported by the local government, the school management implemented strategies aimed at the re-foundation of the school. The attempt was to create a new space intervening on material structures, on relationships with and between students but also with external actors, we could say separate from the external environment. As emerged from the words of the headteacher, one of the main objectives was to transform the school into the space in which the State law and the logic of order opposes the deviance, disorder and anti-civicism defined as typical of this periphery.

The first time I arrived I found all the students in the driveway. They do 'drop out', that is! At some point during the lessons, through word of mouth along the four floors of the school, the students decided to leave the school. And they left! To avoid this, I literally locked them inside: we had gates [...] so I locked them in! Bear in mind that up until that moment they also threw creolin along the corridors several times a year. In short, these kids didn't go to school, and when they did they did damage.

The change was conveyed by a real hand-to-hand engagement with the students and their families, a struggle where feelings, embodied practices, material and symbolic artefacts come into play. 'Locking the gates' is the symbolic representation of the constitution of a safe territory where different rules are in force, a new space, as reported by teachers, that generates conflict and requires continuous negotiations with the student's families who feel delegitimised as they are considered unable to contribute to the education of their own children, or in extreme cases bearers of logics in contrast to the school and the State.

Furthermore, the school management has tried to attract new students, more motivated and with medium-high social and cultural backgrounds. This action, while on the one hand, aims to create a more inclusive and safe space through *mixité sociale*, on the other, it responds to a logic of economic efficiency which, through the increase in enrolments, removes the risk of closure of the school. According to Kudla and Courey (2019), starting from Wacquant's studies on territorial stigmatisation, many scholars have focused on institutional actors, market forces and the media who mobilise stigma from above to justify urban regeneration processes. Other studies focus on incorporation and resistance to stigma from below, by local populations, especially in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods or public housing districts (for the case of

Scampia see Mudan Marelli, 2021). The two scholars instead focus on the practices of those organisations – which Wacquant *et al.* (2014) defines as *street-level bureaucracy* – that operate in the middle of this dichotomy: they strategically mobilise or resist the stigma by negotiating alternatively with the actors from above or with the inhabitants of the areas involved in the regeneration processes. They seem to fight stigma but they need to highlight the negative attributes of the neighbourhood to justify the support they receive from above.

It is in fact through this strategic management of the territorial stigma, that in our case the school management has attempted to override territorial boundaries. From the narrations of the headteacher, it emerges that proposing “the school of Scampia” constituted a sort of pass to build relationships with associations, institutions and companies which, in terms of image, benefit most by welcoming students from the most famous of the degraded suburbs. In this sense, it is precisely the spatial figure of the territory/trajectorial, described above, that allows entry into a new figuration of the space closer to the network (Knoblauch, Löw, 2020); a spatial figure capable of relating distant and different elements (nodes). The branding of the suburbs promotes the school, placing it in the prestigious cultural and productive spaces of the city, perhaps obtaining the most inclusive result for students, as it allows them access to new contexts. As one teacher says:

For the guys of Scampia it is unthinkable to go to the theatre, but when you see them dressed so elegantly, in the presence of the main authorities, you think Finally, I did it! It's a great satisfaction. On our website there is an article from the *Sole 24* (newspaper). It is a study by the Agnelli Foundation. We are the fifth school in Naples to be included in the job market, but the first are private schools, so we have made it just a little!

We could say that the practices of the actors and the transformation of the material and symbolic space seem to have created a new, safer, more inclusive space, open to other contexts. At the same time, however, we cannot fail to notice a certain vocational ambiguity and an unconvincing performance: the logics of security, inclusiveness, economic efficiency and the pursuit of prestige, intersect and often conflict. The idea of the quality of space that emerges cannot keep them together. Inclusive practices are contradicted by the discriminating words used by the teachers towards the weakest students, «*those on the top floor with whom you have to be very strict*», and by the spatial organisation of the institute founded on the discipline of bodies and on their segregation on the top floor. The same ranking, proudly shown by the headteacher, highlights a quality based on quantitative and statistical indicators but does not consider the relational and affective dimensions of being at school. A widespread quality does not emerge, as it is not shared with the neighbourhood and has no transformative capacity, on the contrary, it even requires a “distance”.

It is a quality that does not relate, that does not mix. Each student stays on his floor with his background, separated like water and oil. Inequalities seem confined rather than fought.

The case of the school is emblematic of an ambivalent quality that characterises this space, a quality that takes on different connotations also according to the gaze of the observer. If we look back at the neighbourhood, in fact, we see other spaces where quality is only branded. One of these seems to be represented by cultural and political associationism.

As illustrated in par. 2, since the 1980s Scampia has become a space of social, cultural and political effervescence. The many activities organised by the associations are transforming the neighbourhood into a model of social activism capable of attracting stakeholders and social and economic resources. Just to name a few examples, Scampia every year attracts thousands of people for the carnival organised by *Gridas* and it is also visited for its mural art realised by famous street art artists and the many associations who consider art a way to regenerate the neighbourhood. Of course, this confluence must be read as a polysemic space. The logics of action, the interests at stake and the resources of the actors in the field are often divergent and even conflicting. Each of these associations is the bearer of an idea of the neighbourhood and what practices are necessary for its revitalisation. Thus, around the first associations, which remain the 'planets' of an increasingly complex solar system, now revolve around an increasingly dense nebula of satellites which, however, do not seem able to establish a network with shared objectives and strategies. As denounced by a former headteacher who was once active in the area:

The associationism attracts a lot of funding, because Scampia has been used by many to get some medals or to obtain economic aid. Scampia has become a symbol. I remember that it was enough for me to pick up the phone and get the funding I wanted. The children were involved in all the projects of the associations, they needed us. So, this great associationism was born but over time it is no longer voluntary [...]. I don't want to accuse anybody, but it becomes a job opportunity by attracting a lot of money and interest. I aimed to build a network, instead everyone took it for himself, doing small projects that didn't have a great impact. I was in Scampia twelve years, so much excitement, so many initiatives, but I always saw the *Vele* from the window.

From what emerges from the headteacher's words, we could say that in Scampia the ability to network has developed more outwards in synergy with various institutions, than among the actors already active in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, for the citizens who do not participate in the activities of associations, there are still no spaces such as squares, bars, shops or cinemas, the *third places* (Oldenburg, 1989) where one can relax in public, have a chat, meet friendly faces and make new acquaintances. We do not deny the existence of a sociality linked, for example, to the common life of apartment blocks or residential parks. However, we believe that this sociality represents an extension

of the private, domestic dimension and, for this reason, it does not provide a setting for grassroots politics or urban intensity. Moreover, this kind of sociality – often gendered – can reproduce the patriarchal dichotomy between public and private space that, on the one hand, reproduces the idea that the female body in public space is ‘out of place’ (Massey, 1994); on the other, allows to weaken the relationships in the neighbourhood.

Certainly, it is possible to reach the city centre easily with the underground *Metro dell’Arte*, so called due to the presence of artworks by artists of national and international fame, but there is still a lack of those spaces where democratic participation extends to all the inhabitants and does not thicken in the headquarters of associations. We report below an excerpt of the ethnographic notes collected during the research.

Walking around the neighbourhood is practically impossible. The Ciro Esposito park entrance is on a fast-flowing roadway. The pavements are completely deserted and overgrown with weeds that impede pedestrian passage. There is nothing around. I invite my interviewee for a coffee but he replies: ‘There are no bars here, there is nothing at all: it’s desert!’. When I ask him if he usually walks or plays any sport in the park he answers me: «Are you crazy? No one goes there, it’s dangerous! There are only junkies or thugs [...] maybe at dawn [...] I mean at 7.00 a.m. no later» (21st October 2022).

The large empty spaces and the lack of attention to the numerous green spaces is emblematic of this inability to bring together the interventions undertaken by different actors. As reported by our interviewees, the initiatives of some associations that have painstakingly created and looked after small green spaces are contrasted by widespread degradation and the absence of institutions in the basic care of urban decorum.

Some recent research shows that 80% of the young people of Scampia believe the presence of the Camorra is still prevalent compared to the State and the Church; that 70% would like to live elsewhere and that 71% perceive they live in a context characterised by vandalism, violence and deviance⁴. The data also tells us that Scampia is an area marked by a very high rate of unemployment (65% – with a peak of 74% for women) and school dropouts (13%)⁵.

Despite the narrative of the neighbourhood’s rebirth, the social ferment and the spot initiatives of local institutions seem not yet to have

⁴ The research was carried out by the chair of Criminology at the Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples. Through the collection of questionnaires, the project aimed to understand the perception of legality among the students of the lower and upper secondary schools of Scampia, <https://www.unisob.na.it/ricerca/criminalita/presentazione.htm> (consulted on 12/02/2024).

⁵ https://www.regione.campania.it/assets/documents/file_6832_GNR.pdf (consulted on 12/02/2024); for further data see also Pascali M. (2017, 17-19).

been able to affect the overall quality of this space, and even when quality experiences seem to emerge, they appear to be connoted by an ambivalent nature.

4. *Final remarks*

As shown in our contribution, Scampia is a space that over the years has been, and continues to be, the subject of multiple regeneration projects by institutions, voluntary associations and by its inhabitants. Referring to the theoretical framework of spatial *Re-Figuration* we can assume that it is a space in which the *territorial/trajectorial* spatial form, which relegated it to the extreme, peripheral city borders, coexists with that of the *network*, due to connections with actors and institutions from “outside” the neighbourhood. But Scampia also takes on the characteristics of another spatial figure, the *place*: the intensities and affective flows that cross the neighbourhood, as well as the attempts to reappropriate the space from below by the residents, reveal an identity that becomes more evident at the moment in which it is spatially experienced as a “loss” (Knoblauch, Löw, 2020, 274). Starting from the growing relevance of network spaces, this characteristic means that this place takes on its meaning only from its positioning in the network (*ibidem*). As emerges from our work, these four spatial figures coexist, sometimes conflicting or getting to tension, other times drawing mutual advantage. We could therefore argue that the quality of this space is intrinsically related to its ability to bring together different spatial logics that unfold through simultaneous and changing relationships between actors, institutions, infrastructures and material and symbolic artefacts. But which quality, or qualities, emerge from these simultaneous processes of spatial *Re-Figuration*?

First of all, we can define it as an ambivalent quality, being determined by a continuous tension, or by the greater force alternately impressed by one or another spatial figure. On the one hand, a *branded, commodified quality* comes to light. Through its positioning in a network Scampia has become a ‘brand’ and for this reason every project started here has a resonance: in the imaginary it recalls the global brand of the redeemed neighbourhood. On the other hand, it is necessary to note a certain social effervescence, an affective and emotional intensity, deriving from the mobilisation of associations and institutions which, however, gives rise to qualities *thickened* in some points of space. But it also leads to conflicts and negotiations or, at worst, to attempts that remain completely extraneous to the inhabitants’ daily life experience. Looking beyond the neighbourhood, we could say that our study highlights that when the emotional and relational dimension and the one of practices are not considered in regeneration projects, the risk resides in the production of many unconnected qualities, sometimes conflicting or incompatible,

but above all unable to become a widespread quality. Scampia seems to remain a space in which to inhabit but not to live. The effective quality of the renewal projects and the impact on the inhabitants' life remain an open question, often obscured by the spotlight on the neighbourhood and its local mobilisation. As we show below, this is a characteristic that brings Scampia closer to other disadvantaged Italian districts subject to requalification processes. These similar 'experiments' seem to suggest that even when a space appears *overmanaged* (Carmona, 2010), it is not always a space of quality.

From different Italian studies that do not explicitly focus on quality but that subtly describe the transformations of Italian suburbs after requalification interventions (thus implicitly posing the question of quality), what emerges is still an ambivalent quality, always related to the situated point of view of the observer. For example, when talking about San Siro district (Milan), Grassi (2020) brings out a *contested* quality squeezed in between the imperative of decorum and the risk that governmental instruments of security and control could definitively erode the inclusiveness of public space. Similarly, Fava (2012) and Alietti (2012), speaking respectively of Palermo and Milan suburbs, highlight that in *advanced marginality* (Wacquant, 2008) urban contexts, too often quality coincides with securitarian logics. Moreover, the reiterated stigmatising image of these spaces both as places of lack – lack of order, of respect for the law, of urbanity – and as places of excess – too many immigrants, too many delinquents – produces a regime of truth that limits reflection and imposes a logic of inadequate and ineffective public action, marked by a securitarian drift (Alietti, 2012).

Even from a critical standpoint, in all these studies, the quality 'debate' considers security and decorum as the main indicators, remaining entrapped in the above-mentioned conceptual division between *over* and *undermanaged* public spaces. Other studies try to go beyond this normative conception of quality and focus, instead, on unexpected forms of quality. Among many, Farinella and Saitta (2013) reflect on the forms of resistance of subaltern populations in Messina to an organisation of life and public space that started in the aftermath of a remote earthquake and finished in the building of *baracche* (hovels). What emerges here is quality as a heterotopia, characterised by the 'indecorous form' of those chaotic and potentially subversive forms of housing. In fact, they identify an attribution of meaning to public space that is profoundly different from the official one. On the same trail, Dines (2012) critically examines, through the study of different public spaces in Naples, the urban modernist interventions that have been realised to censure the Neapolitan population, its social practices and urban traditions. Hence, in his view, quality can emerge only in the endless dialectic between political discourse and lived experience. Therefore, the constituting of public space is an unfinished process, continuously shaped by responses and disruptions from the

ground. So, in both these studies, quality emerges only in the interstices of the normative categories of public space ordering.

At the same time, a discourse on quality becomes possible only by avoiding preordained axioms about what constitutes a ‘good’, ‘virtuous’ or ‘beautiful’ city (or neighbourhood). Hence, according to Fisher (1985), the *first-order* discourse retraces the definition of quality in what is commonly legitimate and taken for granted: indicators such as those of decorum and security are unquestionably widely shared and not reflexively questioned. For this reason, in our view, it would be more appropriate to inscribe the debate on quality within a *second-order* discourse, which is realised when the instances and points of view of all the actors in the field are accepted and considered. It is the only way to generate change, especially cultural change, in public space.

Accordingly, in regeneration processes merely providing inhabitants with a physical space to live seems not to be enough. A territorial space, as a neighbourhood, only becomes a place when it is “loaded” with shared meanings that go beyond the sense of loss. For this reason it seems necessary to accompany such projects, with an activity of creating identity, roots and collective memory: «It is an activity that involves the layering of signs due to cultural events intended to leave a mark on the neighbourhood’s lifestyle» (Caudo, 2022, 18). It is an activity that promotes a *diffuse* quality: an intensity that gives the urban space a value and a capacity of meaning. Intensifying the neighbourhood will thus significantly intensify the relationship with it, provide a better perceptive acuity, reinforce the feeling of urbanity or strengthen the identity of the space considered (Amphoux, 2003). This is particularly relevant for the working-class and low-income neighbourhoods, where public space plays the most important social function (Carr *et al.*, 2007, 235). Likewise, the creation and cultivation of *third places* (Oldenburg, 1989) seems necessary for a shift in the debate on public space quality because, as Lasch (1995 [2001]) noted, these are decisive for the formation and maintenance of “civic virtues”. They are in fact pivotal to construct the public dimension alongside that of the private, single, and individual dimensions. In this sense, they can create a diffuse quality.

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