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The Resilience of Small and Troubling Neighbourhoods for Improving the Destination Brand of the Cities. A Case From the Neighbourhoods of Naples

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ABSTRACT

Modern cities, like living organisms, are in a constant state of evolution and transformation. The cityscape, in general, has an inner diversity, made up of neighbourhoods each with their own unique identity, subculture and history. A recent and promising phenomenon consists of investing increasingly in social, economic, redevelopment and branding strategies to regenerate neighbourhoods, known in some cases as slums, even though endowed with a rich cultural and historical heritage. This paper gathers the findings of the first phase of an ongoing research project aimed at exploring the role of neighbourhoods in social and economic redevelopment, and its implications of the underlying need to consider them as vital pillars for building sustainable and resilient brand value for the cities. These first findings provided the theoretical background, methodological issues, and an overall descriptive introduction about the three neighbourhoods case studies in Naples analysed in the ongoing research project.

Keywords: Destination brand, Resilience, City identity, Cultural regeneration

INTRODUCTION

Modern cities are dynamic systems, like biological organisms, always evolving and transforming. In recent years, we have witnessed an interesting and promising phenomenon: the crucial role of smaller, disreputable, and emarginated neighbourhoods in reinforcing or rebuilding the overall brand equity of an entire city, modifying the sentiment, perception, and behaviour of current and potential customers – citizens, tourists, regulars, headquartered companies, potential investors – toward it. An eloquent example of this transformation can be observed in Naples (Italy) with the recent cases of the Quartieri Spagnoli, Rione Sanità, and Quartiere Scampia, such as the suburb San Giovanni a Teduccio. This paper is part of an ongoing research project aimed at exploring the role of neighbourhoods in urban regeneration. It analyses the implications in terms of reinforcing over time the brand equity of the entire Naples city toward its current and potential stakeholders

(citizens, tourists, regulars, entrepreneurs, investors, and others). Through a cultural and customer-based brand equity (CBBE) perspective, the proposed research project would emphasise the need to carefully consider these neighbourhoods as vital pillars for building more sustainable and resilient brand equity of cities in the future, leveraging on three case studies of neighbourhoods in Naples: Quartieri Spagnoli, Rione Sanità, and the suburb San Giovanni a Teduccio in Naples. All are historical areas of the city. In particular, the aim of this paper, however, is to put into evidence the findings of the first phase of the ongoing research project, that is, to introduce the theoretical and methodological issues, such as the frame and the objectives of the future phases.

The whole research project is organised in three phases. The findings of the first phase are discussed in this paper. In the second phase, we would apply a qualitative research approach, based on the feelings about the three neighbourhoods case studies - Quartieri Spagnoli, Rione Sanità, and San Giovanni a Teduccio - from the perspective of key stakeholders, using open-ended interviews. Therefore, key informants will be the relevant stakeholders of Naples city: representatives of the city and regional government, representatives of the small firms located in the areas, representatives of cultural institutions (Universities, Museums, Archaeological sites, etc.), representatives of industrial organisations, main incoming tour operators which have Naples as a cultural destination in their offering. The third phase of the research project will be deployed on a sample of "internal customers" - citizens, regulars, entrepreneurs, investors, policymakers - and tourists living or visiting the three investigated neighbourhoods. Gathering the data through structured interviews online with closed-ended responses, and adopting a multivariate statistical method for the elaboration (SEM model) we will explore the perceived destination CBBE of the new neighbourhoods, if and why it has improved the CBBE of the entire Naples city.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Introducing the theoretical background (section "Theoretical background"); the methodological issues (section "Aim, research design, and reference brand conceptual models"); the overall description of three neighbourhoods case studies (section "Overall description of the three case studies"); the expected findings of the whole research project (section "Expected future findings"); conclusions and limits of this paper (section "Conclusions and limitations).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Neighbourhoods that were once on the fringes of urban development are now emerging as key catalysts for the city's overall growth. The theories of gentrification, advanced by Smith (1979) and Lees et al. (2008), contribute to understanding the socio-economic dynamics underlying urban transformations. Scholars have highlighted the contributions of smaller neighbourhoods through various research areas. Harvey (1989) highlighted how the redevelopment and regeneration of marginal neighbourhoods can influence the economic structure of a city, while Florida (2002) analysed the role of creativity and innovation in urban transformation processes. The works of

Zukin (2010) examined the link between urban redevelopment and social dynamics. The opening of new shops, restaurants, and cultural activities not only increases employment but also stimulates the local economy, attracting investors and noncustomers of these urban areas. This transformation goes beyond numbers; and has a significant social impact, reducing inequality and promoting a sense of cohesion and inclusion among residents. Investments in local infrastructure, the creation of new businesses, and the stimulation of the real estate sector contribute to sustainable economic growth (Glaeser, 2011). Access to government funding and incentives plays a critical role in facilitating this process (Grimes et al., 2018). The studies by Lichtenstein et al. (1993) highlight how the transformation of neglected urban spaces into liveable and commercial areas can significantly contribute to economic and social development. The studies of Jacobs (1961) and Lynch (1960) emphasized the importance of local characteristics and community participation in creating sustainable urban environments. Studies by Porter and Kramer (2011) demonstrate that integrating sustainability and CSR into urban projects can generate long-term benefits for all stakeholders, including investors, the inhabitants, and the environment. Florida's (2005) studies have highlighted the importance of the "bottom-up" approach and community involvement in urban transformation. Effective local governance, as highlighted by Pierre & Peters (2020), is essential to coordinate redevelopment efforts and ensure long-term sustainability. This bottom-up approach actively involves residents in the transformation process, creating a sense of belonging and responsibility. Local community participation in decision-making processes and development projects promotes greater sustainability and social resilience (Huxley et al., 2019). Active community involvement is a fundamental participatory marketing strategy to ensure the long-term success of redevelopment projects (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). The conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage in smaller neighbourhoods were analysed by Graham et al. (2016). Many times, smaller neighbourhoods are custodians of a rich history and cultural heritage. Redevelopment does not just mean building something new but also preserving and enhancing what already exists. This combination of ancient and modern gives shape to a more complete and authentic urban identity. The use of cultural resources as a lever for sustainable tourism is an essential element in redevelopment, generating economic and cultural benefits (Richards, 2001). The redevelopment of smaller neighbourhoods contributes to diversifying tourism. While a city's main attractions are often well-known, sometimes at the international level, smaller neighbourhoods offer unique, authentic, and immersive experiences. The strategic positioning of smaller neighbourhoods, emphasising their uniqueness and authenticity, can attract investors, residents, and tourists (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990). Through careful management of local cultural heritage, it is possible to create a distinctive brand for the neighbourhood, attract tourist flows, and promote community participation (Richards, 2001). This not only attracts visitors eager to discover lesser-known places but also creates economic opportunities for local businesses. Achrol & Kotler (1999) introduced the concept of urban marketing as a tool to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of urban areas. Urban marketing takes a

central role in communicating the identity and opportunities of redeveloping neighbourhoods, and neighbourhood branding is a key component of urban marketing (Hankinson, 2007). Recent studies (Sadeque et al., 2020), have addressed the issue of the relation between brand identity formed at a "lower place scale" (i.e. neighbourhood) is a driver for determining the identity "at a higher level of place scale" (i.e. city), in the perspective of the place branding (Zenker and Braun, 2010; Lucarelli & Brorström, 2013), place and neighbourhood identity (Masuda and Bookman, 2018); built involving the relevant stakeholders (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2012), in particular, place customers (Warnaby, 2009) that manifest a neighbourhood brand love (Ahuvia, 2005; Langner et al., 2016); Ahuvia et al., 2014; Aro et al., 2018).

AIM AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Following the recent studies addressing the role of neighbourhood brand identity in place branding, the aim of our ongoing research project is to demonstrate how the brand equity of specific areas of a city, that is neighbourhoods, could influence the brand image of an entire city. Our hypothesis of the whole research is the following: 1. The more the architectural regeneration initiatives inside a neighbourhood increase, the more the brand equity of the city improves, and the more brand equity increases; 2. The more the cultural events inside a neighbourhood increase, the more the brand equity of the city as a destination increases, and the more brand equity increases; 3. The more cultural institutions (i.e. Universities, cultural centres, public offices, etc.) invest in the neighbourhoods, the more the brand equity of the city as a destination increases. The theoretical background of the research will be enlightened by four theories: 1. Consumer culture theory, understanding the cultural motivation underlying the attachment to a place and neighbourhood brand of the customers (citizens, tourists, investors, etc.); 2. Customer-based brand equity (CBBE) to understand the factors influencing the positive and negative engagement and reactions of consumers toward the neighbourhood brand (Keller, 1993, 2016; Wang & Ding, 2017; Wolter et al., 2016; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013; Aaker, 1996); 3. Self-identity theory (Tenenbaum & Eklund, 2014) to understand how individuals categorize themselves into specific social groups to differentiate them in terms of the perceptual brand image of a city through its components (i.e. neighbourhood); 4. Self-expansion theory, helps us to understand how individuals expand themselves by connecting to identities (i.e. place-city-neighbourhood brand) with which they desire or have closer relationships (Reimann & Aron, 2014). To pursue this aim, we will focus the research on three of Naples's historical areas. Two neighbourhoods: Rione Sanità, located north of Naples' historical centre, adjacent to the Capodimonte hill; and Quartieri Spagnoli, located in the historical centre of Naples. The third case study, instead, is the historical coastal suburb San Giovanni a Teduccio, located in the east of Naples. All these three areas have a difficult story, with an image of slums or suburbs dominated by neglect and crime, but, more recently, with a liked place-destination brand. Over time, this situation also implicated the insurmountable difficulties for effective exploitation of the valuable cultural and historical heritage

present locally (i.e. churches, historical buildings, museums, etc). Recently, several initiatives (cultural events, location of universities and research centres, new mobility infrastructures) gave impulse to a regeneration of the areas, capturing the interest of the destination's customers (tourists, citizens, regulars, small enterprises), and reinforcing the entire brand equity of Naples city. The methodology of the whole research project, therefore, is based on a qualitative (first and second phase) and quantitative approach (third phase), to have a detailed understanding of the Naples city case study led by the case studies of destination brands "at lower place scale" (i.e. neighbourhoods). Urban brand development is a complex phenomenon, influenced by multiple interconnected factors such as economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a multidisciplinary approach, integrating contributions from disciplines such as urban planning, economics, sociology, and geography (Yin, 2014). Case study research is a robust methodological approach to exploring such dynamics (Flyvbjerg, 2006), capturing the complexity and specificity of urban contexts (Bryman, 2016). This approach allows us to analyse in detail local influences on development. The adopted research methodology leverages an iterative process (Merriam, 1998) involving data collection (qualitative and quantitative), analysis, and ongoing reflection. Data collection occurred through a variety of methods, such as qualitative and quantitative interviews, observations, and document analysis (Merriam, 1998). This allowed us to adapt the research based on new information emerging during the three phases of the study. Data analysis aims to identify patterns and relationships, highlighting the interconnections between urban development factors (Yin, 2014). The proposed methodology can be a powerful tool for understanding the complexity of phenomena in specific contexts (Yin, 2014), and represents an essential approach in the study of urban brand development, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the complex and contextual dynamics of city brands. It offers a unique opportunity to thoroughly investigate intricate aspects of reality, allowing one to gain a detailed understanding of selected cases (Stake, 1995). The data will be gathered through qualitative open-ended interviews with key stakeholders (in the second phase of the research project), and those gathered through quantitative closed-ended interviews (in the third phase) with internal customers (citizens, entrepreneurs, stockholders, etc.) and tourists. They will be elaborated based on two brand conceptual models, well-known in the literature and managerial practice. The first is "Kapferer's brand identity prism" (1996), deployed around a set of six factors influencing the brand identity as if it were a person, represented by the faces of a "straight" hexagonal prism. Briefly, these six factors, every one broken down into more micro dimensions (items), are the following. **Physical characteristics,** which would help the customers to identify any neighbourhood brand investigated: physical artefacts of the urban regeneration projects, urban streets, buildings, cultural and archaeological sites, artisan workshops, kinds of restaurants, people, etc. **Personality.** That is, the set of human traits that better represent any neighbourhood brand involved. It would emerge through the lens of 12 Jungian archetypes (Jung, 1976; Mark & Pearson, 2021). **Culture.** The system of values, beliefs and/or principles embedded into any neighbourhood

brand analysed. **Self-image (or mental representation).** It should highlight the perception that the customers have of themselves to be "users" of the neighbourhood brand investigated. **Reflection (reflected image).** It should put in evidence the stereotypical characteristics of the neighbourhood. It reflects the general collective imagery of the neighbourhood brands investigated, from the perspective of the customers. The second conceptual framework will be "Keller's Customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model" (Kapferer, 1996). The six constituent constructs of the CBBE model will be explored using a set of items (60), both for internal customers and tourists (Italians and strangers). The six constructs are briefly presented in the following. **(Brand) awareness.** That is the ability of the customers to bring the neighbourhood brand to mind in situations appropriate and in its specific and differential identity. **Performance (of the brand).** Overall, the construct is planned to be explored by the customers through dimensions concerning aspects relating to the competitive performance of the neighbourhood as a destination and if and how they impact Naples city's CBBE. **Image (of the brand).** The construct will be investigated on the customers through dimensions concerning primary images associated by the informants to the neighbourhood brand, and if and how they impact Naples city's CBBE. **Judgments** (of internal customers-tourists towards the neighbourhood brand). This macro-construct is divided into four micro constructs - quality, credibility, superiority, and consideration of the neighbourhood destination - anyone investigated through specific dimensions. **Sensations** (or even feelings of internal customer-tourists towards the neighbourhood). It concerns aspects relating to the ability of the neighbourhood brand to generate a sense of belonging, security and reassurance in the informants, social approval and self-esteem in living or visiting the destination, and if and how it impacts Naples city's CBBE. Finally, **Resonance** (of the brand), that is, the deepest links between the informants and the neighbourhood brand - in terms of loyalty, or of being a promoter towards other customers of the same - and if and how they impact Naples city's CBBE.

OVERALL DESCRIPTION OF THREE CASE STUDIES

Rione Sanità

The Rione Sanità in Naples, anchored around the 17th-century Basilica of Santa Maria della Sanità, holds a rich historical and cultural legacy. Originating from the Latin term "sanitas" or "health," the neighbourhood's name reflects its historical connection to health and devotion, established during the construction of the basilica in response to the 1656 plague epidemic. Despite recent challenges, including the intriguing Fontanelle Cemetery, Rione Sanità remains a significant historical site, with Renaissance noble palaces, churches hosting cultural events, and a vibrant atmosphere featuring narrow streets, artisan shops, and traditional venues. Enveloped in popular traditions and religious festivals, the district showcases a captivating blend of history and daily life, preserving a unique cultural heritage. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Rione Sanità faced a decline marked by the loss of industrial and commercial activities, urban transformations, and social issues. Emigration of the youth, along with poverty, crime, and illegal construction,

contributed to diminished community vitality and discouraged investment, impacting the neighbourhood's quality of life. The Rione Sanità recently underwent a redevelopment process, focusing on restoring historic buildings, noble palaces, and churches to enhance the architectural landscape. In collaboration with scholars and cultural experts, efforts aimed at understanding the area's history and implementing conservation strategies were integral to the initiative. Simultaneously, improvements were made to enhance accessibility and livability, including the creation of new infrastructure and support for cultural and commercial activities, fostering local identity. Projects also targeted the preservation and promotion of popular traditions and artisan activities, with cultural events engaging the community and visitors. The success of the redevelopment highlights a harmonious balance between historical conservation and contemporary needs, creating a vibrant neighbourhood that attracts visitors and enhances the residents' quality of life. These first initiatives highlighted the importance of a holistic approach that combines urban planning interventions, cultural promotion, and community involvement to achieve complete and positive regeneration.

Quartieri Spagnoli

The Quartieri Spagnoli of Naples serves as a vital and culturally rich part of the city, reflecting historical influences and transformations over the centuries. Originating from the Spanish rule in the 16th century, the name refers to densely populated streets and alleys between Toledo and Medina streets, initially constructed to house the Spanish garrison. Established during Emperor Charles V's reign in 1503, this area near Castel Nuovo has witnessed persistent high population density throughout its history. The Quartieri Spagnoli in Naples boasts a vibrant and close-knit community, with crowded streets fostering a strong sense of authenticity. Rich in historical and cultural resources, the area features numerous churches, including the 16th and 17th-century Church of Santa Maria di Montecalvario, offering significant architectural and cultural insights. Additionally, the Mercadante Theatre stands as a key cultural institution with a noteworthy role in Naples' theatrical history. Neglect in urbanization and infrastructure maintenance intensified socioeconomic issues, causing emigration, poverty, crime, and difficult living conditions. In the Quartieri Spagnoli of Naples, initial redevelopment efforts focused on renovating existing structures and engaging the community. Incentive programs and support for new commercial and cultural activities led to an economic revival, making the area famous for diverse gastronomic experiences, and preserving local heritage through artisan workshops. The neighbourhood, resembling an open-air museum, showcases street art, including the renowned Maradona mural, and hosts regular events, religious celebrations, and cultural activities, fostering a vibrant and enriched local culture. In summary, the Quartieri Spagnoli of Naples are a concentration of history, culture, and daily life. Their unique and authentic atmosphere makes them a fascinating destination for residents and visitors who wish to immerse themselves in the soul of the city.

San Giovanni a Teduccio

The San Giovanni a Teduccio district in Naples' outskirts, famed for its ancient village and San Giovanni Battista Church, grapples with post-World War II building speculation, resulting in high population density. Its name traces back to a 4th-century tale of fishermen discovering a San Giovanni Battista statue, prompting chapel construction and village formation. The toponym Teduccio originates from Emperor Theodosius' daughter, Teodosia, who owned a villa in the area, supported by archaeological findings dating back to 390 AD. Once a luxurious holiday destination until the 18th century, the area underwent a significant transformation in 1904 when it became Naples' major industrial centre. This shift was driven by the presence of the Real Opificio di Pietrarsa and leather factories relocated by Ferdinand II of Bourbon. Despite the initial aim of addressing citywide unemployment, the industrial project has sadly failed. The area's decline began paradoxically with the construction of Italy's first railway line in 1839, disrupting the village's harmony and attracting factories. The influx of workers led to the displacement of the nobility, and shortsighted planning failed to anticipate Naples' demographic boom, integrating the industrial zone into the city without sustainable solutions. Now undergoing industrial divestment, the neighbourhood faces severe decay, marked by slums, prostitution, and hazardous waste, contributing to a precarious state and an irreversible decline. San Giovanni a Teduccio is undergoing a comprehensive redevelopment, transforming its coastal side with plans for a tourist port, aquarium, university structures, and an Apple development centre. The initiative includes funds for revitalizing public housing adorned with murals by street artist Jorit, symbolizing a community battle for redemption and tourism attraction. Efforts to rejuvenate degraded areas involve the opening of "Troisi Park" and the planned archaeological park of Vigliena Fort, alongside initiatives like the National Railway Museum of Pietrarsa and a technological campus focused on training, innovation, and research, recognised by the European Commission. In summary, the neighbourhood of San Giovanni a Teduccio represents a place that has seen its intended use change very often, today it is the neighbourhood of social redemption. In which projects are a source of pride for the city of Naples and opportunities for young people.

EXPECTED FUTURE FINDINGS

Naples and its ancient neighbourhoods are rich in history, culture, and tradition, and are often at the centre of discussions regarding its transformation and development. In recent years, a fundamental aspect of this process has emerged forcefully: the role of smaller neighbourhoods in urban redevelopment. These neighbourhoods, often neglected or marginalized, are becoming protagonists of a real rebirth, contributing significantly to the general development of the city. These historical and cultural heritage have remained on the fringes of urban development for years. However, recently, there has been a growing awareness of the latent potential of these neighbourhoods. Their narrow streets, welcoming squares, and historic buildings represent a precious resource that, if properly exploited, can transform the entire city. The

redevelopment of smaller neighbourhoods is not just a top-down initiative but starts from incentives promoted to stimulate local initiative and actively involve the community. Encouraging local initiative means encouraging residents to actively participate in the transformation of their neighbourhoods. This happens through volunteer projects and cultural and entrepreneurial initiatives that strengthen the social fabric and create a sense of belonging. Naples is a city that attracts visitors from all over the world, but the smaller neighbourhoods are often overlooked in favour of the more famous attractions. The redevelopment of these neighbourhoods has led to a more equitable distribution of tourism, allowing I give visitors the chance to discover authentic hidden gems. The valorisation of the historical and cultural heritage of these neighbourhoods not only attracts tourism but also preserves the rich history of the city. Sustainable development projects can transform urban spaces, making them greener and more welcoming for residents and visitors. The redevelopment of the smaller neighbourhoods of Naples has offered the opportunity to introduce innovative solutions to address urban challenges, such as waste management, sustainable mobility, and environmental regeneration. Naples has experienced some successful cases of urban redevelopment in smaller neighbourhoods. Rione Sanità, Quartieri Spagnoli, and San Giovanni a Teduccio (more recently also Rione Scampia) have seen a cultural renaissance thanks to local initiatives, transforming their ancient and for some time abandoned streets, buildings, churches, and squares into a fascinating tourist centre. San Giovanni a Teduccio and Rione Scampia are today innovative and prestigious university hubs and places around which many new activities aimed at the development of the entire territory gravitate.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

In conclusion, the process of redevelopment of smaller neighbourhoods goes beyond the physical appearance of the city. It is a process of social and economic transformation that actively involves the local community. This process, also, can be an enabler to improve the brand equity of the entire city of Naples. Naples, together with other cities that embrace this philosophy, is experiencing a vital synergy between its history, its present, and its future. The integration of management and marketing approaches in the redevelopment of smaller neighbourhoods offers a comprehensive framework for sustainable urban development and destination branding. While the redevelopment of smaller neighbourhoods brings numerous benefits, it is essential to address emerging challenges. Equity in access to resources and prevention of excessive gentrification are critical issues that require attention (Hackworth & Rekers, 2005). As can be seen, in the case of the city of Naples, the role of the smaller neighbourhoods is crucial for the overall development of the city as a brand destination. Investing in these areas not only conserves cultural heritage but stimulates innovation, employment, and social cohesion. This paper presents the limitations of its theoretical state and the lack of empirical pieces of evidence that will explored in the second and third phases of the research project, as we have described above. The field research will be useful

in testing the consistency of the conceptual model of brand equity and understanding if and how regeneration projects of neighbourhoods contribute to creating a neighbourhood brand and, the latter, impact on the city CBBE building.

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