

## **SPATIAL STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING CONVIVIALITY IN PUBLIC PLACES: THE CASE OF THE HISTORICAL GOLDSMITH AND TEXTILE ARTISANAL MARKET AREA OF CITTÀ BASSA IN NAPLES**

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### **Abstract**

The effects of the privatization of public and quasi-public places in affluent and well-connected areas of the city and the correspondent decay and abandonment of public places in deprived areas need to be discussed. Under the umbrella concept of conviviality in public spaces, a research project on the rehabilitation of urban areas for commercial and retail uses – as engine of a complex process of production of places of social and cultural mixité – has been defined. In this context, a reflection on the role played by the rehabilitation of traditional and natural market areas inside city centres will be developed in order to favour liveability of public places.

The increasing in the expulsion of commercial activities from the city centre and the proliferation of gated suburban commercial areas have deprived wide areas, creating ruptures in the continuity of the urban grid. According to Gehl (2001), these ruptures are causes and effects of decay and abandonment of public areas. The research main hypothesis is that traditional retailers should be considered an essential element to ensure effective public use of urban public spaces. Thus, conservation and preservation strategies should take them in account as a priority matter, in order to guarantee a high level of conviviality in the urban centres.

The research methodology is based on a qualitative approach. Focussing on the process of impoverishment within local commercial districts – due to functional, logistic and market-oriented policies – the research aims at defining a holistic methodology for interpreting, designing, managing and assessing the refurbishment and redevelopment of those specific areas. In details, in order to apply a case study approach (Yin, 1994), the research group started working with local stakeholders in order to identify the most significant case study to be carried out in Naples, thus selecting the historical market place of Piazza Mercato and its neighbourhood in the Città Bassa of Naples (Italy) that are object of the Local action Plan implemented in the framework of the CTUR and HerO Projects of the URBACT II Programme. Naples presents interesting aspects of public spaces dedicated to identitarian artisanal

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and commercial activities inside a dense historical centre – one of the bigger UNESCO sites in the world. After the selection of the case study has been made, a possible strategy for addressing the revitalisation of the area was built and tested, by delivering a set of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and focus groups.

The aim of this research has been to produce useful tools for coping with the abandonment of public spaces in former commercial urban areas, and to avoid the risk of generating anonymous and globalized commercial districts. It aims at involving local stakeholders in pilot action plans, to demonstrate the possible effectiveness of the proposed approach. In so doing, it offers useful tools applicable in urban policies, particularly in European cities, characterised by the presence of significant historical centres challenged by both isolation and gentrification processes.

## 1. Introduction

The contemporary city is affected by a profound crisis due to the loss of cultural identities, of traditional social networks, and of welcoming urban spaces for improving interactions between diverse components of society. (Madanipour, 2010) Places of public life are the expression of this scenario: the agora is changing forms, functions, and symbols, following new trends superimposed by globalization phenomena. The impact on the transformation of public places due to recent dynamics, is revealed by the tendency to produce market-led transformations of public places in affluent areas and the abandonment and decay of the peripheral public realm. (Carmona et al., 2003)

In the following pages a research project will be presented which is aimed at identifying the main components of a process of rehabilitation of urban areas for commercial and retail uses in order to favour social and cultural *mixité* and economic regeneration. The project deals with the increasing globalization process, and consequently with the expulsion of traditional and identitarian commercial activities from the city centre, creating ruptures in the continuity of the urban grid in terms of creation of market-led and anonymous commercial areas on the one hand, and in terms of abandonment and decay of less affluent areas with a strong local cultural character on the other. (Augé, 1992)

The research starting point is the role played by traditional retailers and artisans as an essential element to preserve local cultural character, ensuring effective public use and liveability of urban public spaces. This qualitative approach aims at defining a holistic methodology for interpreting, designing, managing and assessing the refurbishment and redevelopment of those specific areas. This topic will be addressed by developing an urban design tool based on an effective participatory process in the rehabilitation and redevelopment of public places in abandoned commercial areas (Healey, 1997). This tool could be applied within community planning consolidated methods (Arnstein, 1969), in order to best address the physical and spatial component of the mapping and visioning process. Consolidated procedures for collecting and sharing the demand expressed by local communities in

terms of services delivery and public places organization have been developed in different fields of knowledge. Nevertheless, there is a lack of procedures for addressing demand for spatial transformations in order to favour the preservation and development of traditional and identitarian artisanal and retail areas as a driver for a wide urban regeneration process. This topic is included in the research programme of the EU-funded research Commercial Local Urban District Programme (CLUDs) “aimed at emphasizing the strategic role of small retailers – handcraft and typical food – in reinforcing the sense of community, reducing transportation costs and contributing to the creation of an attractive urban environment, thus producing an increase in private investment”. (CLUDs Commercial Local Urban Districts, 2011)

In order to identify the way physical and functional transformations of commercial areas in city cores can favour results in terms of social cohesion, economic development, cultural preservation and local liveability, the study started by working with a case study approach (Yin, 1994).

The research focusses on the specific experience of Naples in Southern Italy, which offers a wide range of interesting fields of reflection on the research topics. The group of scholars and local technicians involved in the fieldwork started doing active observations of the Neapolitan urban area in order to identify possible significant case studies to be carried out. The conceptual map of significant areas was discussed with local stakeholders resulting in the selection of the historical market place of Piazza Mercato and its neighbourhood in the Città Bassa district as a case to be analysed. This area has been the core of the Local Action Plan implemented within the framework of the CTUR and HerO Projects of the URBACT II Programme and is now the object of a new project funded by the EU.

Through the experience gained during the execution of the Local Action Plan for this historical area in Southern Italy, this paper aims at introducing and discussing a work in process oriented to coping with the tendency to abandon wide core areas of the city centre by supporting virtuous processes of urban regeneration, and intervening through a participatory process in the rehabilitation of traditional and natural market areas.

This paper is divided into four sections. Having introduced the research in this section, the following sections will:

- Set the context to identify the theoretical and methodological context of urban design, community planning and economic procedures to be applied together to commercial urban districts regeneration;
- Define the framework for the empirical analysis and discuss the pilot area findings; and
- Draw general conclusions, defining the role of local commercial areas as drivers of urban regeneration.

## **2. Setting the theoretical and methodological context**

The research project here presented is based on two different kinds of EU-funded research. The first one – the 7FP Marie Curie IRSES project Commercial Local Urban District Programme (CLUDs) – set the theoretical perspective and the

methodological approach. The second one – the development of the case study approach – has been conducted under the umbrella of the Local Action Plan implemented within the framework of the CTUR and HerO projects of the URBACT II Programme.

The conceptual framework of the CLUDs project (CLUDs Commercial Local Urban Districts, 2011) consists of the possibility of merging urban design, community planning and economic procedures in order to build a new tool for renovating degraded public spaces and improving the attractiveness and accessibility of deprived urban areas by focussing on the high potential of local commercial activities. The research can assist policy-makers in coping with the needs of urban regeneration by setting up an analytical process to understand how a public-private partnership oriented to sustain local retail can be both market-led and social-led. These aims can be reached by highlighting integrated approaches related to credit access, local resources promotion, job creation, typical retail protection and community engagement – in order to understand how the territorial milieu can contribute to create the necessary critical mass for improving local urban regeneration initiatives. (Ball, 2003)

The history and culture of European cities reveal the importance of public spaces such as streets and squares, which are deeply influenced by the commercial functions they host. Over the centuries, local retailing models, often integrated with the production of typical services, handcraft traditions and locally produced food, have frequently conditioned forms and organization of the European city. More generally, a higher level of manufacturing, commercial and residential integration is still related to vibrant urban environments, which are rich in urban life and social relations. (Brinkerhoff et al., 2011)

From the social point of view, it is widely recognized that integrated urban environments often contribute to a higher level of safety because of the social control exercised on the public spaces due to their continuous use; for the same reason, they are less likely to become blighted areas, thanks to the involvement of local communities in preserving their values. From the environmental point of view, the residential and commercial balance in each area is a fundamental tool in securing a less car-oriented living model, as small retailers allow residents to meet their everyday needs by walking; thus, it represents a real and proper pillar in ensuring a sustainable urban lifestyle. Furthermore, the link between small retailers and niche local production helps to ensure a more consistent and efficient supply chain, avoiding useless freight transportation costs, as well as reinforcing the relationship between the urban and rural environments.

Although these are remarkable and valuable features in the traditional European urban model, nowadays the changes in the international retail organization system are deeply impacting on the commercial functions of some urban areas. In particular, shopping malls and other large shopping centres present potential forces for dramatically reshaping the urban and suburban landscapes.

The CLUDs rationale is oriented to provide critical mass to weak urban areas through the connection with a broader network of local producers, thus fostering the

concentration of services (urban competitiveness) by connecting them to the production of goods in a wider territorial milieu (urban-rural balance).

The described Joint Exchange Programme CLUDs, reflecting the rationale of Economic Opportunity Zones, focusses on local small retail associations concerned with typical local production and their capacity of bringing together public initiatives, private investments and community demands.

This research project as been developed along diverse routes for empirical applications. In particular, two projects guided by local administrations and oriented to make possible a wide public-private partnership have been chosen to cross the CLUDs theoretical premises with a case study approach. The projects "Cruise activity and the recovery of urban and harbour building heritage: Strong elements of the common interest of sea towns to develop and strengthen the urban tourism sector" (CTUR) and "Heritage as Opportunity" (HerO) of the URBACT II Programme ([www.urbact.eu](http://www.urbact.eu), 2011) have been both developed (2008-2011) by a network of European cities. The core idea of the first one has been to improve competitiveness and liveability of port cities through the waterfront revitalisation (including derelict industrial areas) in an overall approach of the port city development, creating a mix between maritime and urban activities within the framework of an integrated approach of sustainable development. The second project – dealing with the challenging management of historic towns in Europe – focuses on heritage cities throughout Europe, in order to enhance balance between the safeguarding of heritage and the development of the city, taking heritage as an economic driver. These projects are both completed and are now in the process of being implemented in the local policies and are the base of the new projects promoted by the Neapolitan City Council in order to deepening the concept of land consumption in the historic centre.

### 3. Case study analysis: the Local Action Plan of Naples Città Bassa

Briefly, Naples can be considered one of the prominent ancient settlements in Europe and part of the Mediterranean basin. Its historic centre is a unique example of architectural stratification through the centuries and is still a vibrant catalyst of mixed activities without any museumification phenomena. Along with these positive aspects there are many problems, such as: the high population density; the low education indexes; the severe status of the labour market linked to the lack of private activities and job creation initiatives; the presence of criminal organizations; and the strong rehabilitation needs of the built environment, including the cultural heritage.

Table 1. Naples at a glance

Location	Capital of the Region of Campania - Southern Italy
First settlement	VI century B.C. as a Greek settlement
Population	1,004,500 inhabitants (City Council of Naples, census 2001)
Pop. density	8,556 inh/sq km (City Council of Naples, census 2001)
Unemployment rate	31.39% (City Council of Naples, census 2001)
Income per capita	€ 25,565.81 (Finance Ministry, 2009)



Historic centre	UNESCO recognizes the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the historic centre of Naples (1995).
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The complexity of this local scenario of resources and challenges is the humus for nourishing the local initiatives we are going to describe. (Gaber et al., 2007)  
 The first step has been the definition of the case study domain in terms of location, size, functional organization and general characteristics. Through the dialogue with the Urban Planning Department of the City of Naples, the active observations in different daytimes, weekdays and seasons as well as the discussion with local stakeholders and scholars in charge, a specific area involved in these comprehensive projects has been chosen in order to address the topics of the research.

Table 2. Plans and Programmes which coexist in the study area

Plans and Programmes connected to the ERDF 2007 – 2013	DOS (Strategic Guidance Document); Integrated Urban Plan EUROPE for the historic centre of Naples (PIU EUROPA); Grande Programma UNESCO (UNESCO Great Programme); Strategic Plan of Naples; HerO “Naples Historic Centre World Heritage Site Management Plan (WHMMP)” “Project of renewal of Borgo Orefici” under 2000-2006 ERDF Funds
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The coexistence in the same area of various urban planning and management tools, of several UE-funded initiatives as well as of grassroots movements and of traditional local economic activities can be considered the ideal scenario for developing a complex participatory process of urban regeneration to be tested and generalized. The research in progress here introduced has been developing in parallel and – on some topics – in cooperation with the planners in charge for the cited URBACT projects conducted by the City of Naples.

The area of Città Bassa, despite having previously had a strong commercial character, suffers since the end of the Second World War relative neglect and gradual decay. In this context some relevant key issues can be pointed out with regards to: the physical aspects such as location, accessibility, built environment conditions; cultural issues such as historical heritage, monuments, arts and crafts traditions; and social scenario in terms of social deprivation indices.

The work is premised on enhancing local revitalization and regeneration processes by focussing on the potential of an integrated approach to commercial activities, among the key issues related to the urban revitalization of the historical urban landscape. This is to be addressed in Naples by meeting the needs of different stakeholders – the linkage with the cited URBACT projects is "to secure traditional shops and retail trade structures as these ones are struggling to survive and to set up new governance structures for a better coordination of the revitalization activities" (HerO, 2011).

Table 3. Città Bassa: some relevant aspects

Location	Enclave between the port area and the historic centre UNESCO WHS
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 km from Capodichino International Airport;</li> <li>• near the Central Railway Station;</li> <li>• served by four metro stations (2 of those need to be completed);</li> <li>• near the local and regional maritime transportation nodes of Beverello Quay and Porta di Massa Quay.</li> </ul>
Historical heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Porta Nolana gate of the ancient city walls;</li> <li>• the renaissance church of SS. Cosma e Damiano;</li> <li>• the ruins of Castel del Carmine;</li> <li>• the baroque church of Santa Maria del Carmine;</li> <li>• Sant’Eligio Maggiore Church of the Angevin period dated 1270.</li> </ul>
Art and crafts tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borgo degli Orefici (goldsmith quarter) since the fourteenth century;</li> <li>• Piazza Mercato Old Marketplace;</li> <li>• Antiche Botteghe tessili (textile market);</li> <li>• Typical handmade street food.</li> </ul>
Social deprivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unemployment rate (Mercato district 38.01%, Pendino district 40.37%);</li> <li>• Illegal immigration;</li> <li>• Hidden and informal economic activities.</li> </ul>
Built environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low level of housing maintenance and technological retrofitting;</li> <li>• Abandoned and decayed public places;</li> <li>• Lack of spaces for pedestrian uses due to cul-de-sacs, squares transformed in parking areas, inefficient street lighting, abandoned ground floors (38% unused sqm – source Si.Re.Na Company);</li> <li>• Buildings which provide physical and visual barriers between the area and the waterfront.</li> </ul>

The focus area for HerO projects is Piazza Mercato, which is connected to an overall URBACT LAP named “Città Bassa” ([www.urbact.eu/hero](http://www.urbact.eu/hero)) included in a comprehensive intervention called “The waterfront of the historic centre and port area from piazza Municipio to piazza Mercato: a sustainable development through the

improvement of the cruise tourism impact”, which also concerns the LAP of the URBACT Thematic Network CTUR (Cruise Traffic and Urban Regeneration) lead by the City of Naples.

Field of action		Principle						
Objective	#	Project title & description	Responsibility (stakeholders to involve)	Financial resources	Funding by	Financing account	Time schedule	Links to other projects
Objective 1 Title explanation	1.1	Title of "Action 1" Brief description strategic requirements	Planning Department, Mr. A (Tourism Office)	50,000 €	Municipal budget	yes	2012	3.1
	1.2	Title of "Action 2" Brief description strategic requirements	Tourism Office, Ms. B (Preservation authority)	10,000 €	Municipal budget & ERDF	yes	2012	-
Objective 2 Title explanation	2.1	Title of "Action 1" Brief description strategic requirements	Economic Department, Ms. C (City Marketing)	250,000 €	Urban Development program	no	2013	1.1
	2.2	Title of "Action 2" Brief description strategic requirements	City Marketing, Mr. D (Tourism Office)	5,000 €	Municipal budget	yes	2011	-

Example of a structure of a Local Action Plan, in this case the LSG can be a good source to identify the key actions as well as to fill out the LAP table.

Figure 1. Example of Local Action Plan organization. Source: HerO Final Results: The Road to Success - Integrated Management of Historic Towns Guidebook; p. 47

The area of Città Bassa of Naples reflects all the issues, criticisms and potentiality related to the integration of typical handicrafts, dense residential uses, traditional commercial activities and the historical character of public places. This wide and articulated area lies between the port and the historical centre which has been listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO since 1995.

The study area is included in the range of influence of the Local Action Plan built by the City with the help of its Local Support Group (LSG), within the framework of the URBACT projects. The LSG as defined by HerO is to support the development and implementation of the Integrated Cultural Heritage Management Plan, which is “oriented towards the needs of the historic urban area and its users, offers the unique opportunity to bring the different stakeholders together”. (HerO, 2011) The Neapolitan LSG has been formed as the first step of the URBACT projects and has become the main interlocutor of the different kinds of local initiatives such as research fieldworks, entrepreneurship, training and programmes for the control against informal and hidden economy.

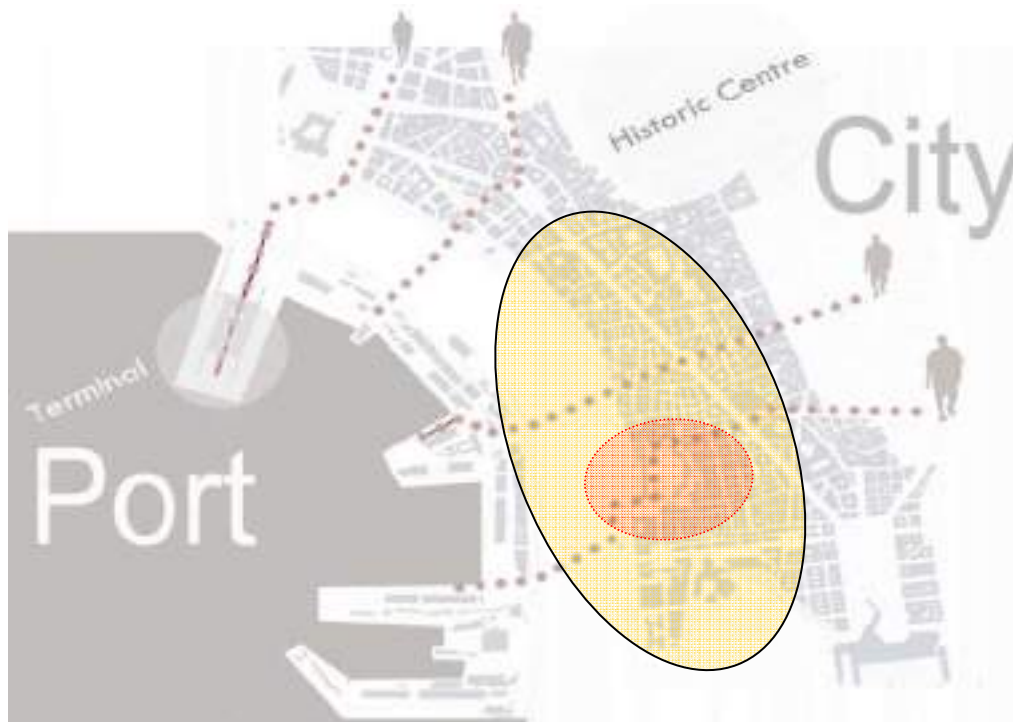


Figure 2. The study area of Città Bassa of Naples and Piazza Mercato. Source: Elaboration by the CTUR Final Report

The Local Action Plan (LAP) of Naples Città Bassa could become an experience of paramount importance – to be analysed, assessed and enhanced due to its mixed and complex character. Focussing not only on social indices and economic issues, the LAP is oriented to integrate both the approaches: built environment and historic heritage rehabilitation on the one hand and economic strategies on the other.

The Città bassa LAP includes the districts of Borgo Orefici/Waterfront (which form part of CTUR) and piazza Mercato (part of HerO) – all closely related to the port and the eastern part of the city – and is aimed specifically at reconnecting the ancient town centre and the harbour as well as regenerating the historic neighbourhoods.

The main topics are development of sustainable tourism, creation of business incubators, increasing commercial attractiveness, and job creation in specialized fields. One of the results obtained by the LAP has been to create an impact at the local level by transferring the knowledge acquired in the URBACT process to local policies, programmes and actors. This has been accomplished by scaling-up some of the action plans at the policy level and integrating them into mainstream services, as well as by securing funding through the Operational Programmes of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for their implementation. In addition, the process has also contributed to creating new partnerships between different levels of government and the involvement and participation of private stakeholders in the development of the project. The LAP has been developed through the active participation of different categories of local stakeholders. (Sanoff, 2000)

Table 4. Città Bassa LAP: main aims and objectives

1	Requalification of the waterfront monumental area and nearby historic urban area;
2	Refunctionalization of the city and the port heritage;
3	Maximize the economic and social impacts of the projects;
4	support the social and economic development of the “Città Bassa” quarter based on historical activities.



Figure 3. Scheme of priorities for the study area. Source: HerO Final Results: The Road to Success - Integrated Management of Historic Towns Guidebook; p. 71

Table 5. Città Bassa LAP: flagship projects investments (CTUR and HerO)

Projects	Responsible	Funds allocated	Source
Cultural heritage safeguarding – building restoration			
Old Monastery Carminiello (School)	City of Naples	3,000,000	ERDF 2007/2013
S,Eligio Monastery	“	2,500,000	“
Borgo Orefici requalification	SiReNa	17,670,000	Public/private
S.Maria Portosalvo Church	Private	1,200,000	Private
Public places requalification	City of Naples	5,140,000	ERDF 2007/2013

Requalification of complex ambit in the area	“	10,000,000	ERDF 2007/2013
Underground parking and requalification of related areas	“	13,500,000	ERDF 2007/2013
Business incubator for goldsmith and textile activities	City of Naples Private consortia	1,000,000	ERDF 2007/2013 Private funds
Tramlines and requalification of via Marina	City of Naples	4,203,491 13,997,299	ERDF 2000/2006 Public/private funds
Shuttle connection to the Maritime nodes	Port Authority of Naples	750,000	Port Authority of Naples

Sources: HerO Flagships Projects 2011 and CTUR Naples Local Action Plan

#### 4. Conclusions: local commercial areas as drivers of urban regeneration

Starting from the virtuous process launched within the framework of the URBACT LAP here analysed and applying the methodological premises of the CLUDs project, an adaptive model of urban regeneration based on commercial activities is currently being defined - in cooperation with the local stakeholders involved in the transformations of the study area.

Applying the CLUDS methodology, the research aims at building a dynamic architecture of public private partnership PPP in order to enhance the regeneration process during this crisis period. The LAP has been an important instrument for encouraging dialogue between the stronger stakeholders of the LAP area, such as the Port Authority, arts and crafts private consortia and the City Council. By setting up the local support group, the URBACTS projects acting in the area have created a positive process: first, the initiatives developed by public bodies started the auditioning process and the collection of resources; subsequently, private bodies and civil society have become part of the process.

Referring to the logic of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) – models dating back to the 1970s in the USA, are private institutions aimed at providing supplemental services in underserved urban areas – the wider experience resulting from the implementation of PPPs in North America will be combined with recent experiences developed in Europe that have involved actors from the broader territorial context in order to reach a necessary critical mass for urban regeneration.

The complex and articulated scenario of PPP tools offers the possibility of identify a possible dynamic system of relationships between subjects, actions, resources, roles and evaluation of the results. In particular, the case study approach is needed to design a sort of fuzzy-architecture of the partnership models aimed at facilitating local private and public initiatives within the framework of the common interest of



generating social and economic enhancement. A bottom up approach, oriented not only to collect demands and needs from the territory but also to encourage private initiatives, start-ups, non-profit organizations, and other forms of investments, will be elaborated and discussed with local stakeholders.

As we can see, in the LAP experiences analysed the initiative starts with the involvement of public bodies whose activities are primarily oriented to identify priority for public investments and to engage other public and private stakeholders. This process has been developed by the City of Naples and the LSG using a wide participatory process involving different categories of city-users, producing a huge data and information collection from the territory, providing a big effort in terms of sourcing and integration of financial resources and involving different categories of city-users.

The feedback needed – by applying the tools elaborated within the framework of the WP1 of the CLUDs research – is a model of governance that could enhance the non-profit private initiatives of urban regeneration driven by the development and rehabilitation of commercial areas in a wide profitable and marketable way.

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