

IS THE STREET ART A DRIVER FOR TOURIST VALORISATION OF MARGINAL URBAN CONTEXTS? THE EXPERIENCE OF NAPLES

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Abstract

The work investigates the role that street art practices can play in marginal and complex urban realities as identity markers and instruments for territorial enhancement. The intent is to understand, through the analysis of some street art experiences conducted in the suburbs of Naples, to what extent these unconventional artistic practices are able to favor the rewriting and re-signification of degraded and often abandoned landscapes and if they can be used by local institutions as drivers to develop alternative and territorialized tourist routes.

1. Introduction

Over the last few years the city of Naples has become an interesting area for experimenting with street art practices, as evidenced by the proliferation of projects, festivals and tourist tours dedicated to the theme and the large number of street artists who wanted to leave in the Neapolitan capital their own sign (Iovino, 2019a; Salomone, 2018; Amato, 2015).

These unconventional artistic practices took place in a scenario marked by the progressive disengagement of the state at local scale and by urban policies that are often more attentive to the interests of the dominant urban coalitions than to pursue goals of socio-spatial equity. For this reason, they appear to local public policy makers as an interesting field of opportunities to promote the image of a different city, creative and inclusive and, at the same time, encourage the activation of urban regeneration and tourism development processes in degraded peripheral contexts.

This explains why, alongside artistic practices usually considered *off*, in the sense proposed by Vivant (2007), i.e. illegal or without institutional support, other practices have spurred, that may be considered *in*, i.e., formally authorized, promoted by cultural associations or, as in the case of Naples, produced with the support of local authorities, in line with the urban commons policy proposed by the mayor of the city De Magistris. The present work investigates the role that such “insurgent” practices (Cellammare and Scandurra, 2016) can play in marginal and complex realities as identity markers and tools for tourism development. Our general aim is to understand, through the analysis of the experiences carried out in some peripheral areas of the city of Napoli, to what extent these expressive forms, territorialized and territorializing, are able to

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generate new narratives and new urban imaginaries, stimulating the rise of alternative tourist routes compared to traditional destinations by tourists in the city.

The empirical analysis is based on a methodological approach which comprises: (i) conduction of semi-structured interviews with diverse stakeholders, involved both in the policy-making sphere and in the graffiti art worlds, including tourist guides and tour operators offering street art itineraries; (ii) extensive documental analysis of existing information, such as policy documents, strategies, publications and reports from city government; media news, associations website and specialized blogs active in the urban art field; (iii) participant observation and visual recollection of the art work in the city.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section briefly illustrates the relationship between street art and territory, proposing some interpretations. The third section focuses on the distinctiveness of the investigated area, trying to highlight spatial patterns and long-term characters of the city and its suburbs. The fourth section examines the street art practices and institutionalization processes experienced in recent years in Naples, questioning their ability to generate territorial effects. The fifth paragraph, finally, proposes some conclusive reflections aimed at evaluating the potential of street art as a tool for tourism enhancement.

2. Street art as a territorialized and territorializing practice

Street art, as a *territorialized* and *territorializing* artistic practice, features a specific interest for geography (Iovino, 2019a; Amato, 2015) and more generally for all those disciplines that place at the center of their field of study the territory and the territorialization processes that shape the living environment of human societies¹.

Form of expression intrinsically urban, the street art is born *out of* and *for* the shattered suburbs of contemporary metropolitan areas. There the street artist rewrites fragments of landscape, appropriates interstices and urban residues, he paints, colors and reinvents these marginal spaces, removing them from anonymity, producing new semantics and making them places of critical reflection, contemplation and discussion. Artworks by street artists are, therefore, *territorialized* or *site specific* (Kwon, 1997), due to dense relationship with the context within which they operate and from which they are conditioned². Abandoned factories, overpasses and underpasses, enclosure walls, façades of degraded buildings, industrial wrecks, railway wagons and road signs become the canvases through which the artist relates himself to the places and to those that those places live or simply pass through.

The search for a dialogue with others makes street art a popular and non-elitist, horizontal and non-hierarchical expressive form: street art speaks to the general public,

¹ Territorialization (Raffestin, 1984; Turco, 1988), is the process by which human societies transform space (natural data) into territory (data produced by culture). A phase of territorialization can be followed, in correspondence with a crisis, by a phase of de-territorialization, which is, according to Raffestin (1984, p. 78), “first of all the abandonment of the territory”. The de-territorialization is generally followed by a phase of re-territorialization, which closes a TDR cycle (territorialization de-territorialization, re-territorialization), in a continuous transformative dynamic.

² Street art dialogues with the context not only through interaction with the inhabitants, but also from the spatial and material point of view, using the imperfections of the surfaces and incorporating the architectural and / or casual elements of the street into artistic creation.

inhabitants, visitors, passers-by, tourists and it relates to them and, in this way, it becomes a carrier of a critical discourse about the city³.

The rewriting work born from this interaction is carried out with expressive techniques and methods that can be very different, ranging from spray cans to stencil art, from sticker art to muralism, from mosaics to video projections, from collages to LED art. The piece produced becomes part of a hermeneutic path based on emotions and on the empathic elaboration of signs and symbols, a path that activates the narrative potential of places.

Beyond the aesthetic value of the pieces, the artistic action has a social function and, when accompanied by true experiences of dialogue and interaction with the citizens and the local community, can lead to the rediscovery of the sense of place and the bonds of community. Viewed in this perspective, the street art can, therefore, take the form of a *territorializing act*⁴, capable of restoring a face and an identity to fragmented urban fabrics, to deterritorialized spaces without quality or services, “no places” expelled from the life cycle of the city.

The resignification capacity of these artistic practices and their growing popularity have stimulated the interest of many actors (institutions and public stakeholders, art galleries, large companies, cultural associations, etc.), giving way in recent years to new paths of institutionalization and/or commodification of this expressive form. A change harshly criticized by “purist”, i.e. street artists faithful to the origins that continue to paint illegally, keeping away from the fashions, the rules and the market (De Innocentis, 2017)⁵. An emblematic example of this “purist” orientation is the “artistic euthanasia” of the Italian street artist Blu, who canceled all his murals in Bologna, to protest the privatization, commodification and, more generally, instrumentalization, or even “domestication” (Costa and Lopes, 2015) of these unconventional and transgressive practices⁶.

Even outside the art world there are critical voices (Tomassini, 2012) that underline the risks and limits of an urban policy that “abdicates” its role and exploits an art “that is by its own nature, anti-institutionalization” (Costa and Lopes, 2015) for masking the degradation and abandonment of difficult territories and the institutions’ inability to implement appropriate strategies for these areas. Sometimes the goal of these operations is to transform the artistic work into a brand aimed at increasing the

³ The highly disputed charge of street art is linked to its origins and its history. It represents, in fact, the evolution of writing or graffiti in the 1960s in the New York ghettos as an illegal and clandestine practice of rebellion against the pre-established order and the conquest of urban space by suburban gangs. See Lewisohn, 2008; Genin, 2016.

⁴ Territorialization occurs through a succession of territorializing acts (Raffestin, 1981), aimed at exercising a symbolic control (denomination), practical control (reification) and creating organizational structures that facilitate its management (structuring).

⁵ According to De Innocentis (2017), it is possible to identify four categories of street artists, in addition to *purists*: the *independents*, who work in a legal and authorized manner, but do not accept indications from above and seek a close synergy with citizenship and the territory; *the artists who live in a middle ground*, as they oscillate between legal and illegal, between independence and institutionalization; the *designers and illustrators*, who experience street art but do not have much experience of these practices; the *former street artists*, who have embraced new commercial-oriented artistic paths.

⁶ It is not possible here (nor does it fall within the scope of this article) to reconstruct the interesting critical debate that has developed in the street art world on the existing tensions between the processes of commodification and institutionalization of these artistic practices and their impacts on the degree of creativity and artistic value of pieces or the artistic reputation building mechanisms. On this issue see Costa and Lopez, 2015, Hansen, 2015.

attractiveness of the city or some of its parts for tourists⁷. Actually, street art is an important agent of transformation in urban life, as several studies testify. It acts indeed on the social value enhancement, on the promotion of inclusion, participation and citizenship, but even on the urban image (producing symbolic value) and on the economic value creation mechanisms, promoting real estate valorization, gentrification/touristification processes (Andron, 2018; Costa and Lopez, 2015). This paper will not discuss the theoretical framework of these interesting issues (including the controversial role of street art and more generally of the art-driven urban renewal programs, in branding the creative city), deeply studied by many authors in recent years⁸. Although inspired by the theoretical discussion about the phenomenon, our contribution provides a fundamentally empirical set of evidence to improve our knowledge about the geographies and the governance of street art in Naples, rather than pursuing a more conceptual approach to the assessment of culturally driven regeneration programs or tourism policies and all the critical issues and dilemmas there involved.

In this perspective we focus in the following paragraphs, on street art practices and institutionalization processes experienced in recent years in the area of investigation.

3. The area of investigation

Naples, for several reasons, turns out to be an environment particularly suited to the development of unconventional artistic practices, such as street art, characterized by a close relationship between artistic action and the places where this action is located, namely the fragmented and degraded suburbs of contemporary cities.

In the national and European panorama, the Neapolitan capital stands out, in fact, for the complexity and typological variety of its suburbs (fig. 1), extremely heterogeneous in terms of geomorphology, urban history, social composition, settlement and functional structure, real cities in the cities that make up an intricate urban patchwork (Pagano, 2001; Laino, 2008; Amato, 2008).

⁷ In Italy, the institutionalization of these practices has been reinforced by the economic crisis and the budgetary constraints faced by local authorities. Deprived of the necessary financial resources to be used for improving the urban environment, many local governments have in fact seen the street art as a useful and free tool for urban regeneration. It is the case, for example, of Rome that has set up a series of street art projects in its suburbs or even of the Municipality of Turin that has welcomed and promoted important events such as MurArte or the most recent PicTurin project.

⁸ Starting from the works by Landry (2000) and Florida (2002, 2005) an intensive cultural and academic debate has developed around the cultural approach to urban regeneration policies and its multiple impacts. The direct link between urban development and the presence of an open and tolerant culture proposed by Florida and welcomed in the public sphere by many policymakers has been questioned by post-modern critics. Authors such as Lay (2003), Zukin (1991, 1995), Peck (2006) Miles (2005), to name a few, have highlighted the negative effects taken by culture-led (or art driven) practices where culture is just another commodity for the masses or even worse “a carnival mask” (Harvey, 1989), behind which increasing social inequalities and urban conflicts are hidden. More specifically on the question of touristification or tourism gentrification see Cocola-Gant, (2018), Lees (2012), Colomb and Novy (2016).

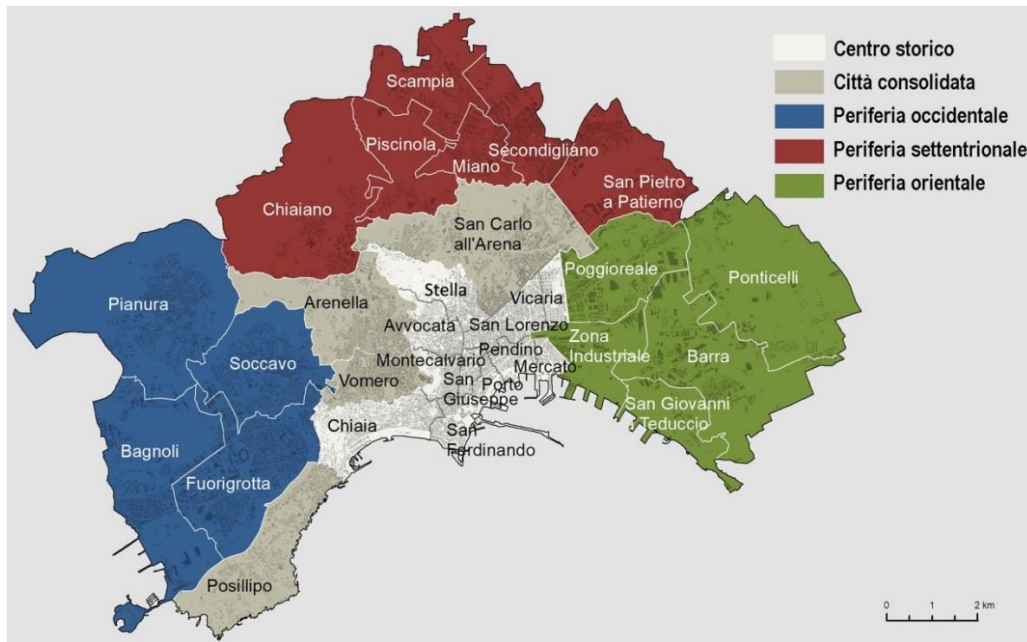


Figure 1: Naples and its neighborhoods according to PRG 2004.

Source: PRG 2004, modified by the Author

Revisiting the clusterizations suggested by other Authors (Laino, 2008; Berruti and Lepore, 2009), in a recent work (Iovino, 2019b) I proposed a taxonomy of the Neapolitan suburbs partitioned into seven main groups:

1. *the internal suburbs* located in the “womb” of Naples which include the very central neighborhoods of Mercato, Pendino, San Lorenzo, Montecalvario, Stella and Vicaria;
2. *the historic industrial suburbs*, mostly abandoned or being discontinued located at the two ends of the city (Bagnoli in the West, Industrial Zone, San Giovanni a Teduccio and partly Barra in the East side);
3. *the “quality” public housing areas of the first peripheral crown* dating back to the Fifties and today inhabited mainly by middle class dwellers;
4. the marginal peripheries of the great public building, placed mainly in the North-eastern quadrant (Secondigliano, Scampia, Barra and Ponticelli) and in the western neighborhood of Soccavo;
5. *the suburbs of illegal construction*, which grew out of control in the 1970s and 1990s, especially in the western and northern areas (Pianura and Chiaiano are the most striking examples);
6. *the “waste” places of the first and second crown*, “no places” without any urban recognition, real existential suburbs such as the Roma camps or some megastructures abandoned by the institutions and turned into criminal enclaves (i.e. the “Vele” of Scampia);
7. *the new spaces of socialization and production of active territoriality*, a typology of heterogeneous spaces that includes buildings or open spaces almost always owned by the city, entrusted to no-profit associations or local committees for the performance of activities of collective interest.

This latter type of peripheral spaces is linked to the second reason that makes Naples an area of great interest for the study of places' re-appropriation practices, such as the street art. That is the abundant and growing presence of associations, local committees, urban movements that for years, opposing the anomaly and the socio-environmental degradation of the suburbs, have been carrying out an enormous quantity of fertilization projects and initiatives. These latter range from the care of public spaces to urban gardening, from courses for school recovery and work placement to many projects that bring young people closer to sport and cultural activities (theater, music, painting, etc.). A varied and plural morphology that draws a geography of self-organizing capacities and local planning, a geography that is different from that of dominant economic flows, but also compared to that of organized crime networks which, sadly known, represent an historical and archetypical character of the city.

The activism and planning effervescence of local associations concerns both the inner marginal areas and the second crown neighborhoods. In Scampia alone, for example, there are over a hundred associations and local committees that have been operating in the neighborhood for years, carrying out a myriad of projects and initiatives⁹. A long-lasting tradition of associationism also boasts the peripheries of the "belly" of Naples (according to the famous expression by Matilde Serao). Not surprisingly, right in the historic city center, in the populous San Lorenzo district, in 2012, an innovative path started with the occupation of the former Asilo Filangieri. It gave birth to a new category of socialization spaces: urban commons, i.e. spaces owned by the municipality but directly administered by citizens, through a collective use declaration inspired by civic uses, which establishes methods of access, program of activities and functioning (Micciarelli, 2017). Currently there are eight initiatives like that in the city. Most of which regard sites of great historical importance: the former Filangeri Asylum, the "Scugnizzo Liberato" and "Santa Fede Liberata" in the ancient center, the "Giardino Liberato" in Materdei (Stella district), Lido Pola and Villa Medusa in Bagnoli.

As producers of "social profitability", these public spaces have been recognized as commons in the municipal statute and regulated by specific resolutions. A result made possible thanks to the agreement between the local associations involved in the experimentation of practices of re-appropriation and self-management of public spaces and the city administration which, referring to the works by the Rodotà Commission (Mattei, Reviglio and Rodotà, 2007), who recognized the legitimacy of such practices and initiated a process of institutionalization of this category of assets, entrusted to the competences of a specific department (the Councillorship for Commons, a unique case in Italy). The Neapolitan experience, object of study and imitation by other national and European urban realities (Palermo, Turin, Barcelona, Madrid), is considered a best practice at the EU level, and received the "Good Practice City" under the Urbanact program.

Among the drivers of this path to institutionalization, a non-secondary role is played by budget cuts to local authorities that have become stronger for the economic crisis and the payment of the interests of the city debt. Actually, the Municipality is in a situation of pre-financial distress, responsible in turn for a further contraction of urban

⁹ The literature on Scampia is now very extensive. Among others see Amato 1993; Andriello, 1983, Braucci e Zeppoli, 2009. For a brief review on the Scampia model see Pollichieni, 2016.

services. In this difficult situation local governments tend to devolve a large part of the city's cultural and social policies to civil society and local associations.

A similar path of institutionalization has also involved street art. In 2016, the Municipality recognized the phenomenon as a "new cultural expression" of youth, issued a specific disciplinary document (DISP/2016/0005488), through which the normed use of public surfaces is foreseen "for urban creativity interventions (drawings, murals, writing, etc.) (...), with the intention of redeveloping the urban context, especially the peripheral one, of the city of Naples".

In a context marked by the dismantling of urban welfare, the street art is entrusted with the role of eliciting regenerative actions. It is not by chance that among the meritorious elements for the granting of the surfaces there is the presentation of artistic projects "that contemplate the involvement, both in the conception and in the realization, of the social context (inhabitants, associations) of the area affected by the project".

4. Street art in the Neapolitan suburbs

In Naples this art form boasts a long tradition, which dates back to the late 1970s, to the precursor works carried out by Felice Pignataro in the northern suburbs of the city, in particular in Scampia where this artist, of Roman origins, chose to live and die. In this notorious neighborhood, emblem of marginality, he founded, in 1981, together with his wife Mariella, the cultural association GRIDAS (Group of Awakening from Sleep), with the aim of reawakening the consciences of citizens who lived there and of promoting a shared path of critical reflection and hope. His artistic work with strong ideological and social connotations is an act of condemnation of the conditions of degradation and anonymity of suburbs, especially those of the large public housings with functionalist inspiration, where the inhumanity of the urban configuration exalts individualism, isolation and self-segregation. It is no coincidence that Pignataro's favorite surfaces are the numerous barriers that mark these marginal landscapes (fences, gates, walls). Physical and social barriers to which the artist wanted to give a new ephemeral face, painting them, often in collaboration with the schools of the neighborhood, to convey alternative visions of the world, centered on solidarity and social cohesion (Pignataro, 1993; Di Martino and Il Gridas, 2010). As a tribute to the artist, who died in 2004, the GRIDAS transformed the new Scampia subway station into Felimetron, an area that exhibits about twenty works created by the artist in memory of his forty-year work in the neighborhood and in the city.

Over the years the works of a new and large generation of local artists have been added to Pignataro's precursor works. Among these is Jorit Agoch, a rising star of Italian street art, increasingly known internationally. Born in Naples from an Italian father and a Dutch mother, Agoch is known for his "branded" faces, faces of ordinary people or famous people taken from the local and Italian culture (San Gennaro, Maradona, Eduardo De Filippo, Hamsik, Ilaria Alpi, Pasolini, Massimo Troisi, etc.), portraits with two red stripes on the cheeks. This is a reference to African tribal rituals where the artist has stayed several times, but at the same time it is a symbolic element that contains an egalitarian message, the aspiration towards a world devoid of social hierarchies, in which all men are part of the same human tribe.

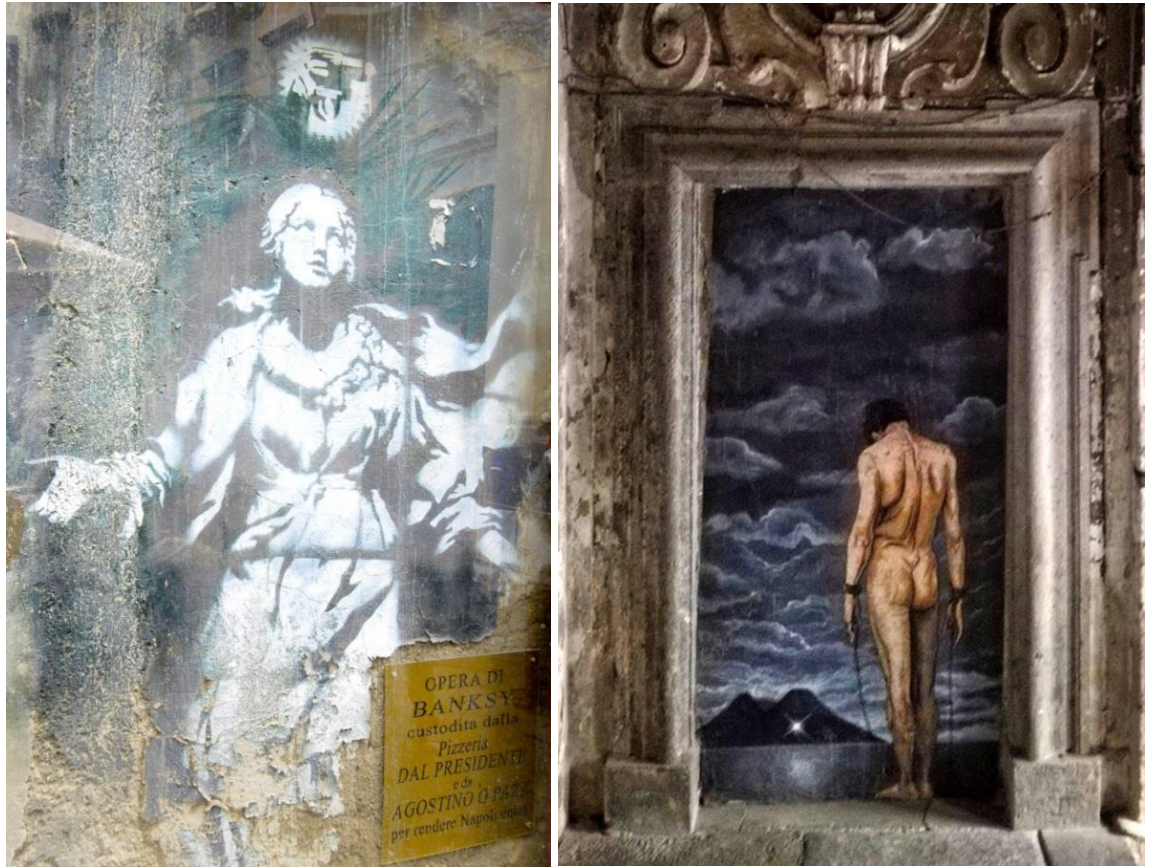
Also Diego Miedo and Arp are Neapolitans. The first is active principally in Gianturco, in the eastern suburbs of Naples, where he created many of his giant and monstrous and floating creatures (Miedo and Schiavon, 2016). The second, Arp, is re-known for his funny skeletons that perform surreal actions, a clear reference to the profane

sacredness of the city and to the devotion to the dead, exemplified by the cult of the “capuzzelle” and of the “pezzentelle” souls¹⁰. Of Casertan origin are, instead, Zolta famous for his stripped and colored figures with an original and unmistakable style and Lume, whose “urban vegetation” that scratches the surface of abandoned and disintegrating walls, seems to reclaim the spaces that man has taken away from nature. The red and blue anthropomorphic figures of Cyop & Kaf adorn the Spanish Quarters with over 230 artworks, small and large, made on walls, gates, newsstands, collected for future reference in the volume *Quore Spinato* (Cyop & Kaf, 2013). Rosaria Bosso, also known as Roxy in the Box, has left her mark in the dense network of alleys and palaces of the Spanish Quarters with her Vascio Art: dozens of colorful posters of famous figures such as Frida Khalo, Rita Levi Montalcini, Amy Winehouse, Artemide, Anna Magnani, portrayed seated as if facing the windows of their bass.

Alongside local artists, the Neapolitan urban scene is populated by many internationally renowned artists. Many of them were attracted by the contradictions, the lights and the shades of the city, and perhaps also by its anarchic spirit. All of them left their ephemeral creations here. Consider the beautiful works by Ernest Pignon-Ernest, from Nice active in Naples for many years (particularly between 1988 and 1995) or the provocative Madonna with gun (fig. 2), the only Italian work by the English artist Banksy¹¹, the most famous street artist in the world, and yet see the man in chain by the French artist Zilda who adorns the historic Sanfelice building in the Sanità district (fig. 2) or the tributes to Caravaggio made in red and black by Christian Guémy, known as C215.

¹⁰ The *capuzzelle* are skulls of dead people with no identity or family, while the souls *pezzentelle* are the abandoned and forgotten souls, remained imprisoned in Purgatory, able to fulfill the prayers of those who had taken them into care.

¹¹ Banksy identity is still unknown. His murals, executed with the stencil technique, are of a satirical and subversive nature and address social issues such as media manipulation, homologation, the atrocities of war, etc. His Madonna with gun, now protected by a display case, highlights the paradox of a city marked by the mixture of sacred and profane, faith and criminality, revealing its contradictions and dissonances.



*Figure 2: “Madonna with gun” by Banksy and
“le vent pèse autant que les chaînes” by Zilda.
Source: photo by the author.*

Other artworks to be mentioned are: the “Figures of Women” realized by Alice Pasquini at Calata Trinità Maggiore, the “Little Men” scattered in the Decumani by the Florentine artist Exit Enter, the goldfinch made by two Germans - Becky Stace and Bambus - on the Blue *Vela* of Scampia, the Siren Partenope at Materdei by Bosoletti (an artist from Argentina) wanted and financed by the residents of the neighborhood. Of special significance are the murales by the American artist Ryan Spring Dooley and the most recent artworks by Nafir, Frz and Serror from Iran.

Among the places of the city most affected by these rewriting practices are the social centers occupied in the 1990s, such as Officina 99, an abandoned factory located in Gianturco in the industrial area or the Ska, Laboratory of Experimentation and Antagonistic Culture, located in the ancient center near the Monastery of Santa Chiara (fig. 3). The murals created in these spaces, in addition to reflecting the cultural and social battles undertaken in those years, appear as markers of identity and instruments of re-appropriation of the urban territory.



Figure 3: The Laboratory of Experimentation and Antagonistic Culture.

Source: photo by the author.

The social centers have more recently been joined by the so called self-managed “liberated” spaces, recognized as urban commons. Works by Hohn, Zolta, Cristina Portolano, Lume, Raro and by many other artists adorn the sixteenth-century structure of the Santa Fede, a former female recluse hostel. There the second edition of the Obla Fest dedicated to illustration artworks took place in 2018. In the former Carcere minorile Filangieri, formerly a Prison for teenagers, now a recreation center called “Scugnizzo liberato”, ancient walls now host artworks such as: Zilda’s Angels clearly inspired by Italian Renaissance artworks, the abstract human figures by Zolta and the bio vegetarian artworks by Lume.

An important stop in an ideal journey to discover the urban art in Naples is also the former Judicial Psychiatric Hospital (OGP) in Materdei. Thos building today they host the *Je so pazzo* social center. The entire façade painted by Blu (fig. 4), the well-known Italian street artist whose identity is unknown, illustrates the horror of imprisonment. Inside its walls are tattooed by the visionary images of Ericailcane, Diego Miedo, Arp, Zolta and others.



Figure 4: Former OPG “Je so pazzo” work by Blu.

Source: <https://www.itinari.com/it/street-art-and-street-food-in-naples-57j4>.

Apart from these structures “liberate” (freed or released) returned to the community, the areas of the city most affected by street art interventions are the Spanish Quarters, the Decumani area and the Sanità district (fig. 5), although important achievements are present in more peripheral neighborhoods in the first and second crown.

The growing attention to these open-air artistic practices, often of high aesthetic quality, has set new energies in motion and activated a new local planning, as evidenced by the promotion of alternative tourist itineraries, aimed at the discovery of these ephemeral creations.

Alongside the practices *off*, in recent years we have witnessed the emergence of practices *in* carried out by local associations and supported by local institutions¹².

One of the first social street art projects in the city was the one that involved Ponticelli, a neighborhood in the eastern suburbs marked by serious situations of degradation and marginality, as well as by the massive presence of illicit activities managed by Camorra clans¹³.

¹² We refer to the distinction proposed by Vivant (2007) between artistic practices *in* and *off*: the former are formal practices recognized and promoted by municipal institutions to animate the city’s cultural life, while the latter are informal practices conducted by artists or cultural associations without institutional support and without commercial purposes.

¹³ Rural area of Naples until 1860, then Independent municipality until 1924, when it was again annexed to the Neapolitan city, Ponticelli experienced a rapid and chaotic urban development in the second post-war period, becoming the site of industrial activities, today largely abandoned, and of large public housing complexes (Iovino, 2019b).



Figure 5: The Street art map in Naples created by Inward.
Source: <http://www.inward.it/attivita/mappa-del-writing-a-napoli>.

With its 52.000 inhabitants, it is one of the most populous and youngest districts of the city and the one with the highest incidence (31,4%) of NEETs, young people under 25 years not (engaged) in education, employment or training¹⁴. Its peripheral location strengthens the marginalization and the underlying dynamics: school dropout, high crime and unemployment rates, lack of public services and equipment.

In this border area, the first Italian Territorial Center for Urban Creativity was established in 2010, directed by the Inward Observatory (International Network on Writing Art Research and Development), committed to promoting, in collaboration with public agencies and private subjects, processes of social regeneration in difficult peripheral contexts. One of the main instruments to achieve these goals has been the use of unconventional artistic practices, such as street art, urban design, graffiti art.

At the end of 2010 Inward developed, with the support of the Vodafone Foundation, Cunto (Urban Creativity Naples Eastern Territory), the first national experimental project of urban social creativity. This experience was followed in 2015 by the launch of a structured program of social street art, conducted with the support of MiBACT and Siae. It was sponsored by various local public agencies (Municipality of Naples, Fai Campania, National Archaeological Museum, etc.) and by private subjects.

The program led to the creation of a small district of urban creativity (fig. 6). Eight Italian street artists have painted eight large murals on the gray and anonymous facades of the four popular buildings of Parco Merola, a public housing complex hosting 160 households relocated there following the earthquake in 1980.

¹⁴ These district data have recently been made available by Istat for Naples and other metropolitan cities in order to support the Parliamentary Investigation Commission on the suburbs.

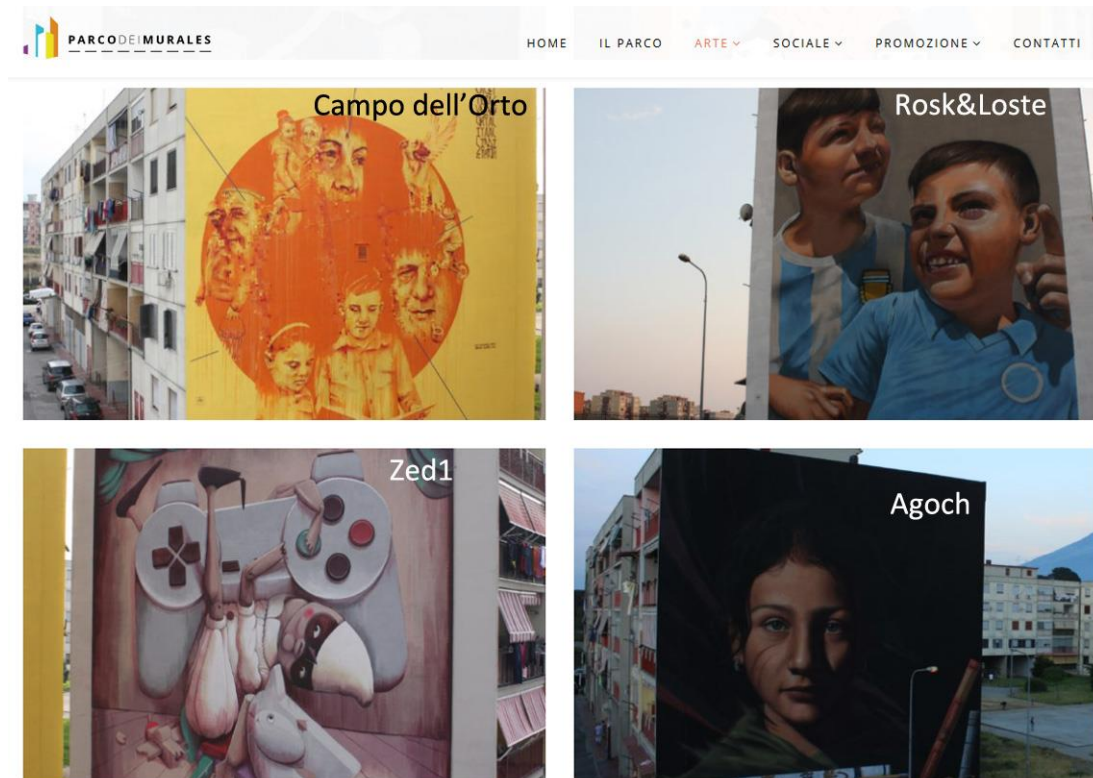


Figure 6: Some works of the park of murals from the website
Source: <http://www.parcodemurales.it/arte/opere/>.

The first completed work was *Ael. Tutt'egual song 'e creature* (Ael All kids are equal), painted by Jorit Agoch commissioned by Unar, the National Anti-Discrimination Office of the Department of Equal Opportunities - Presidency of the Council of Ministers, (together with Miur and Anci), to celebrate the International Roma, Sinti and Caminati Day (fig. 5). The work depicts Ael's "branded" face (the initiatory signs that "mark" all the portraits of Agoch), a small Roma with an intense gaze, represented with a pile of books to underline the importance of school education in the dynamics for social integration. The *zingarella*, as it has been nicknamed by the inhabitants of the neighborhood, is an actually existing child from the nearby Roma camp struck by a serious fire some time before. The mural by Agoch paved the way to several other artworks by Italian street artists¹⁵.

¹⁵ The list includes: *A pazziella 'n' man 'e creatures* (The little toy in the hands of the little kids), by the Tuscan artist Zed1, on the importance and quality of the game for kids; *Chi è volut bene, non s'o scorda* (Who is loved, he does not forget it), by the Sicilian street artists Rosk & Loste, a tribute to the Neapolitan soccer and to the happy season that the city has lived with Maradona (one of the two little boys is depicted with the Argentine mallets); *Trattenimiento de peccerille* (Entertainment for the kids), by the Friulian Mattia Campo dell'Orto, with two children taken in the reading of *Lo Cunto de Li cunti* (The tale of the tales), by Giambattista Basile, surrounded by the characters that populate his stories (the artwork is meant to remind the central role of reading in youth formation); *'A mamm' 'e tutt' 'e mamm'* (The mother of all mothers), by La Fille Bertha, a celebration of motherhood, depicted in the guise of a mother-lady, inspired by the *Madonna della Misericordia* by Piero della Francesca where the Madonna is portrayed in the gesture of protecting two little girls by a mantle; *Je sto vicino a te* (Being close to you), by the Apulian artist Daniele Nitti, who, exploring the theme of solidarity, represents a small village, a metaphor of a settlement model on a human scale; *'O sciore cchiù felice* (The happiest flower), a work by the Piedmontese Petani dedicated to the value of local knowledge and wisdom, which

These artistic interventions have been accompanied by social laboratories, managed by qualified personnel (a team of tutors, psychologists and volunteers from the civil service), aimed at listening to the needs and aspirations of the local community and carrying out recreational-educational activities, especially intended for children, adolescents and mothers living in the park.

The Park, once detrimentally known as *o parco d'e cuoll spuorc* (The park of the dirty necks), is today known as the *Park of murals*. In the intentions of its promoters, the initiative should work as a social incubator, helping the local community “to reflect on his own identity, on the values and on the contribution that anyone, without distinction, can give to the territory” (interview with Luca Borriello founder of Inward, in Perrone, 2018).

A few years after the completion of the program, awarded as part of the “Segnali d'Italia” campaign promoted by IGD Decaux, it is possible to register the emergence of some regenerative micro-processes ranging from the creation of a football pitch at the foot of the mural by Rosk & Loste for the implementation of condominium bookcrossing activities and the creation of a small playground. Indeed, the street art project had the merit of breaking the isolation of a neighborhood-enclave, favoring a rediscovery of the sense of place and the bonds of community.

In 2016 they were promoted the first tourist tour in the Park, led by the children of the cooperative Arginalia, created to promote employment in the suburbs of East Naples. However, lack of cultural resources or other primary factors of attractiveness, the image of an infamous neighborhood with a high crime rate and the periphery of the area compared to the historical city and its wealth of assets did not allow the activation of a real tourist circuit.

More successful was the experience of *Rione Sanità*, which in recent years has become a testing ground for a participatory art project, sponsored by the Municipality. Located in the heart of Naples in the Stella district, the ancient settlement Virgini-Sanità represents one of the most degraded and disadvantaged inner city suburbs. However, unlike Ponticelli, it has a cultural heritage of extraordinary value: Roman necropolis, hypogeum, splendid churches and magnificent baroque palaces built by the Neapolitan noble families between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to enjoy the healthy air of the area (hence the name due to its salubritas). At the origin of its decay there was the construction of the Maddalena bridge (118 meters) at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The bridge was built to join the Capodimonte Palace to the Royal Palace, completely isolated the area at the time, transforming it into a ghetto, a criminal enclave with very high rates of early school leaving and widespread phenomena of juvenile delinquency.

In 2016, the project *Luce* was launched in the district, promoted by the cultural association “Fazzoletto di perle”. The initiative, interestingly financed by the sale of the artwork “Sanità” by the Neapolitan painter Tommaso Ottieri, received the patronage of the Municipality and the support of the San Gennaro Community Foundation, whose main inspiration is Father Loffredo, a parish priest operating in the district and essential reference for the local community. The Foundation, established in 2014, brings together various local actors committed to supporting local fertilization

refers to the research work of Aldo Merola a botanist, the director of the Real botanical garden of Naples; *Cura 'e paure* (*Treat your fears*), by Luca Caputo, also known under the pseudonym of Zed40, which represents an imaginary family, the typical Parco Merola family, united by a common territorial rooting and intent in taking care of their living environment, transforming it into a common good.

projects and initiatives ranging from the recovery of cultural assets to the study of support courses, from the promotion of laboratories for the employment of young people to projects related to sport, theater, music, painting. Bottom-up initiatives carried out by the many local associations and cooperatives that have been working in the district for years, experimenting with new socio-spatial practices¹⁶.

The participatory art project arises in this context and testifies to the resilience, the design effervescence and the energies present in this problematic area. Thanks to *Luce* project followed by *Ultravioletto* project, the palaces and churches of the district have been embellished with seven murals by internationally well-known street artists, South Americans and Spaniards, such as the Mexican Addi Fernandez, the Argentinian Bosoletti¹⁷, the Chilean Mono Gonzalez.

The objective was to give a new image to the district and, at the same time, to stimulate identity-making processes, rediscovering the sense of place and community ties. To this end, the interventions were headed by laboratory activities involving the inhabitants, in particular the younger ones. Their smiling faces are reproduced in “Light”, the tondo made by the Spanish Tono Cruz on the wall of the building in front of the Basilica of S. Maria della Sanità (fig. 7).



Figure 7: “Speranza nascosta” by Bosoletti and “Luce” by Cruz at Sanità.

Source: photo by the author.

In a city marked by one of the highest population densities in Europe and by a chronic under-allocation of public spaces, urban services and equipment, these bottom-up interventions testify the liveliness and the desire for cultural experimentation, and, at the same time, the aspiration to regain urban public space. The painted characters fit into the daily life of the street, become familiar with the inhabitants, enhancing the sense of belonging and pride by the local community.

The artistic creations realized have also contributed to breaking the isolation of the area, opening it up to the city, they have increased its notoriety and tourist flows thanks also to the hard work by local associations and cooperatives.

¹⁶ Much has been written about the Rione Sanità as an “active community that produces meaning and income” (Bonomi, 2018) and about its ability to activate community welfare. Among others see Nocchetti, 2018; Massa and Moretti, 2011.

¹⁷ There are three works by Bosoletti in the Rione Sanità. Among these “Hidden Hope”, a woman’s face marked by the years, depicted on the wall of *La Tenda* a center for the homeless for the innovative ultraviolet technique used, the image needs to be deciphered, converted into negative.

The success of the initiative has pushed the Municipal government to promote and to finance another participatory art project, also in the Sanità district, the *Wi-U Adolescents in Art*. This project is aimed at the cultural growth of peripheral areas at risk. Designed and implemented by a group of social cooperatives (Il Grillo Parlante, La Casa dei Cristallini, etc.), Wi-U has tried to involve young people of the neighborhood in artistic and creative activities to keep them away from organized crime or deviant paths. Many laboratories have been activated in the two editions of the project: creative writing workshops, screenwriting, video photo, graphic communication, artistic make-up. Among the proposed activities, a central role was assigned to street art, which is also linked to the educational project *Io sono Felice! (How happy I am!)*, curated by the *Madre* museum, in collaboration with the San Gennaro Community Foundation and the Municipality. As part of this project, the itinerary called *Dal Madre alla Sanità e ritorno* was developed, a tour to discover places made famous by films and TV series and street art works, with the guidance of the *WI-U teenagers in art*, formed in association.

5. Street art as a resource for tourism?

After a long period of decline, Naples, thanks to the cultural and tourism promotion policies implemented by the municipal administration¹⁸, has been interested since the 1990s in a resumption of touristic flows. This positive trend has strengthened in recent years, benefiting particularly from the growth of urban cultural tourism at international and national level.

Currently the Neapolitan city, with about 1,3 million arrivals and 3,2 million presences, is, according to the most recent Report on Italian Tourism (Buonincontri, 2018), 6th in the ranking of the main Italian cities of art (after Rome, Venice, Milan, Florence and Turin). As part of the Top 10, Naples was also the city of art which has experienced in the last five years (2013-2017), the highest rate of growth in arrivals (over 80%).

As a result, the offer of tourist itineraries in urban areas has been enriched and diversified, especially that relating to “alternative” and customized itineraries, aimed at the discovery of picturesque and unusual places not besieged by mass tourism and therefore more capable to relate to the territory and its inhabitants. It is in this context that the growing interest in street art must be located by sector operators and local institutions.

The 400 ml association¹⁹ was one of the first to move in this direction, promoting *Naples Paint Stories*, an original tour, an urban storytelling, through the streets of the historic center to discover the great Italian and non-Italian artists who chose the Neapolitan suburbs to create their own works (fig. 8). More recently, a second tour has been added in the eastern suburbs, in Gianturco, where the local artist Diego Miedo has realized most of his artworks.

The initiative born within the NAU project - Naples Urban Action, supported by the ANCI, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the Department of Youth

¹⁸ On the Neapolitan “renaissance” of the Nineties and the role of the Municipality and other local actors such as Napoli99 Foundation, see Rossi, 2009.

¹⁹ It is an association formed by young urban creatives that has among its objectives the promotion of culture with particular attention to the urban art. Its name reflects “the nature and spirit of its members: 400ml, in fact it is the content of a spray paint spray expressed in milliliters” (from the association’s website).

Policies of the Municipality of Naples, was based on a careful study work, aimed at surveying and mapping the works present in the city (in particular those created by the “purists”). In this perspective, the itineraries proposed are led by art historians and experts in urban art (often the so-called local riders).



Figure 8: The itinerary proposed by Napoli Paint Stories in the historical center.

Source: <http://urbanlives.it/artisti/la-storia/streetart-napoli/>.

Over time, these tours have gained some notoriety, reaching around 5.000 visitors a year (data referring to 2017 and 2018, according to the association’s website), mainly concentrated in the autumn and spring seasons. To this figure it should be added the participants in the events organized by Napoli Paint Stories, as ObiaFest paint, market & music festival dedicated to illustration, street art and muralism. The event, held in May 2018 in the complex of Santa Fede Liberata saw the participation of almost 7.000 people, reflecting the growing interest in this form of expression²⁰.

Currently there are several tour operators (Getyourguide, Musement, Travelfashiontips, just to name a few) who offer in their packages itineraries explicitly dedicated to graffiti or more frequently mixed tours, which include urban art among the various attractions proposed (fig. 8). Recommended tours of street art also appear in most web portals and city guides (such as Lonely Planet, Benaples, Visitnaples, Napolidavivere, Napolilike).

The *leit motiv* of this constantly growing “creative” tourist offer is the possibility of living an authentic and unique experience, of getting in touch with the local population, of getting to know places that are often infamous, but at the same time marked by the charm of the unusual and different like living debris of history usually are.

As part of this creative and experiential tourism operate, for example, Vascitour and Tour Angels (fig. 8). They offer visits to the heart of Naples in less-known areas (from

²⁰ On this occasion 30 illustrators, muralists and street artists (such as Alice Schiavone, Alleg, Arpaia, Biodpi, Come, Cyop & Kaf, Raro, Zolta, etc.) have left their works on the walls of the former female prison.

the Spanish Quarters, to the Museum, to the Pedamentina) to small groups of tourists accompanied by the mythical figure of the “Fratammè” (the brother not of blood, but of friendship), an inhabitant of the neighborhood who acts as a local guide²¹.

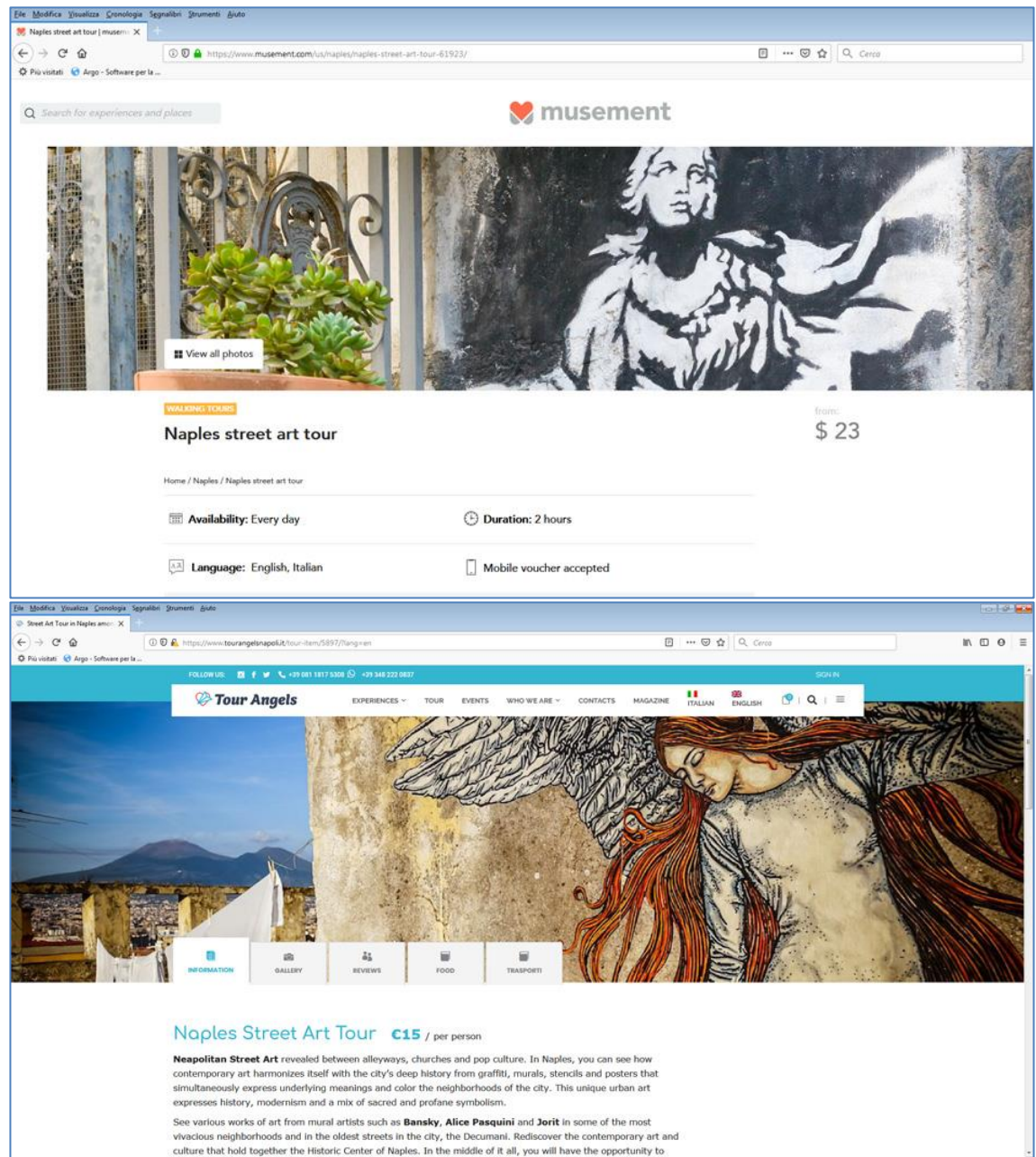


Figure 9: The itinerary proposed by Musement (a) and Tour Angels.
Source: <https://www.musement.com/us/naples/naples-street-art-tour-61923/>;
<https://www.tourangelsnapoli.it/tour-item/5897/?lang=en>.

²¹ Vascitour purposes experiential travels in Naples. According to the website “You could sleep in a ‘basso’, eat with Neapolitans in their houses and live the city in an alternative way, since Vascitour links you with the local inhabitants. You will find your personal *FrataMME* during the trip: he/she will stay with you to make exciting, emotional and inspiring your holiday in Napoli”. See the website <https://www.vascitour.com/>.

Most of the offer is concentrated in the perimeter protected by UNESCO, and in particular in the areas of the historical center with a higher density of historical heritage. These are still niche paths, but they contribute not only to re-launch the image of Naples as a creative city, but also and above all to stimulate pride and respect for places in the local community.

This explains the reasons that led to the institutionalization of these practices, an institutionalization that appears, moreover, fully consistent with the policy of common goods, pursued by the mayor De Magistris.

In a context characterized by a situation of pre-financial instability, street art is seen by the urban government as an opportunity to set up urban regeneration paths in the suburbs, as well as a marketing tool to promote the image of Naples as a creative and inclusive city.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the city is today an interesting laboratory of social street art practices, even though their territorial impact is not always able to trigger real regenerative processes. In particular, from a touristic point of view, the interventions implemented so far seem to have generated more or less significant repercussions depending on the territories involved. Modest results have, for example, been achieved by the project of the Inward observatory, which concerned a particularly difficult and uncomfortable territory, a neighborhood of second crown geographically far from the heart of the city, devoid of attractiveness. The *Park of murals* manages to attract a very small number of visitors, mainly students and social workers, with a decreasing trend compared to the first years of activity.

Conversely, more evident and visible results under the profile of tourism demand have been achieved within the Vergini-Sanità suburb, endowed with a very rich historical and artistic heritage, as well as a central position in the historical urban fabric. Here street art has become one of the many factors of tourist attraction in the area.

The success of the Rione Sanità experience has recently found new areas of application. In Forcella, another infamous and disadvantaged enclave of the “belly” of Naples, the project “NeaPolis ReStart” was launched. The project, organized by the Cultural Association AGORA’, in collaboration with the MANN (National Archaeological Museum of Naples), the Academy of Fine Arts and the Municipality aims at bringing young people closer to art and culture. This aim is pursued through an unconventional dissemination of the artistic heritage beyond the confined space of the Museum. It contributes at the same time to the rebirth of one of the most difficult and fascinating neighborhoods of the city. In this perspective with *Art dint ‘o street*, the project includes a planned path from Mann to Forcella and back, along which to create fifteen murals inspired by the works exposed at the MANN. The murals painted by international artists and Neapolitan writers in close collaboration with the inhabitants of the area are entrusted with the task of restoring walls, alleys and buildings, and contributing to the social, cultural and tourist enhancement of the area.

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