



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

The silenced paradoxes of urban renewal: morality, welfare reconfiguration and precarious labour in Collective Food Procurement in Turin

Vasile, M.

Citation

Vasile, M. (2023, September 6). *The silenced paradoxes of urban renewal: morality, welfare reconfiguration and precarious labour in Collective Food Procurement in Turin*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3638588>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3638588>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Conclusion

By focusing on the case of Parco Piemonte and its “greening” through the development of the Orti Generali project, I analysed some of the shapes taken by urban renewal in Mirafiori Sud, a peripheral area of Turin, which image is being transformed from the one of an industrial to a green and attractive area. I firstly framed the park’s regeneration as part of a (relatively recent) growing attention to marginal green urban areas and the redefinition of urban gardens. Non-profit organisations in Turin play a significant role in these transformations and are key players as part of new forms of management of public (green) spaces (see also Bolzoni 2019). At the time of the fieldwork, a growing number of urban gardens in the city was managed by non-profit organisations, which also increasingly worked to create a network, among other for finding common resources and objectives, as exemplified by the case of *Or.Me*. Non-profit organisations’ involvement in the management of urban renewal was justified by the retrenchment of the municipality and by broader trends, language and morality of citizens activation and participation to the transformation of their neighbourhoods, as exemplified through the practice of volunteering (Muehlebach 2012). Similar trends have been analysed in contexts such as the US where new forms of management of public space have developed, such as NGO management (e.g. Eizenberg 2012). This case study in Turin, however, allows to highlight specific entanglements between the moral “reformation of sociality” (Rozakou 2016), the governance and sustainability narratives around contemporary urban renewal practices and their exclusionary features.

The in-depth longitudinal analysis of the Orti Generali project revealed that while its development highly relied on the engagement of local inhabitants, their participation remained confined to only certain levels of decision-making. Going beyond the language of citizen activation, it became clearer that the garden organisers envisioned the continuation of the project via their guided intervention, legitimized by their professional knowledge and expertise, rather than on open debate and participatory decision-making processes. I argued that such configuration, while opening the park to new gardens and (gardening) activities, reduced the possibility for this space to become an arena for

democratic debate and inhabitants' ownership of an "autonomous community space" (Eizenberg 2012). On the contrary, the project became functional to neoliberal urbanism reproducing, among other, its exclusionary features and an "aesthetic consumption of cities" (Guano 2020).

My analysis of Parco Piemonte also aimed at giving voice to some of the long-term occupants of the park, namely spontaneous gardeners and errant shepherds. I shed light onto their practices (and their environmental, social and economic context) to challenge widespread narratives which tend to delegitimise these *in toto*, in the name of renewal and progress. I regard these practices as forms of knowledge, civic engagement and resistance, which continuation is increasingly jeopardised by processes of urban renewal, and in particular by hegemonic understandings of beauty and cleanness - even more than ideas of legality. Looking at both long-term and more recent urban gardening practices is also important to consider how many people from the area were involved and benefited from this production and how many are today. As it might become clearer in the future, the development of new gardening projects such as Orti Generali might reduce the gardening space for local inhabitants due to the price of plots and its growing attractiveness to other urban dwellers.

I built this section around anthropological works such as of Newman (2015) 's political approach to ecology and to the analysis of the "production of nature" (xxii); key debates among the ones on urban planning and the planner – user divide (Herzfeld 2020; Bolzoni 2019; Newman 2015; Signorelli 1989); literature on volunteering and its moral premises (Pusceddu 2020; Muehlebach 2012) as well as on sustainable redevelopment and greening (Certomà and Tornaghi 2019; Barchetta 2016). This allowed me to go beyond the context of Turin and develop an understanding of the case of Parco Piemonte as part of broader global trends. This ethnography contributes to the current debate on blurring boundaries between city planners and users by highlighting how such approach could benefit from in-depth analysis of decision-making processes (e.g. everyday forms of negotiation and resistance) and by bringing back into the discussion the dimensions of cultural divide and power relations between these different agents (Signorelli 1989).

Moreover, this case exemplifies how such renewal projects can be at the same time based on the language of participation, civic engagement and blurring division of roles, while also adopting the character of a “civilization-based project” (Newman 2015, 128). In this context, this signified developing a new culture of civic engagement that is, among other, functional to the promotion of volunteer work, the morality of the good, responsible, modern citizen (Rozakou 2016) and confines civic engagement to certain practices and models. As part of these, disagreements and contestations are only rarely voiced and conflicts become silenced, among other, because of the mediation played by non-profit organisations which are represented as a saving entity in the context of the generalised austerity threat that “a renewal project is better than no project”.

The uncertain future of the long-term occupants of the park sheds light on some of the exclusionary features of contemporary greening practices and the loss of knowledge and diversity which they might entail. While this goes beyond my capacity of evaluation, gardeners such as Olivier also problematised the actual environmental impacts of these “sustainable projects”, as exemplified through his requests for more radical environmental practices and a new approach to human - non-human relations. Overall, my analysis aimed at unpacking some of the political (e.g. management, participation, decision making) and social (e.g. diversity, marginality, exclusion) dimensions of the transformation of the park and, through its contextualisation, introduce how this might open the way to further processes of (eco) gentrification (e.g. Barchetta 2016; Cucca 2012).