

URBAN REGENERATION AND TOURIST DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE FORMER INDUSTRIAL SUBURB OF BAGNOLI (NAPLES, ITALY)

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Citation: Iacune, S. (2024). Urban regeneration and tourist development: The case of the former industrial suburb of Bagnoli (Naples, Italy). *Analele Universității din Oradea, Seria Geografie*, 34(2), 139-147. <https://doi.org/10.30892/auog.34204-921>

Abstract: This article analyses the tourist perspectives of former industrial suburbs through the case study of Bagnoli (Naples, Italy). In fact, despite at the end of XIX century the district of Bagnoli was an emerging seaside and thermal area, in 1910 it was chosen as the location of a huge iron and steel industrial plant. Even today, unfortunately, the district is characterized by dismissed facilities and a heavy industrial landscape that constitute a landmark. However, at the same time, Bagnoli still retains great potential and tourist resources, which could help it in the process of urban regeneration and recovery of tourism, until now largely hampered by bureaucracy, corruption and incapacity of the political class. After a qualitative analysis of the existing literature, a field analysis was conducted, in order to observe the resources of the territory and the strong dualism with the former industrial landscape. Finally, to support the analysis, a questionnaire was submitted to the residents of Bagnoli in which a renewed optimism for the regeneration of the neighborhood emerged, but also a strong awareness of the weakness of the institutions.

Key words: Urban regeneration, suburbs, tourist development, Bagnoli, Naples

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INTRODUCTION

The article explores the topic of urban regeneration and its impact on tourism in peripheral and former industrial neighborhoods, with an in-depth analysis of Bagnoli (Naples, Italy). Consolidated international experience highlights how the suburbs, often associated with negative connotations of marginality and degradation (Salet & Savini, 2015; Molinari, 2021), can be reevaluated and transformed into a tourist key, through focused actions of urban regeneration (Ashworth & Page, 2010; Tallon, 2010; Barbini & Presutti, 2014; Fredriksson, 2017). Successful

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examples include Lisbon (Zarrilli & Brito, 2013; Zarrilli, Brito, & Cappucci, 2019), Barcelona, Bilbao and Valencia (Miani, 2005; Albanese, 2008; Caparrós i Gironés, 2019; Mansilla & Milano, 2019). However, the case of Bagnoli demonstrates that such transformations require long and complex processes, often hindered by various factors. This article will retrace the history of the neighborhood, from its origins to the industrial tradition up to the post-industrial phase (Cento Bull, 2006; Mazzetti, 2008; Manceau, 2014; Selvaggio, 2015; Felice, 2017; Esposito De Vita, Ragozino, & Varriale, 2018; Romanelli, 2018; Romanelli, 2019; Lepore, Palermo, & Basile, 2020), highlighting its considerable potentialities and trying to understand if and how Bagnoli – which is located between two emerging tourist areas, the Posillipo hill (figure 1) and the Campi Flegrei – can participate in the tourist boom that the city of Naples has been experiencing for some years.



Figure 1. Ex-industrial area from Posillipo hill

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a qualitative approach, based on a combination of review of existing literature, field work and administration of a questionnaire. This method allowed us to analyze the resources of the territory, the infrastructures, the urban fabric and the social landscape, highlighting a strong dualism between the residential neighborhood and the abandoned and peripheral ex-industrial area. As mentioned, to support the research a questionnaire was submitted to two Facebook groups of people resident or connected to Bagnoli, with questions relating to the quality of life and the prospects for tourism development.

FROM ÉLITE TOURISM TO THE POST-INDUSTRIAL ERA: REGENERATION ATTEMPTS

The Bagnoli district is part of the municipality of Naples, together with Fuorigrotta and the islet of Nisida, and is known for its natural resources, its volcanic nature (Bagnoli is located on the eastern edge of the volcanic area of the Campi Flegrei) and a rich historical and archaeological heritage. In fact, the toponym Bagnoli comes from the Latin *Balneolis*, which means area of thermal baths, appreciated and frequented by the ancient Romans.

Precisely thanks to the beauties of its territory, between the end of the Nineteenth century and the beginning of the Twentieth century, Bagnoli was an emerging center for élite seaside and thermal tourism, with a consequent prestigious residential development, so that the Scottish architect

Lamont Young proposed a forward-looking tourist development project for the neighborhood, which unfortunately was never realized due to a lack of investors.

Despite the promising tourist perspectives, in 1910 Bagnoli was chosen as location of the Ilva (later named Italsider) steel plant for logistical reasons and for a less congestion compared to the eastern part of Naples. The plant ceased its activity in 1992, but still today the neighborhood is marked out by a landscape of abandoned and ghostly warehouses and machineries.

Until now, the failure of the regeneration projects of the ex-industrial area of Bagnoli is evident, due to wrong policies on multiple levels, from the municipal to the national level, corruption, interference from organized crime, bureaucracy. Notwithstanding that, in an attempt to resume the regeneration of the ex-industrial area, some recovery works have been carried out so far: Città della Scienza (City of Science), a science museum and a research and scientific dissemination centre; Pontile Nord (North Jetty), formerly used for the docking of large tonnage ships, now converted into a panoramic promenade; the Auditorium “Porta del Parco”; a partial decontamination of the land.

The redevelopment of Bagnoli has been characterized by a series of attempts and projects which, over the years, have tried to transform this area from an ex-industrial pole to a modern urban neighbourhood, with a focus on tourism and landscape potential. Since 1991, Bagnoli began to be imagined as a scientific-technological centre. This project involved the recovery of abandoned industrial areas and the construction of modern infrastructures to attract investments in the innovation and research sector, as well as the recovery of bathing areas and the increase in tourist facilities. However, a lack of funding led to this ambitious vision being shelved. In 1994, the architect Vezio De Lucia proposed the “Napoli 2000” project, with an approach more oriented towards enhancing the resources of the territory. The idea was to create a bathing sea and an equipped beach, restoring access to the coast to citizens and tourists. The project also included the construction of parks and green spaces, the recovery of historic industrial facilities and the promotion of cultural and recreational activities. However, the lack of specific details and a solid financial plan made this dream of revival unrealistic.

There were then years of confusion and failed interventions, due to the lack of an action plan and continuous regulatory stratifications. The establishment of Bagnoli Futura SpA in 2002 marked a more structured attempt to address the regeneration of the neighborhood. This company was in charge of managing the reclamation and redevelopment processes of the ex-industrial area. In the following years, several projects were defined, including the recovery of contaminated land, the creation of an urban park, new infrastructure for leisure and sport, and the construction of residential and commercial buildings. However, bureaucratic problems, difficulties in obtaining financing and accusations of corruption limited the concrete results, until in 2013 Bagnoli Futura ended up under investigation (then failed in 2015) and, in the same unfortunate year, the interactive scientific center of “Città della Scienza” was set on fire.

A significant turning point occurred in 2015 with the “Decreto Sblocca Italia”, which transferred the responsibility for recovery and redevelopment to a special commissioner, together with governmental agency Invitalia, excluding the Municipality of Naples from territorial planning. This new commissioner management led to an acceleration of the decontamination processes, with the start of works for the removal of polluting materials and the redevelopment of the ex-industrial areas. The construction of a conference center, the recovery of the beaches and the creation of new green spaces were planned. Several concrete actions followed, including the inauguration of other scientific facilities in the context of “Città della Scienza” (Planetarium and Corporea) and, in 2021, the victory of the project “Balneolis and the new felix season” in response to the Invitalia call for bids for the redevelopment of the ex-industrial area of Bagnoli.

In January 2024, the mayor of Naples, Gaetano Manfredi, proposed a series of further and future actions regarding reclamation, infrastructure, parking, building and waterfront redevelopment, the creation of an urban park and the recovery of the “Parco dello Sport” (Park of the Sport), realized in 2010 and never implemented. In May 2024, 1.2 billion euros were allocated by the Italian government for the realization of these objectives.

THE TOURIST POTENTIAL OF BAGNOLI

Clearly the promising tourist perspectives of Bagnoli were hindered by the localization of the Ilva industry. Despite this, however, the neighborhood has various tourist resources and potentialities which, with some interventions, could still favor its revitalization.

First of all, Bagnoli is a coastal neighborhood with several stretches of free beach that could be equipped by the Municipality, and some beach resorts managed by private companies; furthermore, Bagnoli is well connected to the center of Naples by railway lines. The only limit is that the sea of Bagnoli is not considered officially bathing due to pollution, and to make it suitable for swimming an extremely expensive intervention is needed. Therefore, it is included in the list of actions to be completed. Another great potential of Bagnoli is thermalism, both in relation to the facilities that were active between the 1950s and 1970s, to be restored (Noviello and Smętkiewicz, 2019), and to the “Terme di Agnano”, a still operating high-end spa in financial difficulties with a glorious past: nowadays it is owned by the Municipality of Naples, which is trying to relaunch the activity. From the point of view of cultural tourism, Bagnoli district is known for a particular type of tourism, the so-called “edutainment” (term composed by the words education and entertainment), thanks to the great tourist attractiveness of the interactive centre of “Città della Scienza”, much visited by school groups visiting the city of Naples. This visit is often combined with a guided tour of the adjacent “Pausilypon Archaeological Park”, an area of extraordinary interest both from a naturalistic and historical-cultural point of view, located in Posillipo district but easily accessible from Bagnoli. Another cultural attraction is the islet of Nisida (figure 2): it hosts the Juvenile Penal Institute of Naples and therefore it is not open to public. However, guided tours are organized periodically to visit the Literary Park which was created by virtue of the many authors who have described its beauties since the classical era.



Figure 2. Islet of Nisida

Recently, the “Pontile Nord” (figure 3) was chosen as the location for the trailer of a successful television series, rising to the rank of a real landmark for Bagnoli, as well as a favorable observation point of the ex-industrial area, within hypothetical but possible thematic tours focused on industrial tourism (Gelbman, 2007; Xie, 2015). From a naturalistic point of view, it can be mentioned that in Bagnoli is located the entrance to the “Cratere degli Astroni” State Nature Reserve, in the past a thermal area, then a royal hunting reserve and, today, an important WWF Oasis.



Figure 3. Pontile Nord

Thanks to its favorable position between Posillipo and Campi Flegrei and well connected to the center of Naples, and with a strong seaside vocation, Bagnoli has a great potential for the development of the tourist-residential function, as an alternative to the center of Naples. Until now, in Bagnoli there are four hotel facilities (two 4-star hotels and two 3-star hotels, for a total of 236 beds), while the non-hotel offer is still limited, with only 68 (i.e. 0.7 %) of the 10,385 Neapolitan facilities present on the Airbnb portal (as of 31st December, 2023; source: www.airbnb.it).

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

To support the analysis, a questionnaire was developed which, through 11 questions, aims to evaluate the general satisfaction of those who live the daily life of Bagnoli and their vision of the future. Respondents were asked to express an opinion on aspects concerning the quality of life and leisure facilities, but also the development perspectives, especially from a tourist point of view, in light of the urban planning activities implemented so far and the phenomena of bradyseism and volcanic risk that characterize the territory of the Campi Flegrei.

The questionnaire, drawn up using the Google Form format, was published in November 2023 in two Facebook groups (“Bagnoli 80124” and “Info X Municipalità Napoli”) of residents and people connected to the neighborhood and recorded the participation of 254 respondents. Most of these are women (67.5%) aged between 41 and 60 years (51.6%), resident in Bagnoli for more than 40 years (84.3%) (figures 4, 5, 6, 7).

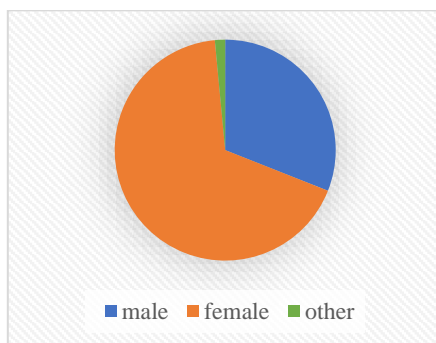


Figure 4. Gender

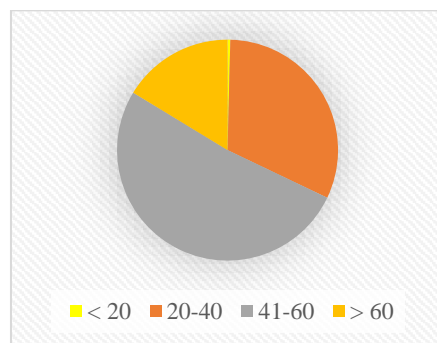


Figure 5. Age



Figure 6. Resident in Bagnoli

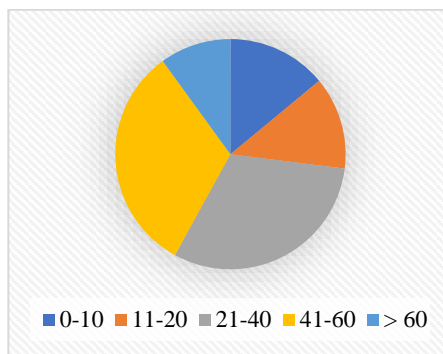


Figure 7. Years of residence

For each of the aspects reported in Figure 8, we asked to assign a score from 1 (minimum) to 5 (maximum). The features of Bagnoli that are most appreciated are the position (4.24) and the landscape (4.28), confirming the excellent potential of the neighborhood in these respects. Next, with a rating of 3.4, are transport and bars/restaurants. The score given to parking was not very high (2.8), perhaps due to the difficulties that residents encounter on the seafront in the night hours of weekends, given the presence of nightclubs. Security does not appear to be one of Bagnoli’s strong points (2.26): in addition to the concerns common to all large metropolitan areas, in this case must be considered the perception of seismic and volcanic risk (of which will be said later). However, the assessment of the level of cleanliness was very low (1.97), probably due to the lack of care taken by the municipal administration in ensuring the maintenance and cleaning of streets and pavements and, more generally, urban decorum.

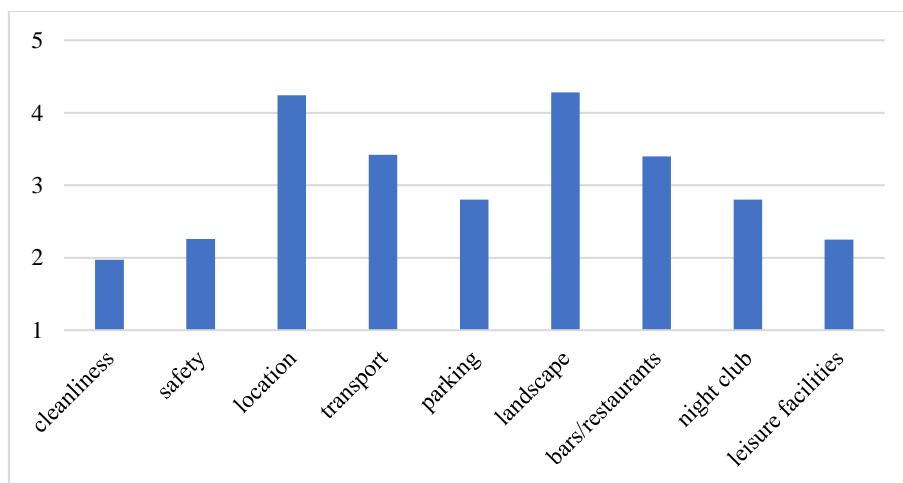


Figure 8. Assessment of territorial features

The most popular leisure facilities are the Pontile Nord (3.7), the Riserva Naturale degli Astroni (3.6) and the Città della Scienza (3.5). These are good but not enthusiastic evaluations, perhaps motivated by disappointment at the lack of or insufficient valorization of the neighborhood’s resources and the ineffectiveness of territorial and tourist development policies, despite the good potential (figure 9). A disappointment that is largely confirmed by the evaluation of the regeneration policies implemented so far, considering that over 90% of respondents has expressed a very negative opinion (figure 10). Furthermore, two thirds of respondents complain that the neighborhood has worsened in the last ten years (figure 11). Nonetheless, the large

majority (71.5%) still believes in a future tourist development of Bagnoli, perhaps indicative of a sense of belonging and territorial identity of those who, aware of the qualities of their territory, hope that things can change for the better (figure 12).

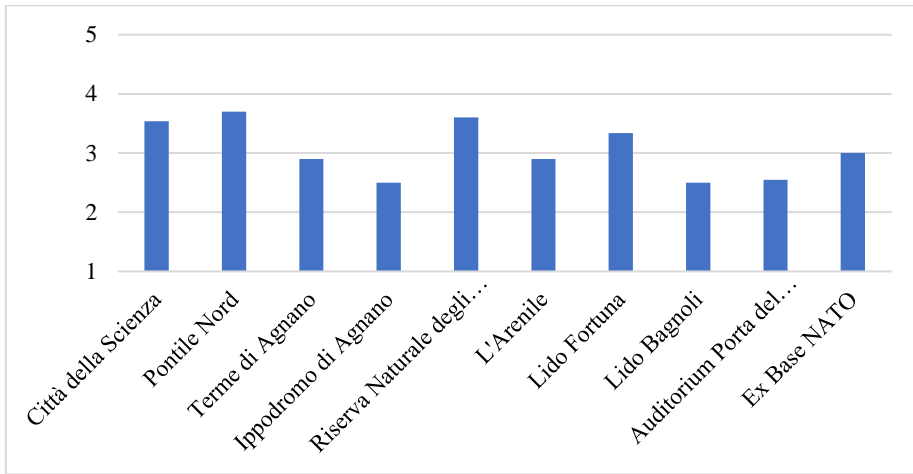


Figure 9. Assessment of leisure facilities

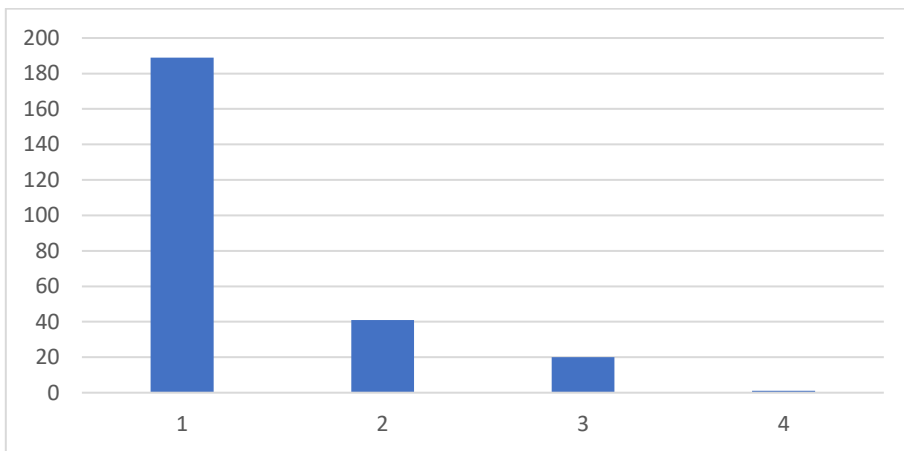


Figure 10. Assessment of regeneration policies

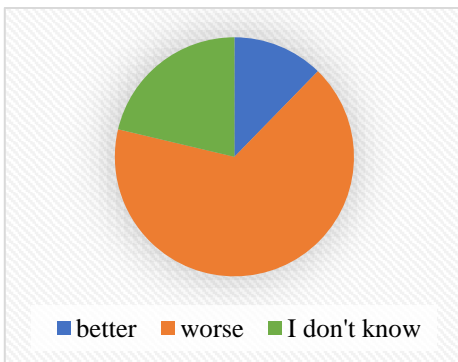


Figure 11. Evolution of Bagnoli over the past decade



Figure 12. Prospects of tourist development

Unfortunately, the seismic and volcanic nature of the Campi Flegrei, if on the one hand contributes to the charm of that *locus amoenus* described since ancient times by great poets, on the other hand is perceived as a risk (65.2%) and a serious limit to a future development of the neighborhood (60.9%) (figures 13, 14). However, it should be underlined that the questionnaire was carried out in a period in which there was a significant recovery in seismic activity in the Campi Flegrei area, with tremors that reached and even exceeded a magnitude of 4, which largely explains the pessimistic view emerged from the questionnaire. The questionnaire administered to residents revealed a general awareness of the tourism potential of Bagnoli, but also a widespread mistrust towards the institutions responsible for the regeneration. Residents expressed a desire for improved infrastructure and services, and an interest in the development of tourism activities that can create jobs and improve the quality of life in the neighborhood.

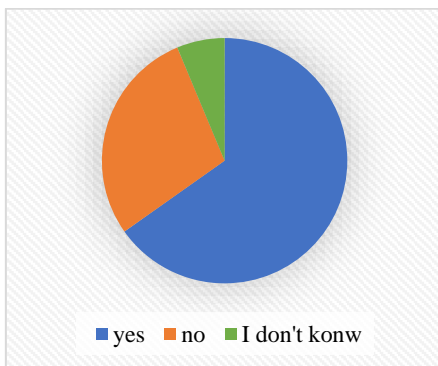


Figure 13. Concerns about bradyseism and volcanic risk



Figure 14. Repercussions on future development

CONCLUSIONS

Thanks to its strategic position and the resources of the area, Bagnoli is a neighborhood with a high tourist potential; after all, the urban suburbs are often characterized by dynamism, creativity and innovation (Petrillo, 2018).

After the decommissioning of industrial activity in 1992, several attempts to redevelop the area followed, almost always unsuccessful; the history of Bagnoli, in fact, highlights the difficulties of the urban redevelopment of this suburb, underlining the importance of organic planning and effective management of resources and of an integrated approach that involves local institutions, residents and private investors, essential for the revitalization of the territory.

So far, the new proposed projects, the allocation of funds for their realization and the residents' confidence that emerged from the questionnaire, lead in a new optimism. If the current regeneration projects are implemented, it will be realistic to enhance and give value to the relevant tourist resources of Bagnoli – which are mostly in a potential stage – in the context of the considerable tourist flows that reach the city of Naples. It will be therefore possible to create a diversified and integrated offer ranging from bathing to spa, from nature to culture, from archaeology to industrial tourism, aimed at a tourist segment – niche but growing – that is attracted by unusual and alternative landscapes and atmospheres: landscapes and atmospheres that a rediscovered and regenerated *Balneolis* would certainly be able to supply.

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Submitted:
09.0242024

Revised:
19.11.2024

Accepted and published online
21.11.2024