

# Ways of interpreting urban regeneration: Hamburg, London, Brussels and Rome<sup>1</sup>

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Keywords: regeneration; urban policies and tools; sustainability.

## Abstract

*Over the coming decades all cities throughout and beyond Europe, be they large or small, will face the great challenge of regeneration. European Commission has promoted a “regeneration agenda” focused on an integrated sustainable approach. But, while the European Commission draws the path, European cities provide a variety of ways to transform drafts in deeds.*

*The four case studies described below – Hamburg, London, Brussels, Rome – give evidence that, in the last decades, every city had drawn its own “regeneration way”, with a different level of sensitiveness regarding the European principles.*

*However, all the case studies deliver at least one action attuned to the principles of a sustainable regeneration, and it's possible to select from every experience the “good” that has been realized.*

## Introduction

The challenges that cities are facing have changed, as have the strategies designed to tackle old and new problems. Urban renewal, revitalization, *renouvellement*, *rehabilitation*, *riqualificazione*, *recupero*<sup>2</sup> have been for years the key words of the European Commission's policies, programmes (Urban, Urbact...) and tools conceived to develop the idea of a good city for all.

But globalisation, climate change, pressure on resources, environment deterioration (Toledo Declaration, 2010)<sup>3</sup> have transformed the urban development conditions and introduced the notion and evidence on “environmental limits”.

The concept of growth in economic and urbanism as well is worn out; the “business as usual model” focused on development at all costs shall be abandoned if we want to maintain cities and territories in a liveable condition, as Tim Jackson<sup>4</sup> states, while a “green approach” is urgently needed.

In response to this wake-up call, the European Commission has promoted a new urban agenda focused on an integrated, smart, sustainable, inclusive development, based on a multi-level and multidisciplinary approach. That is the mean of the regeneration strategy being shared at EU meetings<sup>5</sup>, with the

1. *Urban regeneration in the city centre and peripheries Rome, Hamburg, London and Brussels*, Conference, Sapienza Università di Roma, Facoltà di Ingegneria Civile e Industriale, Rome, 15th and 16th March 2015, “Aula del Chiostro”, via Eudossiana 18. The Conference has been organised by prof. Fabiola Fratini.

2. Key words in French and Italian used in the European Commission documents aimed at urban renewal policies and research programmes (Urban, Urbact...).

3. [ec.europa.eu/archive](http://ec.europa.eu/archive)

4. Tim Jackson, 2011.

5. Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities (2007) and Marseille Declaration (2008).

hope that urban policies would shift towards sustainability and regeneration<sup>6</sup>.

By calling for “an integrated urban regeneration and its strategic potential for a smarter, more sustainable and socially inclusive urban development in Europe” (2010)<sup>7</sup>, the Toledo Declaration Reference Document clearly expresses this concept.

But policies, programmes, declarations have apparently not hit the target if in 2015 an URBACT II paper<sup>8</sup> defined “sustainable urban development” an elusive concept and proposed to clarify what we understand by sustainable regeneration.

Urban regeneration “is a way to reorganise and upgrade existing places than planning new urbanisation (Puppim de Olivera and Balaban, 2013) [;] typically urban regeneration actions involve economic, social and physical/environmental improvement measures [and] urban regeneration contributes towards the implementation of sustainable development through the recycling of land and buildings, reducing demolition waste and new construction materials, as well as reducing demand for peripheral urban growth and facilitating intensification and compactness of existing areas (Turcu 2012)”<sup>9</sup>.

With this definition, the European Commission provides a general understanding to consider urban regeneration an integrated and sustainable oriented approach<sup>10</sup> and promotes strategies to support a new growth model and create the conditions for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (Horizon 2020).

While the European Commission draws the path, European

6. Urbact II, 2015.

7. [ec.europa.eu/archive](http://ec.europa.eu/archive)

8. Urbact II, 2015.

9. Urbact II, 2015.

10. Urbact II, 2015.

cities provide a variety of ways to transform drafts in deeds. The four case studies described below – Hamburg, London, Brussels, Rome – give evidence that, in the last decades, every city had drawn its own “regeneration way”, with a different level of sensitiveness regarding the European principles. Thus, the results of regeneration policies / programmes vary from city to city, and even within the same city. “Regeneration” can be considered sustainable or not; and in certain cases a *passé-partout* word used in order to apply a “politically correct” label to different urban actions. The examination and the comparison of the cases allow to identify and name four “regeneration ways”. The names given, as the descriptions, are related to the need to expose typical situations that make up the plural image of the regeneration, beyond and beside the EU suggestions.

### ***Sustainable regeneration***

Under the flag of “regeneration” Hamburg has developed two huge projects with different goals, although included in the same vision – Hamburg Spatial Vision 2020 (2013): the regeneration of the harbour area (a brownfield) with the realisation of HafenCity (started in 1997) downtown on one hand, and the regeneration of Wilhelmsburg island by IBA-Hamburg (started in 2006) – south of the city – , a 35km<sup>2</sup> area in a state of decay with a mix of low quality functions, on the other.

HafenCity is related to a global market strategy, but the guiding principles of the masterplan include sustainability and participation within a local character framework; Wilhelmsburg island’s regeneration is locally oriented, but the subject of innovation in the field of sustainable architecture, developed by IBA-Hamburg, happened to realize an exhibition of solutions for the city of the future.

Both projects are integrated, multilayered and multidisciplinary, which are central criteria to obtain the “EU good practice label”.

### ***Iconic-global oriented regeneration***

London is regenerated first of all using “spotlight projects” with the goal to respond to global expectations. The city has adopted a strategy focused on major renovation and maintenance projects, with much care dedicated to new iconic buildings and most visited public spaces. The city’s approach has featured a number of interesting policies (like the London Green Grid) but the initiatives developed have also been tailored to boost market values and to conquer the leadership in the global imagination.

### ***Multipolar-sustainable regeneration***

Brussels offers examples of the complexity of a regeneration focused on the local. The regeneration strategy implement-

ed regards sensitive neighbourhoods located in the most deprived municipalities of the city-region, where the problem of marginalization has reached emergency levels and the process of regeneration has involved an integrated-participatory approach first (1991), that switched to sustainability later (2013).

In Brussels, the instrument used to regenerate the city-region is the “Neighbourhood Contract – Contrat de Quartier CdQ” (1991), a tool that focuses on small areas, combining urban and social interventions. From 2009, in response of the new urban challenges, the CdQ evolved in a new, sustainable and green tool, the “Sustainable Neighbourhood Contract – Contrat de Quartier Durable CdQD”.

Thanks to this approach, the regeneration actions are flexible, local oriented, sustainable and spread in the city-region municipalities where the needs are evident.

### ***Immaterial regeneration***

The attempt to regenerate Rome’s periphery took place in the ‘90s with specific tools: Pru, Priu, CdQ<sup>11</sup>. But after the first decades of experimentation – which are difficult to appreciate – regeneration activities seem to slow down.

San Basilio is the case study chosen to illustrate the situation. When the direction and financial resources are lacking, the regeneration may turn out to be “immaterial”.

San Basilio’s regeneration is spotted with, light actions due to local actors helped by public institutions. In a way, these practices are rooted in the “laboratori di quartiere” experiences of the ‘70s, especially in the neighbourhoods located in the outskirts. Thanks to this heritage, social activities, although “immaterial”, can help to achieve important goals as proactive citizenship and community building.

“SanBa” murales, school/university mapping and community walks have been the ingredients of a self-made regeneration with no ambition to last too long, but which may be the seeds for a more liveable future.

The combination of the themes outlined here and the various case studies may suggest new points of view and offer food for thought regarding what regeneration is and should be to provide better future for both cities and people.

## **Sustainable regeneration in Hamburg**

Hamburg is a “good practice” example according to the sustainable regeneration definition diffused by UE documents. Urban regeneration in Hamburg is concentrated on two major areas located south of the city: HafenCity and Wil-

11. Pru – Programma di recupero urbano; Priu – Programma di riqualificazione urbana; CdQ – Contratti di Quartiere.

helmsburg. Both are key projects of “Hamburg Spatial Vision 2020”<sup>12</sup> – released in 2007 – , linked with the goals to concentrate the future development in the geographical centre of the city and to “bridge the gap” between Hamburg and the islands south of the Elbe river.<sup>13</sup>

So, on one hand, in 1997 the municipality decided to regenerate the area of the former harbour – south of the city centre – and develop the new district of HafenCity as a new downtown.<sup>14</sup> On the other, with the “Leap across the Elbe” project (2002), the city government and local inhabitants promoted the regeneration of Wilhelmsburg Island – south of HafenCity – through a complex strategy.<sup>15</sup>

Both projects belong to a common metropolitan planning framework issued in 2007 aimed at, among other goals,

*HafenCity (1997 - ...)* is designed as a central, new district complementary to the heart of Hamburg (and not in competition, according to the designers), to house, in 25 years, 12,000 inhabitants, 40,000 workers, 80,000 visitors.

A huge laboratory of design capable of involving urban planners and architects, investors and builders. The aim is to give shape to an idea to become a European urban model: a city open to the culture of globalization, however, “faithful” to its historical roots, sensitive to environmental issues and energy saving.

The idea became reality in 2000, when the municipality decided to launch a competition for the master plan concerning the regeneration of the area of the disused harbour.

The winning team – ASTOC, coordinated by Kees Christaanse – drew a city of “short distances”, dense, compact, mixed,



Figure 1

connecting the individual projects in the city, reinforcing the urban qualities in northern and central neighbourhoods, regenerating the southern peripheries and preserving the character of Hamburg as a “green and blue” metropolis.

12. “The spatial vision, draft abridged version – Hamburg”, 2007.

13. Ingrid Beckner, 2015.

14. HafenCity Hamburg, 2013.

15. IBA\_Hamburg, 2012.

formed by neighbourhoods and structured through the design of public space, in line with the principles envisaged in the documents of the competition. The proposal runs over an area of 157 hectares – 40% of the surface of the city centre – divided into 127 hectares of land and 30 of water.<sup>16</sup>

The plan elaborates the theme of reconciliation between city and nature through 10.5 km of riverside walks and pro-

16. HafenCity Hamburg, 2013.

vides 41.9 acres of open space available to citizens and visitors (28.1 of which public and 13.8 for public use).<sup>17</sup> But still the residents claims the lack of “green” especially along the promenades in Santorkai and Dalmannkai quarters.

However, the network of the public spaces draws the physical structure of the district and helps to boost social and outdoor activities.

The buildings that shape the form of the district host residences (30%), offices (48%), universities, schools, cultural activities, hotels (13%), trade and gastronomy (9%). Each building generally houses a variety of functions. To reduce energy consumption, investors are encouraged to produce buildings with low environmental impact through the granting of “ecolabel” certification.<sup>18</sup>

Architecture enlivens volumes, draws the prospects, frames backgrounds and substantiates the landmarks while the users walking through the public space network liven up the urban scene - especially during the weekend.

The landmarks are entrusted to the expert hands of archistars and, as the architecture of the background, evoke the fashionable style characteristic of many skylines of this millennium (figure 1). Unique but similar to others, buildings produce an “urban déjà-vu”, which is struggling to find its harmony. Yet in HafenCity, as in Copenhagen or Moscow, “celebrity copyright” seduces planners, investors, inhabitants, employees and tourists. The awareness of acting at a global scale pushed decision-makers to focus on the aesthetics of urban design that, here as elsewhere, becomes part of the process of formation of the new centre and its success. A shimmering success, for now dedicated to a select audience, because of the square meter cost, the activities’ brand, the glittering shops and restaurants, the “luxury” background.

In 2007, the “Hamburg Spatial Vision 2020” declared that the city should be a growing metropolis that resonates well in the international perception, be more competitive on the international stage and develop spotlight projects which are the key to forming a successful global image.<sup>19</sup>

Thanks to HafenCity, Hamburg is now part of the global geography of the places that matter: ten years after the “laying of the foundation stone”, HafenCity has already done “the world tour”.

What remains to be seen is whether, in the end, the new district will be able to integrate the demands of the market and be a “city for people”, to quote Jan Gehl<sup>20</sup>. Concerning the regeneration topic, is HafenCity to be considered an “integrated urban regeneration, ... sustainable and socially inclusive”? – to quote Toledo Declaration.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. “The spatial vision, draft abridged version – Hamburg”, 2007.

20. Jan Gehl, 2010.

*Wilhelmsburg* is a huge island (35 km<sup>2</sup>) located south of the city centre and south of HafenCity. The area has been developed during the XIX century as an industrial place linked to the harbour activities.

The reasons for the regeneration of the island are to be found in its geographical and historical features. The area, partially below the sea level, is cut off from Hamburg by the Elbe river. The separation also covered the administrative boundaries. In fact, the island was run by a separate municipality and only after 1937 the territories of the south were annexed to the city to ensure its expansion.

The flood of 1962 – which caused more casualties, homeless and destruction there than elsewhere in Hamburg –, contributed to build a negative image of the island, adding to the feelings of distance, insecurity and abandonment.

The flood devastation and the consequent declining population left the island in a state of decay. Year after year the island was at the receiving end of land uses that fitted nowhere else: dumpsites, containers, power lines, highway intersections, high density and low quality buildings.

In 2000, active Wilhelmsburg residents – in the name of a mixed population of 100 different nationalities, mostly Turkish, with high rates of unemployment and low incomes – decided to change the fate of the island.

They became promoters of surveys and proposals aimed at increasing the awareness of the local opportunities. In 2002 the results of these activities were substantiated in the “White Paper on sustainable economic and social development of the islands”. A “springboard of ideas” that pushed the municipality to launch in 2004 the “Leap across the Elbe” project.

The project recognizes a great potential in the island as regards the availability of areas for urban development and, at the same time, with concerns as to the presence of environmental resources. Wilhelmsburg is set to become the “green heart” of Hamburg.

It is within this framework that, in 2007, the IBA - Hamburg has developed a multidisciplinary strategy on four levels – urban, social, cultural, environmental – designed to redevelop open spaces and transform areas both built and to be rebuilt.

The regeneration strategy included the “International garden show”, the construction of new settlements, the test of building techniques and materials with low environmental impact (such as Hybrid house and Water house) and a master plan for the centre of the island designed by Jo Coenen.

The new centre now hosts different buildings (residences, offices, retails, equipment) on a 30 hectares area. Among them, the Ministry of Urbanism and Environment, a “coloured stripe building” (Sauerbruch Hutton design) which became the landmark of Wilhelmsburg (Figure 2). Yet, despite the efforts, the area seems to lack a “sense of place”.

However, with over 60 projects focusing on three main



Figure 2

themes – Metrozones, Cities and climate changes and Cosmopolis – the IBA initiative develops an idea of the city aimed at demonstrating that it is possible to work on the existing city, even in its peripheral and abandoned parts and promote innovation, for the protection and enhancement of natural resources.

### London global-iconic regeneration

A Sustainable regeneration approach has been introduced by the Blair government (1997) with the Urban Task Force (UFT) work coordinated by Richard Rogers.<sup>21</sup> The UFT developed a new vision, described in a report, which would be pursued through *Urban [sustainable] Renaissance* policies (*Toward an Urban Renaissance* - 1999).

With the principles of the *Urban Renaissance*, the government intends to setting out an alternative vision to the current state of the British city, setting out principles, guidelines and models aimed at urban regeneration, at promoting better

economic and social conditions within the framework of a sustainable development.

With regard to the reality of London, the UFT report highlights the particularity of the great metropolis within the British landscape and its importance as a financial and business centre. According to UFT studies, London has some of the distinctive features of the proposed *Urban Renaissance* model. However, the report considers it necessary to define some corrections such as, for example, a governance referring to the city as a whole and a vision capable of integrating objectives and actions developed by each borough, that would strengthen the functional mix and develop an increased concern for the housing sector and the quality of the public realm.<sup>22</sup>

Since the late 90s, parallel with the release of the UFT report<sup>23</sup>, the future of London was taking shape with the aim of enhancing the attraction of international markets, encouraging tourism flows and promoting international investments. Those are also the years of global cities theorizing and worldwide competition between power nodes, to quote

22. Marion Roberts and Tony Lloyd Jones, 2010, p. 169.

23. Urban Task Force, 1999.

21. John Punter, 2010, p. 2.

Saskia Sassen.<sup>24</sup>

From 1993 to 2007, in London of course, but in other British cities too, the property boom encouraged an unprecedented amount of speculative development activities.<sup>25</sup>

The combination of these elements has determined a development linked to the pursuit of profits by maximizing quantity. A goal that suited the private sector and local councils as well, both involved in entrepreneurial strategies, implementation of major regeneration projects and public realm improvements for the sake of small investors (“buy-to-let”/ “buy-to-leave” practices<sup>26</sup>) and extra-large developers.

Therefore, the initiatives of regeneration that have been promoted in London are mostly the result of these conditions and are aimed at a global market visibility and for business purposes. The projects intend to spread a new and vibrant image of the city through entertainment events and great regeneration plans; new architecture icons; cultural offers; upgraded public realm; facilities, attractions including shopping for tourism both mass and elite.

The *Urban Renaissance* principles suggested balancing the pressure of investors with strategic planning, driving of the transformation processes by local government and defining clear public-private commitments.

But in reality things turned out otherwise. “The Urban Renaissance most dramatic physical impacts have been concentrated in the city centre” with a typical combination of “central retail, hotel, leisure and eating/drinking sectors, a reflection of the growth consumerism”.<sup>27</sup>

*Events.* The Millennium event, which celebrated the transition to the twenty-first century, was nothing more than an excuse to turn the light onto the city and to spot new locations for further development through spectacular projects.

The *Millennium Wheel* is a perfect example of the kind; a masterpiece of marketing policy. The London Eye was created for the 2000 celebrations on the South Bank of the Thames. The “extra-large” structure was built to establish the record of the tallest Ferris wheel in Europe and to become a global star. The work, now sponsored by Coca-Cola, attracts 3.5 million visitors per year and has become an identifying landmark of the city along with the Tower Bridge and the “Gherkin”.

The starting of the *Millennium Dome*<sup>28</sup> was certainly less glittering, even though it was meant to be another successful urban symbol in the mind of the decision-makers<sup>29</sup>.

But the location of the “white elephant” – as it has been

tagged –, on the Greenwich Peninsula in South East London, far from the centre; its considerable size too large to fill (365 meter in diameter; 52 meter in height at its centre) and its costs too high to be balanced by the benefits did not help to make it an “urban star”.

Unused for years, in 2005 the Dome was sold and rebranded “O2 Arena” by a mobile telecommunication company and is now the centre of an extensive regeneration plan for the peninsula. The latest version of the master plan (2015) is sponsored by Henry Cheng Kar-Shun – a Hong Kong billionaire – teaming up with the existing developer Quintain, and proposes high buildings for wealthy customers in just the same style as the Docks.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly the *Millennium Bridge*<sup>31</sup> (figure 4) is the project more attuned to the principles and guidelines of the *Urban Renaissance* compared to those mentioned above.

It is a pedestrian bridge integrated into a broader project called “Thames path” – a walkway along the Thames banks started in the '70s.<sup>32</sup> The new infrastructure is an important link within the pedestrian network along the river. In fact, the bridge connects the New Tate and St Paul Cathedral sewing up the two banks. Thanks to the bridge and the Thames path it is now possible to stroll between Westminster and the Tower Bridge and appreciate the monuments along the new route.

*Architectural icons (or just tall buildings).* Regeneration also means boosting the real estate sector and reshaping the horizon line. The new century offers a profile in London that pierces the clouds, crammed with skyscrapers and cranes.

The annual survey released by New London Architecture (NLA) and GL Hearn (2015) shows 263 buildings over 20 floors approved or under construction (70 of which under construction) within Greater London, with a significant increase of towers under construction (+36%). 62 of the 70 towers are residential and could provide 14,800 new homes<sup>33</sup>.

Concerning the location, East Central and South London will see the biggest rise in tall buildings with 93% of new towers on the way to be delivered.

A trend that will “enhance the leading world position of the city alongside with a dynamic and evolving skyline”, as Deputy Mayor of London for policy and planning Sir Edward Lister stated. The Mayor is sure that a strategic approach, robust planning rules, and the fact that the majority of tall buildings are being built in carefully planned clusters will ensure the quality of the results<sup>34</sup>.

24. Saskia Sassen, 1994.

25. John Punter, 2010, p. 331.

26. John Punter, 2010, p. 325.

27. Ibid., p. 327.

28. Designed by Richard Roger, 1999

29. Robert Collins, 2007.

30. Dave Hill, 2015.

31. Arup project, 2000.

32. Marion Roberts and Tony Lloyd Jones, 2010, p.175.

33. <http://www.newlondonarchitecture.org/docs>, 2015.

34. “Central London Economic Assessment 2010: Paper 5. Place”,

Thus, “very tall buildings have led to the fiercest debate and most prominent urban design policy shifts” as Roberts and Lloyd Jones noted<sup>35</sup>.

Not only tall and not only for the sake of the real estate customers, new buildings can also be architectural icons, cultural symbol and kick-starting transformation processes as well.



Figure 3

The Regional Planning Guidance (1991) worked on the basis of the protection of the strategic views of the key landmarks; then, in 1999, the LPAC issued its Supplementary advice on High buildings and strategic views in London; later, in 2003, the English Heritage produced its guidance on Tall Buildings revised with CABE in 2007<sup>36</sup>.

The result: written policies are good in intent but not specific enough and open to a range of interpretations.

Clearly, there are conflicting demands behind the pressure to build higher and the resistance to that. And with this trend, in a handful of years the skyline will look definitely different. Thanks to the Foster's Gherkin, the Renzo Piano's Shard and "the others", the London sunsets look more and more like any other thriving city of the "Far East" (Figure. 3). Despite the restrictions on tall buildings the phenomenon seems unstoppable thanks to foreign financing flows from the Emirates to China.

2010.

35. Marion Roberts and Tony Lloyd Jones, 2010, p. 181.

36. Ibid. p. 171.

The Tate Modern Southbank can be considered a masterpiece of architectural regeneration and the greatest symbol of success of London cultural policy. The New Tate<sup>37</sup> built in 2000 on the site of the disused power station, located just in front of St Paul Cathedral, is a cultural landmark for million visitors from all over the world (Tate Modern claims it has established itself as the most-visited art gallery in the world).

On the other hand the Gallery has become the centre of a wider regeneration development. A phenomenon which could be considered a good opportunity if not only aimed at saturating free spaces and at spreading a monocultural urban design approach.

*Public realm.* The topic of public realm should take a central space in an agenda of changes influenced by the principle of *Urban Renaissance*. And so it is in London; first of all in the central area which is the engine of an urban economy

37. Designed by Herzog and de Meuron.

consumerism-oriented.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, the city centre (Zone 1 / 2) is the place where the initiatives dedicated to enhancing the quality of the public realm are thriving; but within the same framework it is possible to identify different approaches.

Some projects, such as the "squares word" (1996), concern global reference places and are definitely oriented to global customers. Thanks to "squares in the world," the image of London is regenerated at the level of pedestrians, through the upgrading of spaces, symbol of an iconography that will appeal to a world audience: Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, Whitehall and Parliament square.<sup>39</sup>

The same care can be found, for instance, along the busiest streets belonging to Zone 1 and around the underground stations between Zone 2 and Covent Garden. Here the towns of Camden, Westminster and City of London along with Transport for London (TfL) and private lenders promote the Clear Zone Partnership aimed at redesigning public spaces.<sup>40</sup>

The fact of enhancing the quality of the city at "eye level" helps the commercial activities to thrive. The logic is distilled in a study done by "Transport for London" (TfL): the "streets for walking are better for business."

To reshape the central London shopping streets the regeneration actions include the spread of pedestrian areas, redesign of spaces, reorganization of signs, lighting and parking along the streets.

A network of "walking routes", designed according to this criteria, has been developing along the busiest streets and around the metro stations between the boundaries of Zone 2 and Covent Garden and in the heart of the city. The best example: Great Queen Street in Covent Garden and Holborne.

Among the initiatives which concern the public realm in central areas some try to match the quality of authenticity, a good urban design and a marketing approach.

For instance, straddling mobility, interventions on public space and support to local businesses are the goals of the redevelopment of the area around Seven Dials, near Covent Garden, Marylebone High Street, or St Christopher's Place. These interventions have become "places of worship" of customers looking for authenticity and stylish regeneration.<sup>41</sup>

Here, the quality of the location and the partnership with "enlightened" private entities allow the realisation of the principles of *Urban Renaissance* through the creation of an urban environment on a human scale, calibrated on a soft mobility, made attractive by the quality of the design. The ambience has been imagined to fully enjoy a select audi-

ence with fashionable boutiques and restaurants mixed with street food and weekly market.

Another approach with similar goals but other design references is the one that features the Southwark Bank. Thanks to the new initiatives involving the bank of the river, it is possible to observe a colonization by office buildings, food and shopping facilities. The anonymity of the design of public spaces is framed with granite, glass and steel and ground floor activities led by international chains - "starbucks-zara-benetton-sephora".

The use of similar elements creates a "curiously corporate ambience with a feeling of compound", which is "replicated in new commercial developments across London - for example at Tower Place, Cardinal Place, and Exchange square"<sup>42</sup> - and corrupts the authenticity of places.

At last a different strategy. In 2012 the Greater London Authority delivered *All London Green Grid* (2012) which can be considered a framework plan aimed at regenerating urban territories through a sustainable ingredient: the green. The plan is aimed at promoting the design and delivery of "green infrastructure" across London<sup>43</sup>, defining a network of green spaces (street trees and green roofs), providing a range of benefits (recreation, amenity, healthy living, ecological resilience...).

The same year, the city pursues the way to regenerate neighbourhoods again through nature and extra-small projects - called the "100 pocket parks" - spread all over the city. A sort of "urban acupuncture" strategy.

The initiative has been promoted in 26 municipalities of London with £2 million funding for 100 public spaces.<sup>44</sup> The goal is to increase the quality of roads, squares, gardens, canals and riverbanks. It cuts out small areas in the city where, thanks to a special design on a microscale, it is possible to find comfortable seating, flowers, shrubs, trees.

In this regard, Mayor Boris Johnson said: "investing in public space transforms the city in a pleasant and attractive place for residents and visitors, in an environment where business can grow."

Ultimately, the urban regeneration in London is primarily a *renaissance* to measure a global node that favours business and investments, focusing on a continuous renewal of the urban image through icon products (architecture, features, spaces), which are able to turn the international interest towards the city. However, the economic and symbolic importance of this phenomenon opens new lines of experimenta-

38. John Punter, 2010, p. 327.

39. Marion Roberts and Tony Lloyd Jones, 2010, p. 174.

40. Tim Long, 2014, p. 8.

41. Marion Roberts and Tony Lloyd Jones, 2010, p. 177.

42. Ibid., p. 176.

43. All London Green Grid SPG - Greater London Authority, 2012, <https://www.london.gov.uk/>

44. <http://www.london.gov.uk/pocket-parks>.



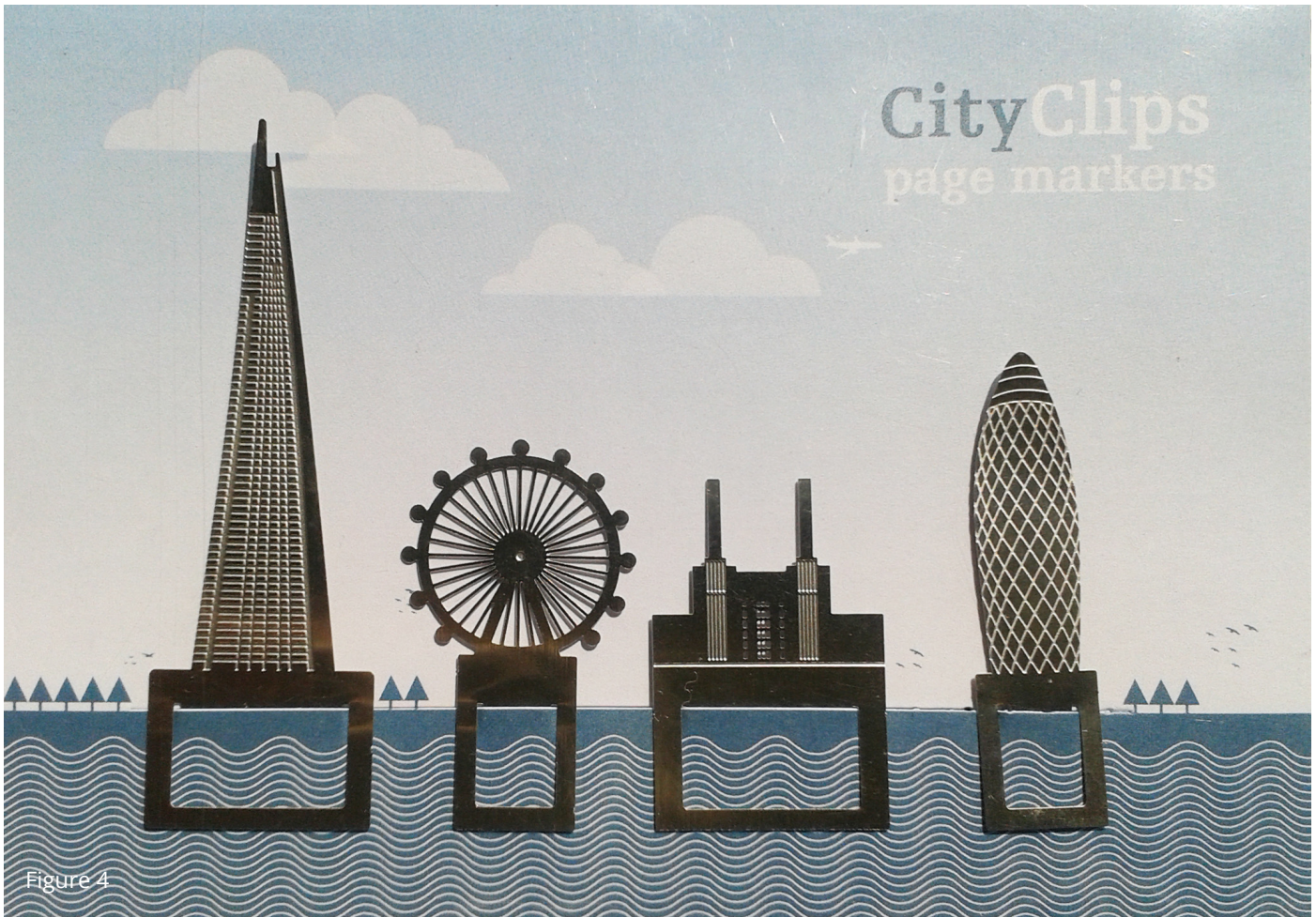


Figure 4

tion such as the design of the public realm. Nevertheless, considering the added value produced by these years of commercial real estate boom, perhaps the city could proceed towards greater redistribution of opportunities, widening the actions of regeneration in those parts of the city and for those citizens less illuminated by the spotlight of globalization. However, the green strategies adopted after 2012 seem to orient the city policies towards a green and sustainable regeneration concerning “All London”<sup>45</sup>.

### Multipolar-sustainable regeneration in Brussels

Urban regeneration in the Brussels Capital Region concerns degraded neighbourhoods of the city centre, and the urban policies are rooted in the local dimension through the implementation of Neighbourhood Contracts (CdQ - 1993)<sup>46</sup>: an innovative multidisciplinary “micro - local” fixed term scale tool (4 years + 2).<sup>47</sup>

45. All London Green Grid SPG – Greater London Authority, 2012, <https://www.london.gov.uk/>

46. “Ordonnance”, 7 octobre 1993; “Arrêté du gouvernement de la Région”, 3 février 1994.

47. Fabiola Fratini, 2003, pp. 42-44.

The CdQs (1993-2009) intervene incrementally, in the municipalities of the first ring of the city-region, home to the dynamics of decay. The choice of the CdQs’ location draws a “patchwork” that corresponds to a strategy of “step by step” redevelopment. The size of the area is proportional to the budget and implementation capacity of the Region and the municipalities involved.

Given the complexity of the issues, the law provides for three major fields of intervention: the real estate, the public space, and the “social” involvement.

*The real estate.* The basic idea of regeneration related to real estate is to promote public / private partnerships to renew dilapidated buildings within the border of the CdQs area. However, a final assessment of the first CdQs (1994-1998) highlights the prevalence of interventions funded by public bodies.<sup>48</sup> Especially in the more derelict thus less attractive neighbourhoods (as in Anderlecht or Molenbeek municipalities). As everywhere, the developers’ strategy aims at protecting investment and acting in safe conditions. Most of them prefer to intervene in the downtown areas of the City of Brussels, around the former Canal (St Catherine area), where a

48. Fabiola Fratini, 2004, pp. 89-100.

set of policies (not only CdQs) implemented by the municipality have already obtained good results in the field of regeneration.

But even in better locations, such as in central Brussels, the developers select the buildings to transform with care. They prefer to wait for the improvement of the quality of a specific neighbourhood under CdQ's policy and take advantage, at a later date, of the enhancement of the urban ambiance.

Nevertheless thanks to CdQ's regeneration processes could start, involving the urban tissues of derelict neighbourhoods, and now are spreading through a greater number of central municipal areas. The good results can be observed in the renewed public realm and urban fabric.

And if the kick-start comes first from the public sector and thereafter from the private sector, one of the principal evidence is that the tool has been able to shift from negative to

two years from the beginning of the CdQ.

The redevelopment of public space is seen as a driving force to attract private investors and solicit the intervention of spontaneous renewal. The convenience of the intervention for individuals is linked to the quality of streets and squares that determines, in turn, an increase in the market value of property. The design philosophy which runs through interventions on the public space seems to be inspired by a kind of "minimalism" and the quality obtained is the result of the combination of a few basic elements: tree alignments, grand old trees, natural stone pavements, benches, lighting, bollards for parking, speed bumps.

The choice of the elements complies with the characters and qualities existing in the neighbourhoods, hard to find tarmac, granite, glass and steel.



Figure 5

positive the urban quality and the life of a good number of residents in a relatively short term.

*The public space.* Interventions on public space are the first to go and the first to be completed. The law requires that the construction site shall be concluded, with no exceptions, by

*The social involvement.* Participation contemplated in the processes of designing space intersects with actions under the "social" and, together, affect the welfare of the inhabitants and the livability of the neighbourhood.<sup>49</sup>

The population of CdQs is characterized by the presence of

49. Fabiola Fratini, 2005, pp.117-127.

immigrants (North and Central Africa, Turkey) of predominantly Muslim religion, poorly integrated, suspicious, little accustomed to consultation practices.

The associations involved in the social activities are financed by CdQs to earn the trust of local population through: building a tolerant coexistence; developing the respect of the inhabitants for neighbourhood spaces and enhancing the desire to participate in its transformation.

For example, cooking classes help the women of North African origin to participate in social activities and prepare them to be involved tomorrow in a community design process. Other examples are the campaigns to keep public spaces clean activated in schools, designed to disseminate a new way of feeling the space as a collective good.

The direct involvement of young unemployed people in the physical construction of the public space increases the feel-

ing of identity and reduces the incentives for vandalism.

The “neighbourhood fairs” of the district are designed to invite people to use the space and create opportunities for interaction between different populations.

Unfortunately, all these activities generally come to an end with the completion of CdQs. At the end of four years, the survival of these initiatives is linked to the ability of municipalities or associations to find other funds. The risk is that once “the light” of attention to the neighbourhood and people is turned off at the end of CdQs’ validity, everything reverts back to the way it was before.

The assessment of the first CdQs now completed can be done by just strolling through the renewed neighbourhoods. Generally, the request of the CdQ law to start the renovation from the public realm and to close the construction site within 2 years has been a strategic decision. The consequent

enhancement of the quality of the ambiance has attracted developers and encouraged private owners to renovate their own house.

The respect of the timing by the municipality gave the neighbours a new sense of dignity, demonstrating to them that something good has been really done for an improved livability of the neighbourhood.

Obviously not all the CdQs can be considered successful. But, step by step, something has been done to move the silent stillness of the neglected areas.

After 2009 the CdQs were transformed into “Contrats de Quartier Durable” (CdQD). The CdQDs are aimed at creating a sustainable urbanity through a major involvement of the residents. The main goals: reduce energy consumption, waste production, water waste; promote a better use of public spaces; built social cohesion; change un-sustainable citizen’s behavior.

Besides the CdQD will help to build new housing for a mixed population in a sustainable environment. The most important CdQD will be developed on *Tour & Taxis* area (45 hectares), along the Canal, with



Figure 6

1000-2000 houses, a variety of functions and a public park (10 hectares).<sup>50</sup>

With the CdQD the size of the site involved in the regeneration project has dramatically increased – from less than 5 hectares to 45 hectares – and the areas concerned are no longer located exclusively on the built fabric of the city but on the un-built ones too. The “urgency for sustainability” seems to have changed the philosophy of the former CdQ. In a better way? Certainly in an intensive one.

After more than 20 years the demands of the Brussels city region are changed and new tools are requested. The CdQDs are framed within a multi-level vision: the “Plan Guide pour la Rénovation urbaine durable” adopted in 2013 by the city region. The plan promotes a multi-scalar strategy and provide to articulate the urban renewal projects at different scales, from micro to macro – block, neighbourhood, cluster of neighbourhoods, mobility axe, ... -, to carry out integrated and sustainable actions across the city.

### “Immaterial” regeneration in San Basilio, Rome<sup>51</sup>

In San Basilio, IV municipality, eastern part of the city of Rome, there is no program or project of urban regeneration. Yet, despite some positive features, first among them the presence of green, the area has all the conditions that justify an appropriate policy that can strengthen the quality of the urban environment and to restore the confidence of citizens.

In the meantime, waiting for things to change, associations and local public institutions, with the help of the University<sup>52</sup>, try to do their best organizing activities to mitigate social problems, develop a positive perception and enhance the knowledge and the appreciation of the neighbourhoods of San Basilio’s area.

The actions that are covered within this frame stand for “lightness” and act on relationships and perception.

Thus the regeneration of San Basilio takes place through “intangible” and low cost actions, in line with the financial constraints of a long period of crisis that diverts resources from the municipalities. Low cost but constructive, immaterial actions combine to create a conscious citizenship and an environment ready to face the future regeneration processes.

So, the intangible actions are made with and without targeted funding, thanks to the attention and active participation of local actors, such as the local Cultural Centre, the Nicolai

School, a dense network of associations, and the Sapienza University<sup>53</sup>.

This category includes the project “Well - Fare”<sup>54</sup>; the “walking workshop”<sup>55</sup>; “San Basilio mapping by school and university”, which took shape through a drawing session shared by university students and school pupils<sup>56</sup>.

The initiative “SanBa”<sup>57</sup> complements the actions above. The goal of “SanBa” is to strengthen the positive image of the district through a public art project. The idea is to integrate works of street art and a bottom-up process involving artists and school students. The murals painted by famous artists (Liqen, Iacurci, Hitnes) accompany the walks, are identified as references that dot the process of appropriation of the places by the inhabitants and inspire new mental images of the area, acting on the perception of the neighbours.

The “walking workshop” is a collective action, involving the inhabitants of San Basilio, others neighbourhoods of Rome and other European cities.<sup>58</sup>

It is a learning experience through the neighbourhoods and a dynamic activity to encourage the possession of a territory, to build relationships and to transform the *mental maps*<sup>59</sup> of the inhabitants from exclusionary to inclusive. The *workshop* promotes San Basilio as a place of experimentation and active knowledge.

53. Sapienza University of Rome, Department of Civil, Building and Environmental Engineering, Engineering Faculty, prof. Fabiola Fratini, course of Urbanism 1 in collaboration with prof. Claudia Mattogno.

54. Supported by the City Hall IV and built by local associations (Eureka First, Parsec Metropolis and Europe).

55. Arranged by the University in collaboration with the local Cultural Centre and the Nicolai School (15 March 2015).

56. The “drawing session” was organised with the participation of the students of the Sapienza University and the pupils of the V elementary class of Nicolai School - San Cleto neighbourhood -, 4th May 2015.

57. The initiative was supported by the Cultural Centre and the municipality of Rome (2014 - 2015).

58. The first day of the *Urban regeneration from city centre to peripheries Rome, Hamburg, London and Brussels* Conference consisted of a workshop/fieldtrip in San Basilio, the Roman periphery that had been chosen as one of the case studies to be included in the comparison of realities, approaches and results illustrated during the Conference.

The workshop was designed by prof. Fabiola Fratini based on the involvement of a mixed audience: students and teachers; representatives of local associations; students and professors of the Faculty of Engineering, Sapienza University: prof. Paolo Colarossi; prof. Nino Cappuccitti, prof. Claudia Mattogno; the professors of European Universities: prof. Ingrid Breckner of the University of Hamburg, prof. Bernard Declève of the University of Louvain-la-Neuve and prof. Matthew Carmona of the Bartlett School of Planning at University College London.

The workshop is part of a research organised by prof. Fabiola Fratini with the collaboration of the students of the course of Urbanism 1 (prof. Fabiola Fratini and prof. Claudia Mattogno).

59. See Kevin Lynch, 1960.

50. Bernard Declève, 2015.

51. Fabiola Fratini, 2015.

52. Sapienza University of Rome, Department of Civil, Building and Environmental Engineering, Engineering Faculty, prof. Fabiola Fratini, course of Urbanism 1 in collaboration with prof. Claudia Mattogno.



Figure 7

The scheduled activities start with the choice of the walking tour. There are three routes proposed for the walk. One centred on San Basilio, another including Casal Tidei and San Basilio, the last one around San Basilio and Torraccia. The places chosen as nodes of the paths are targeted to illustrate the character of the urban landscape and the positive landmarks. The three walks have in common the *SanBa* murals. The walking tools distributed at the beginning of the workshop are: a street map which helps those who need to be oriented in the neighbourhood (“I am here”); a photographic map representing the different parts of the area and help with the recognition of the places; a hard cover map with streets and landmarks in which the participants can draw their diary during the walk; a pencil.

On the latter map, participants trace the walk that took place, identify activities, urban objects, places that strike them and report on the observations accompanying the visit. The last stop of the workshop is the Senior Centre of San Basilio. Here participants shared maps, opportunities and problems of the neighbourhoods, the images which can be glimpsed behind the urban reality.

The workshop closed with the hope that the fragments of

“happy cities” – to paraphrase Italo Calvino<sup>60</sup> – lurking in many of the reports presented, would take shape and hybridize the whole neighborhood.

“*Mapping San Basilio by school and university*” aims to tell the story of the area, encouraging creativity, supporting the exchange between school pupils and university students.<sup>61</sup> “Mapping San Basilio” proposes drawing as a means of describing a place by a plural, rich and underground narrative of the city. The proposal comes across similar to “*Mapping Manhattan. A love (and sometimes hate) Story in Maps*” by Beckey Cooper. There are no formats, no specific requests but to illustrate their own emotional geography through colours, symbols, collages and words.

To leave room for creativity, San Basilio is represented in a basic map, compressed into the size of an A4 format. The

60. Italo Calvino, 1972.

61. “Mapping San Basilio by School and University” is a research led by prof. Fabiola Fratini with the collaboration of the students of the course of Urbanism 1 (prof. Fabiola Fratini and prof. Claudia Matogno), professors and pupils of the Istituto Comprensivo via N.M. Nicolai of Casal Tidei (headmaster Gabriella Romano, prof. Maria Gabriella Ballette).



Figure 8

sketch represents San Basilio as an *archipelago* formed by urban islands – every neighbourhood such as San Cleto, Torraccia... – and a sea constituted by the open spaces that separate and surround them.

Thanks to this representation, San Basilio, like Manhattan, seems to be suspended. The few perimeter tracks give way to the story.

So, with few instructions and a drawing, two hundred school pupils and university students met in the classrooms of the Nicolai School in San Cleto to illustrate and describe the *archipelago* through their emotions. Each student was accompanied by a pupil. Together they discussed San Basilio, the map, the mode of representation of their ideas. The available time was that of a football match. Two hundred maps and many stories were the result of the day. But not only that. Besides the maps there is the result of the many reports that came up among pupils and students. During the ninety minutes spent talking of the city and of related feelings, a sharing experience took place between those who knew San Basilio and those who just crossed it.

The final experience was illustrated in a public presentation. The maps were exhibited at the Cultural Centre in San Ba-

silio, and the authors were invited to comment on them. The drawings delineate an “anthropological footprint of the city” and testify the affection that binds the city and its citizens in San Basilio as in Manhattan.

### Conclusion: lessons learned

Besides the need to stress a prevalent concept, all the case studies deliver at least one action that can be considered a “good practice” attuned to the principles of a sustainable regeneration according to the Toledo Declaration.

The following list offers the opportunity to select from every experience the “good” that has been realized.

What a regeneration programme needs:

#### *Sustainable-integrated vision*

As the Hamburg case shows, the regeneration should be the key action of a long-term sustainable-integrated vision (“Hamburg Spatial Vision 2020”), connecting individual projects in the city, reinforcing urban qualities, upgrading

derelicted areas and preserving local character.

The Brussels Plan Guide model interprets the same need of a multi-level and multidisciplinary vision, using a variety of tools concerning small-scale interventions and broader-strategical actions, which include the territory of more than one neighbourhood.

### *Good city model*

The regeneration strategy should provide a good city model as the case studies of Hamburg and Brussels highlight. A city of “short distances”, dense, compact, mixed, formed by neighbourhoods and structured through the design of public space (HafenCity) with a special focus on sustainability and therefore oriented at reducing energy consumption, waste production, water waste; promoting a better use of public spaces; building social cohesion; changing un-sustainable citizens’ behavior (Brussels’ CdQD).

### *Regeneration as acupuncture*

The “small is beautiful” slogan can lead to a successful regeneration strategy implemented with local driven small and “extra-small” actions.

The lack of resources and the need to give quick responses to people for a better environment may suggest a regeneration process driven by “acupuncture” actions.

For instance, the size of the Brussels’ CdQ interests a tiny group of blocks within a neighbourhood’s boundaries and therefore makes the regeneration process more flexible and cost-less, the realization easier and the respect of the timing more likely. London’s “100 pocket parks” can be considered an example of the same kind, even though the implemented actions concern a specific topic (the green) and deliver a less complex response to local needs. Thus, in any case, green actions can be deemed essential for the liveability of the city even if they are pint-sized.

### *Green actions*

Green interventions are core actions of a sustainable regeneration strategy. In other words, a regeneration should be green.

In Hamburg both HafenCity and Wilhelmsburg development plans involve greening initiatives. Wilhelmsburg is set to become the “green heart” of Hamburg, whilst the master plan of HafenCity provides a green network of riverside walks and open spaces. CdQD tools (Brussels’ Plan Guide) are aimed at enhancing the green spaces and thanks to the “quartier verts” tool, every local actor (associations or inhabitants) can promote green initiatives for the sake of the people wellbeing.

At last, the “green infrastructure”<sup>62</sup> promoted by the All London Green Grid plan will help to regenerate, in a sustainable

62. <https://www.london.gov.uk/>

way, the urban territories across London.

### *Innovation & sustainability*

According to EU regeneration principles, sustainability and innovation should be considered part of the same strategy, and the integration of the two concepts can support the development of a new green economy. But both need a shift regarding behaviours.

IBA-Hamburg shows that sustainability can support economic growth, promote innovation for the protection and enhancement of natural resources.

Concerning the topic of the need to change behaviours, incentives can help the growth of sustainable innovation as well as the change of developers approach. In HafenCity, investors are encouraged to produce buildings with low environmental impact through the granting of “ecolabel” certifications.

Both the “quartier verts” tool designed by the Brussels Region and the London “100 pocket parks” can be considered instruments of a “go green” campaign locally oriented to sensitize people to nurture and care any kind of green within urban environment. Which is another way to support a change of behaviours.

### *Public space*

Public spaces of good design quality are required to regenerate the city. In Brussels the CdQ experience exemplifies that regeneration in derelicted neighbourhoods should start from the renewal of public spaces. The redevelopment of public space is felt by the inhabitants as a “care initiative” driven by the municipality and enhances the liveability of the neighbourhood.

The same principle is shared by the London case study, even though in London the concern of the quality of public space is oriented first of all to places of tourism and consumerism.<sup>63</sup> An extended public realm network and a variety of good design spaces are the ingredients of the success of HafenCity. From one of the Brussels neighbourhoods’ new tree-lined street to the renewed Trafalgar square the lesson learnt is: public space, public space, public space.

### *Social involvement*

Sustainable regeneration should be conceived in a citizen-shared process; social involvement is a key action within the regeneration processes. Social involvement should concern all the key stakeholders and regard the change of people’s behavior to ensure the implementation of sustainable regeneration goals.

HafenCity is a particular case of inhabitants’ self-involvement. Here the inhabitants are the active part of the par-

63. John Punter, 2010, p. 327.

ticipation process due to their cultural, economic and social background. Wealthy and middle class households, with professional skills, able to negotiate, belonging to a good social network are an easy proactive partner within the decisional process.

Things change within "sensitive" neighbourhoods. In Brussels participation, tolerant coexistence, respect for the public goods are the key words of the social involvement in CdQ's process and of the success of people's integration.

San Basilio's regeneration is the social involvement process

which took place and meant a learning experience and the implementations of dynamic activities to encourage the possession of a "not-always-friendly" territory, to build relationships and to transform the *mental maps*<sup>64</sup> of the inhabitants from exclusionary to inclusive. Which can be considered a sustainable regeneration action aimed to help people to feel "at home" in their city.

64. See Kevin Lynch, 1960.

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