

***Social Innovation and Local Activators in Brownfields Recycling in Europe.  
What is the Effect on the City and Territory?***

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**Abstract**

Throughout the last decades, more and more attention has been given by scholars and practitioners to social innovation and the reactivation of neglected resources. In Europe, at the regional and municipal level, many innovative redevelopment policies and projects have been promoted to recycle these spaces and create an impact at the local scale. Starting from the analysis of the state of the art and the comparison of 11 European experiences of brownfields recycling, the study investigates these creative centres and how their actions and activities affect the places producing socio-cultural, economic and spatial impacts. The study has the purpose to explore and illustrate the impacts on the place and to understand the role of social enterprises as drivers of social innovation and urban development. The research adopts qualitative and comparative methods. Considering the analyses carried out, the research aims to observe how the recycling process can affect the city and its surroundings. In conclusion, the research may constitute a specific contribution to the existing body of knowledge and provide the basis for future researches, collaborations and practical guidelines for the socially innovative recycling of disused resources in urban–rural contexts.

Keywords: socialinnovation, localresources, brownfields, territorialimpacts

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## **Introduction and methodology**

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in social innovation and its territorial implications. Researchers have shown an increased interest in defining the concept, and the role of local stakeholders and activators. A considerable amount of literature has been published on the meaning of social innovation (Caroli, 2015; Moulaert et al., 2005; Phills et al., 2008, Neumeier, 2012; Marra et al., 2015;). A large and growing body of literature has investigated about the socio-cultural dimension of innovation (Tekin & Tekdogan, 2015; Zarlenga et al., 2016) and its role in social entrepreneurship (Borzaga & Tortia, 2008; Matei & Matei, 2012; Lisetchia & Brancu, 2014). Many researchers have argued that social innovation is not just a new solution, it is a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, and work better than existing practices and therefore bring measurable improvements for the population (Moulaert et al., 2005, Phills et al., 2008; Tepsie, 2012). Other studies have highlighted the importance to include different typologies of stakeholders in the social innovation processes, such as associations, public and private institutions, and local community at various spatial scales (Maiolini, 2015; Moulaert et. al., 2005). In different studies, researchers examined the role of social innovation in developing new forms of entrepreneurships and new business models. The social enterprises are non-profit entities whose goal is to create services and products that respond to a territorial problem and bring social benefits (Neumeier, 2012; Maiolini, 2015; Marra et al., 2015). In Europe, there are many experiences of social enterprises that reactivate neglected local resources with social innovative activities. The present study explores the European panorama to identify the characteristics of social innovation in the recycling of a disused resources. The adopted methodology was focused on the analysis of the state of the art and the study of experiences through comparative and qualitative analyses in order to observe the impacts in the territories. The selected cases are examples of brownfield regeneration where social enterprise affect the urban context with socio-cultural and economic impacts. The study has the purpose to explore and illustrate the 11 cases of brownfield recycling and to analyse the positive impacts of this process. In this regard, the present paper aims to evaluate how social innovation in productive assets recycling affects the territories. Considering this purpose, the wide literature around social innovation and the role of social enterprises were analysed.

### **Social innovation in productive assets recycling in Europe**

Contemporary Europe is more and more influenced by episodes of social innovation and recycling of underused sites. Its territories are places of regeneration and innovation whose ambition is to define new pathways for local inhabitants and administrations. The findings show a huge network of experiences that want to innovate and create places of art, creativity and social interaction. The common objective is to satisfy social and territorial needs, with new activities and services for the urban settlement and its community.

Starting from the analysis of the state of the art many relevant examples of productive assets recycling were selected. The paper is focused on the analysis of 11 cases located in different European nations:

- Caos in Terni (Italy);
- Cascina Cuccagna in Milan (Italy);

- ExFadda in San Vito dei Normanni (Italy);
- Knos Manufactures in Lecce (Italy);
- Kulturfabrik in Esch-Sur-Alzette (Luxembourg);
- Periferica in Mazara del Vallo (Italy);
- Schlachthof in Bremen (Germany);
- Spinnerei in Leipzig (Germany);
- Ufafabrik in Berlin (Germany);
- Valle Salado de Añana in Salinas de Añana (Spain);
- Verkatehdas in Hämeenlinna (Finland).

The study was based on the effects of the reactivation of these neglected areas, and the role of social enterprises as activators of local development. All these examples were former productive sites (see Table 1), such as slaughterhouses (Schlachthof, Ufafabrik), productive houses (Ex Fadda, Cascina Cuccagna), quarries or former factories where cotton, baize and celluloid were produced. They are located in urban and rural-urban areas, since their industrial and productive origin, in general they are in peripheral locations.

From the comparative analysis emerges that all these cases promote a better use of local resources giving rise to a structural impact able to innovate the place overtime. Each of these examples positively affect the territory in which they lie through co-designing activities, social inclusion, community involvement, artistic and cultural events as mean of transformation (Scaffidi, 2019). They are places driving innovation, in which people live and cooperate, and as such, benefit from local activities, new services for the whole urban context. Considering the local impacts, the findings show four main impacts based on culture and education, social issues, economic creativity and spatial development. All these cases are considered creative centres improving the urban surrounding, creating new spaces, building networks, developing international projects and attracting new people, as permanent or temporary inhabitants and tourists.

In this regard, Table 1 illustrates the different activities promoted by the social enterprises. All these cases have many elements in common. Regarding the cultural dimension, it is possible to observe the organisation of festivals and international projects (e.g. Ufafabrik, Schlachthof, Periferica, Valle Salado, Verkatehdas), exhibitions (Caos, Spinnerei, Periferica, Verkatehdas, Knos manufactures, Kulturfabrik) and the development of new offers, sport initiatives, dance and cooking classes, like Spinnerei, Ufafabrik, ExFadda, Cascina Cuccagna and Schlachthof. All these centres pay great attention to different forms of art, with many activities related to literature, music, theatre, cinematography (e.g. Schlachthof, Kulturfabrik, Knos manufactures, Verkatehdas, Spinnerei) and many of them also offer educational supports for kids, like the summer camps organised by Caos in Terni, educational activities by Kulturfabrik in Esch-Sur-Alzette, non-formal education by Periferica in Mazara del Vallo and specific cultural courses for children, discovering the saltworks in Salinas de Añana (Valle Salado). These centres, indeed, aim to build an active community that improve the quality of life, responding to social problems such as the lack of specific offers for the local inhabitants by municipalities, local administrations and institutions. The findings show a general positive impact on the place that improve the local context, attract new investments, new collaborations and economic creativity. These centres become places for innovative initiatives, but also locations

for new enterprises, like shops, bars, restaurants, schools etc. They are places for new forms of communities, meeting places for artists, associations, local inhabitants, that support the socialisation of young people, offering social activities for elderly, kids and family. These centres promote the participation of the local community in their activities, they contrast the emigration of the young generation, braking social distances, increase the quality of life, by creating new services for the different generations. In this direction, the findings illustrate the presence of collaborative spaces (e.g. Spinnerei, ExFadda, Schlachthof, Knos Manufactures), family networks (e.g. Ufabrik), social pedagogy services (e.g. Schlachthof). This innovative and creative experiences define alternative paths for future development in Europe. Furthermore, these cases encourage the recycling of neglected and underused spaces, like productive sites, and promote the recovery and the sustainable development of the assets considered as local resources. The spatial development is also highlighted by the positive influence in the urban context and its surroundings. The findings show indeed a general positive impact on the place that improve the territorial context, attract new people, innovative and international networks. The analysed experiences are characterised by the presence of a social enterprises whose ambition is to develop social benefits for the place by creating innovation in cultural, economic, social and spatial dimensions. Considering these aspects, the paper confirm that social enterprises have a relevant role in the recycling of neglected assets promoting new collaborative and creative spaces.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the paper illustrates a general framework of social innovation in productive sites recycling in Europe, highlighting the impacts in the local context. According to Moulaert et al., (2005), Doherty et al. (2014) and Matei and Matei (2012), Caroli (2015) social innovation strengthen economies, facilitates cross-cutting paths, encourages social involvement and interaction, develop the local territory and new social benefits. Considering these cases and used validation analysis, these findings provide insights for future research about social innovation and the evaluation the socio-cultural and spatial impacts in neglected sites reactivation in Europe. As such, the research presented here is not considered a final report, but it aims to provide a contribution to the existing body of knowledge regarding social innovation in brownfields recycling.

| CASES                |                   | Ufabrik   | Schlachthof   | Kulturfabrik  | Verkatehdas   | Caos   | Cascina Cuceagna   | Ex Fadda  | Knos Manufactures   | Periferica  | Spinnerei   | Valle Salado   |                                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|---|---|---|---|--|--|---|---|---|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| Location             | \                 | Berlin  | Bremen  | Esch-Sur-Alzette  | Hämeenlinna   | Terni  | Milan  | San Vito dei Normanni   | Lecce   | Mazara del Vallo  | Leipzig   | Salinas de Añana   |                                   |
|                      | Nation            | Germany   | Germany   | Luxembourg  | Finland   | Italy  | Italy  | Italy   | Italy   | Italy   | Germany   | Spain  |                                   |
| Reactivated resource | Context           | Urban   | Urban   | Urban   | Urban   | Urban  | Urban  | Rural-urban   | Urban   | Urban   | Urban   | Rural-urban  |                                   |
|                      | Resource typology | Celluloid fabric  | Slaughterhouse  | Slaughterhouse  | Batze factory   | Siri Chemical factory  | Productive house   | fine factory  | Metalmehanic factory  | Tuff quarry   | Cottonmill  | Saltworks  |                                   |
| Activities/Impacts   | Cultural          | Workshops, festivals, flea markets, sport, classes                                    | Workshops, festivals, flea markets, conferences, theatre, music, dance.               | Workshops, exhibitions, conferences, literature, art, residencies, educational centre, transboundary projects | Exhibitions, conferences, movie theatre, educational centre, transboundary projects | Exhibitions, teaching activities for students primary and secondary schools, educational centre, summer camp | Events, agricultura and food production, innovative and cultural initiatives | Exhibitions, conferences, sport and dance classes, transboundary projects | Exhibitions, conferences, movie theatre, educational centre, transboundary projects | Workshops, festivals, exhibitions, educational activities, transboundary projects | Exhibitions, workshops, festivals, conferences, movie theatre, sport and dance classes, | Events, food production, innovative and cultural initiatives, educational activities |                                   |
|                      | Social            | Family network or volunteer, Neighbourhood and Self-help Centre, social participation | Social pedagogy, collaborative space  | Meeting places for artists, associations, local community   | Meeting places for artists and local community                                      | Meeting places for artists, association, local community   | Meeting places for local community, family network                           | Meeting places for association, local community, collaborative space      | Meeting places for artists, association, local community                            | Meeting places for artists, association, local community, collaborative space     | Meeting places for artists, association, local community                                | Meeting places for local community, children offers                                  |                                   |
|                      | Economic          | Shops, bars, restaurants, guesthouse, sale of services                                | Pub, sale of services, cultural magazine  | Brasserie, restaurant, lounge bar   | Restaurant, bar   | Events and services  | Restaurant, bar  | Bars, sale of services  | Bars, sale of services  | Restaurants, guesthouse, sale of services   | Shops, bars, companies, events and sale of services                                     | Shops, bars, services and products   |                                   |
|                      | Spatial           | Sustainable development and ecological construction, building recovery                | Design and planning workshops, building renovation, redevelopment of part of the city | Sustainable development, building recovery  | Building renovation, sustainable development  | Sustainable development, building recovery   | Building renovation, sustainable development                                 | Building renovation, sustainable development                              | Building renovation, sustainable development  | Sustainable development, building recovery  | Sustainable development, local recovery   | Building renovation, sustainable development   | Sustainable development, recovery |

Table 1: Comparative analysis. The 11 European experiences of social innovation in brownfield recycling.

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