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## **“Next Generation Italia” and culture interventions in small historical towns: from opportunities to actions?**

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### **Abstract**

So far not enough attention has been paid by both academics and professionals to the regeneration of smaller cities which hold major artistic heritage but do not have adequate resources to leverage on it and bring positive societal impacts. However, the investment opportunities, offered by the “next generation Italia” plan, call scholars and professionals to discuss about how to valorise the great heritage of history, art, culture, and traditions embedded in small Italian towns with natural, historical and cultural potential. This paper adopts a qualitative approach and focuses on the case of Urbino, a UNESCO world heritage site, whose population and economic status is declining because citizens and businesses are attracted by the lure of higher revenues and better quality of life of nearby cities. Findings revealed that culture and artistic knowledge and capabilities that belong to the tradition of a city rich in heritage can be the lever of innovation and boost civic wealth. Searching the past for looking to the future is, however, a difficult task and divergences in vision, resistance and even political tensions are among the factors that hinder the city regeneration.

**Keywords** – Civic wealth; cultural heritage; historic city centre, social innovation; urban regeneration

**Paper type** – Academic Research Paper

## **1 Introduction: “Next Generation Italia” and culture interventions as a boost for sustainable development in small historical towns**

The Italian Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), also known as “Next Generation Italia”, defines guidelines of interventions to overcome the economic and social impact of the pandemic, acting on the country’s structural nodes and successfully facing the environmental, technological and social challenges of our time. The relaunch action aims to restart growth and radically improve the competitiveness of the economy, the quality of work and people's lives (MEF, 2021).

Within the RRP, funds of almost € 7 billions are allocated to Tourism and Culture, namely two of the sectors most affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. Their aim is to increase the level of attractiveness of the country's tourist and cultural system through the modernisation of tangible and intangible infrastructure.

Furthermore, devoted interventions of more than € 1 billion will be carried out to valorise the great heritage of history, art, culture, and traditions embedded in small Italian towns with natural, historical and cultural potential. Namely, these interventions aim to:

- i) spread cultural and creative activities,
- ii) strengthen the social texture and identity of places;
- iii) supporting participated projects of cultural-based urban regeneration, focused on local communities.

Municipal administrations will be the protagonists, with the aim of supporting the enhancement of the offer of cultural and creative activities, in partnership (co-design) with a great range of stakeholders: public and private actors, social institutions, organisations of third sector, communities of inhabitants, cultural associations, and foundations.

Hence a deep inquiry on the readiness of a community to leverage on cultural intervention is an antecedent aspect that offers an explanation on how funds can be successfully allocated. Accordingly, the following questions are leading our study:

- Who are the main actors and what are their powers/responsibilities in the CH safeguard, use and regeneration?
- How do the different positions of the main stakeholders toward interventions on CH develop?
- Are there conflictual positions on interventions in CH?
- As far as the enhancement of small historical Italian towns is concerned, how is a participatory approach ensured by the municipal administration?

To answer the above-mentioned questions, this paper adopts a qualitative approach. It focuses on the paradigmatic case of Urbino, a UNESCO world heritage site whose population and economic status are declining because citizens and businesses are attracted by the lure of higher revenues and better quality of life of nearby cities. Maintaining the vibrancy and the well-being of the community represents a challenge for the local government, which launched a series of initiative under the umbrella project named “Urbino per Bene” (Municipality of Urbino, 2016). Within this broader project and focusing on a specific initiative known as “the Relaunch of the DATA space” (the stables of the Duke Federico da Montefeltro dating back to the Renaissance), the paper reconstructs the premises that activated the community process devoted to create civic wealth putting, together different visions and perspectives on urban regeneration.

## **2 The Framework to reinterpret historical cities regeneration**

In order to explore how to foster urban regeneration several interdisciplinary contributions have addressed their attention on cultural heritage (CH), regarded by scholars and policy-makers as a driver of development—especially for historic cities—and a key element of civic wealth and urban sustainability (Cervello´-Royo et al., 2012; Echter 2015; Nyseth & Sognnæs, 2013; Nocca,2017).

To build our interpretative framework, we combined different streams of research focusing on:

- the context (i.e., regeneration of historic city centres);
- the purpose (i.e., creation of civic wealth);
- the process (i.e., a path for a participatory governance based on context and purpose).

### **2.1 *Regeneration of historic city centres leveraging on CH***

CH includes both tangible culture (material aspects of culture, such as buildings, monuments and objects, e.g., books, works of art and artefacts), natural heritage (e.g., landscape) and intangible culture (non-material aspects, such as folklore, traditions, language and knowledge), which are embodied in social practices and community life (Throsby 1999 and 2003; Blake, 2000).

In recent years, the role of CH role has been extensively recognized, both at the academic and institutional level (UN, 2015; ICOMOS, 2015; Camagni et al., 2020), thus marking a shift towards a holistic, interrelated perspective on CH, which is seen as socially constructed, dynamic and functional. Hence, CH is conceived both as an element and a tool for socio-economic development (UN-Habitat, 2014; CHCfE Consortium, 2015) and an integral element of territorial capital, capable to influence local economic dynamics since “it shapes cultural and psychological attitudes of local communities; represents an important component of local social and identitarian capital; enhances creativity of the local intellectual and artistic milieu” (Camagni et al., 2020:35). Indeed, its conservation and valorisation are at the centre of a lively debate on what – how – whom – it contributes in revitalizing cities, local areas and historical districts (UNESCO, 2008; Murzyn-Kupisz, 2012; Azmi et al., 2021).

Moreover, both the New Urban Agenda (UN, 2016; UNESCO, 2016 and 2018) and the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015) have opened up new avenues to integrate culture into policies for social and economic inclusion and environmental sustainability, resting on the idea that CH and creativity are linked to local places and communities, thus directly and indirectly contributing to a number of targets, particularly SDG 11 (to ‘make cities and human settlements inclusive safe, resilient, and sustainable’).

In this vein, the revitalisation and the social upgrading of historical city centres have become a strong priority and an aspiration of urban policy in all parts of the European continent (Rudokas & Grazuleviciute-Vileniske, 2021).

Historic city centres and historic districts are symbols of the city’s image; above and beyond their own cultural value they fulfil an important mission in modern urban development: they create the identity and the city’s image and are key geographic factors for the local and regional economy (UNESCO, 2008: 9).

The enhancement and regeneration of the historic city centre are considered by many to be an opportunity for sustainable economic development based on the spur of culture and creative industries and sustainable tourism (Sacco, Ferilli, & Blessi, 2014; Sacco, Ghirardi, Tartari & Trimarchi, 2019; Blessi et al., 2016; Ertan & Eğercioğlu, 2016).

A further topic attracting the attention of scholars and politicians is represented by the recovery and resilience of historic small towns (Azmi et al., 2021) included among the World Heritage Sites (WHSs) where the mobilisation of cultural resources for economic

revitalisation could be pivotal for the development of a “culture-based economy” (Amin & Thrift, 2007; Power & Scott, 2004; Rakic & Chambers, 2008).

However, there was no lack of criticism because there is also a risk of abusing “the role of culture and creativity in urban processes to legitimise and even encourage organised forms of appropriation of common symbolic and material resources” (Sacco et al., 2019: 200). Culture-driven gentrification is one example of this type of appropriation (Atkinson & Bridge, 2005; Zukin, Kasinitz, & Chen, 2015).

In this vein the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach proposed by UNESCO (2011 and 2016) and the UN-Habitat New Urban Agenda (2014), suggests that it is possible to integrate CH conservation and socio-economic development of cities (Grefe, 2009) if we consider the urban landscape as an “organism” made of complex characters, and multidimensional inter-relationships (Veldpaus & Pereira Roders, 2014).

## ***2.2 Regeneration of historical villages and towns and creation of civic wealth***

Historical villages and towns that populate Europe have many of the attributes and qualitative elements (e.g., pedestrian zone, restaurants, retail shops) that create a dynamic social and cultural place and make the location a great place dear to the community and capable to attract talent companies. However, many of them suffer from unemployment, disengagement and economic stagnation (Thurley et al., 2015). In particular, Italian historic centres have progressively lost their social and economic attractiveness (Micelli & Pellegrini, 2018). Citizens often moved out to search for jobs and opportunities, following the same trend of companies and institutions searching for more rational and better connected locations. In other cases, citizens left historical quarters because life quality was clashing with large flows of overtourism (Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020). Either the case, cities lose their most valuable resource: the community (Higgings, 2020).

Municipalities and local governments attempted to address these issues using heritage to regenerate towns. However, many initiatives failed because investments focused on restoration only, while social and economic benefits are achieved if wider targets than building conservation, including employment, training and business development are set. Failure of initiatives promoting a sustainable economy that safeguard the tangible and intangible heritage also occurred because they often forgot to put the community at the

centre, while the engagement of the broader community is critical in achieving this vision (Feehan & Zingsheim, 2019).

A promising solution is civic wealth creation, i.e., the creation of social, economic, and communal endowments that benefit local communities and allow these communities to be self-sufficient, therefore generating positive societal change and sustainable impact (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019; Bacq et al., 2020). This type of wealth goes beyond material resources and physical assets of a community to include intangibles such as health, happiness, culture and social justice. It is a wealth created as outcome of local stakeholders' collaboration and takes the form of new or improved local capacity, capabilities, culture, material and immaterial resources that help to find solutions to community problems and bring about change (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004; Haugh, 2005). Following this perspective, communities (people who share place, identity and interests) are actors for societal change and not merely passive beneficiaries (Glynn, 2019). Therefore, communities directly contribute to create real societal impacts (Branzei et al., 2018).

According to this stream of literature, three stakeholders' category shall jointly collaborate: local communities, enterprises and supporters/facilitators (i.e., providers of financial, technical, and political assistance) to create civic wealth. Collaboration is successful only when the different stakeholders intentionally pursue joint interests to achieve positive societal change. If one stakeholder category is not committed because its interests diverge from others' interests or because they are only partially involved, civic wealth is not created, although other positive impacts can still be achieved. The mechanisms or strategies to achieve fruitful collaboration that generate civic wealth are mainly three: engaged participation, collaborative innovation and resource mobilisation (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019). The key actor (or orchestrator) that may initiate the process of civic wealth creation can be any key stakeholder, who is committed to bring about positive societal change or maintain the civic vibrancy of a community. Although, in practice, this stakeholder is usually a public subject.

### ***2.3 A Participatory Governance and a shared vision for culture-led civic wealth***

According to the literature (Sacco, Ghirardi, Tartari, & Trimarchi, 2019) a participatory governance, which involves citizens and stakeholders in the culture-led processes of urban regeneration, is a condition to generate positive and lasting impacts over time.

The cultural regeneration of a territory is achieved, indeed, through a plurality of cultural participative initiatives (PCIs) that involve different stakeholders and unfold over time (Biondi et al., 2020). A single project relating to the investment of contributions for the preservation of cultural heritage will not be sufficient to trigger a virtuous spiral of cultural, social and economic growth and impact on civic wealth. The idea behind this positive spiral is transforming people into “cultural citizen” who, in turn, would nurture culture as an endogenous growth process (Sacco & Segre, 2009).

It is therefore a virtuous growth path that must be activated and nurtured over time and that requires orchestrator (s), usually a public actor. But it can also be a grassroots initiative, in which citizens, members of an association or a community initiate a cultural project for the regeneration of a public space, a district or a historic city center (Aureli, Del Baldo & Demartini, 2020; Demartini et al., 2020). The role of the orchestrator(s) is fundamental in shaping the vision and enabling participation of all relevant stakeholders (Biondi et al., 2020). The starting phase of a culture-led regeneration project is characterised by the orchestrator's vision, which is long-sighted and requires others to be convinced of its aims and merits. Hence, a key issue is to transform the individual visions of single actors and, specifically, their means and ends into a joint understanding. As Della Lucia & Trunfio (2018: 36) argue, “In the creation of a shared vision of urban development, the greatest challenge is to overcome the significant barriers that inevitably arise when a wide variety of stakeholders are involved, all with different backgrounds, power agendas, aims, roles and competencies”.

For this reason, understanding the sharing of the broader strategic vision behind projects for the preservation and reuse of individual heritage assets is fundamental to understand whether or not there is a widespread perception of the value of cultural commons and a cultural project shared by local actors on the enhancement of cultural heritage (Del Baldo & Demartini, 2021).

These last considerations are particularly interesting because they facilitate reflecting on the theme of the renewal of an historical small town thanks to the transfer of tacit and codified knowledge over time among those who, as residents or city users, base their identity on the tangible and intangible cultural heritage left by previous generations (DeMassis et al., 2016; Magistretti et al., 2020).

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1 The case study in brief***

Urbino is a historic city dating back to the fifteenth century located in central Italy (Marche's region). It is a perfect synthesis between landscape and architecture. It represents an urban palimpsest, an example of resilience and transformation, due to the stratification in its historic fabric that allows one to trace different stages of its evolution marked by the supremacy during the Renaissance period. Urbino was the birthplace of the master painter Raphael and attracted some of the most outstanding humanist scholars and artists, eliciting the inclusion of the old city centre into the UNESCO World List of Heritage city in 1999: "Urbino represents a vertex of Renaissance art and architecture, so it has harmoniously adapted to its physical environment and its medieval past, becoming a completely exceptional city".

However, its tourism vocation, held up in particular by the Duke Palace attraction, does not represent the main economic vocation, since the city's economy mainly relies on the University of Urbino (dating back 1506), located in old buildings inside the walls of the city centre, that had about 13,000 enrolled students (in 2019) and generates jobs and other satellite activities (Maggioni 2017). Currently, the student population is almost equivalent to that of the native inhabitants (14,468). Moreover, while only 1000 of them live in the historic centre, the "campus-city" hosts students from different social and geographical backgrounds who populate the classrooms, libraries and laboratories located in the old city centre.

In focusing our attention on a specific urban regeneration project, the so called "Relaunch of DATA space" project, embedded in the UNESCO site management plan, we applied a purposeful sampling technique (Etikan et al., 2016; Patton, 1990). Namely, we aimed to select a project among the different initiatives launched under the umbrella project named "Urbino per Bene", and supported by the Italian Minister for Culture, that: a) was identified as an urban regeneration project for the development of a UNESCO cultural heritage site; b) had received attention and media coverage at the regional level; c) included a considerable number of different initiatives and expected impacts; c) implied the involvement of different stakeholders. The "DATA space" is located in the ancient stables of the Duke Federico da Montefeltro, built by the famous architect Francesco Di Giorgio Martini in the fifteenth century as a part of the nascent Ducal Palace.

The DATA provides an example of a historical and military place converted into a cultural and economic engine. Thanks to the intervention of a prestigious architect Giancarlo De Carlo, in 1998 it was renovated and transformed into an three-storey building, with the intention of making it a multifunctional center (see Table 1) equipped with a library, exhibition spaces and a multimedia study center.

Table 1– DATA’s Laboratory

LAB	Didactic workshops to share experiences and skills: crafts and co-working courses. The Mediateca and the Medialibrary offer a large heritage of books, music, cinema
TÓ	Here you bring items, clothes and furniture to exchange. It is a place for seminars, conferences and musical events
TATA	Place where the boys bring their plants, which are entrusted and cared for by real green thumbs.
BLABLA	Tandem space in which to learn a foreign language by conversing with a native speaker partner. In addition, the bistro serves as a meeting place.
"Bring a Book" Library	The goal is to create a library through the contribution of the bearer of a book. The DATA must host a space dedicated to reading.
LÍ-LÁ:	Renters and owners can post their offers
Laboratories	Participatory Urban Planning Lab, Social Lab, Theater Lab, Cinema Lab and Innovation Lab. Ease of use of spaces by associations for organizing initiatives and events.
GNAM:	A free space to bring, taste, share and buy the typical dish of the local are

The functional re-qualification and re-functionalization Executive Project was led by the University department of Communication Sciences, supported during the experimental phase by a Business Angel incubator (BpAngel Association) and partnered by several local institutions and schools as follows: ISIA- the Higher Education in graphic design and visual communication located in Urbino, University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Ca' Romanino Foundation, The Artistic High School of Urbino, National Institute of Bioarchitecture. The amount of the financial provision for the project was one hundred and fifty thousand euros.

Besides being a place dedicated to fun, culture, relaxation, eating out and art, DATA also hosts business meetings among local companies to favour business matching. It is also a place aimed at entrepreneurial stimulus, where tests are carried out for its possible use by local companies (see Table 1).

### 3.2. Information collection and analysis

Information were obtained from six semi-structured interviews with key representatives of the main institutions involved in the DATA project, namely the following: the prior

Councilor of the Municipality of Urbino appointed for the city planning and, currently, for Tourism; a consultant for public communication of the city Council; three representatives of the local art schools involved in the project (i.e., ISIA- the Higher Education in graphic design and visual communication; the Academy of fine arts; the Artistic high school of Urbino); the local representative of the Trade association of crafts and small businesses.

Further four unstructured interviews regarded the Rector of Urbino University and the University delegate to the third mission; an architect from the city planning office of the Municipality, responsible for urban regeneration, who also dealt with the drafting of the UNESCO site management plan; the CEO of the Business Angel incubator appointed by the Municipality to support the most promising business ideas, which emerged within the Labs organized at “the DATA space”.

In our interviews, the DATA project opened a discussion on the role of CH in the city of Urbino. Hence, the focus moved from the new functions attributed to the DATA space to the vision and strategic plan of the city of Urbino.

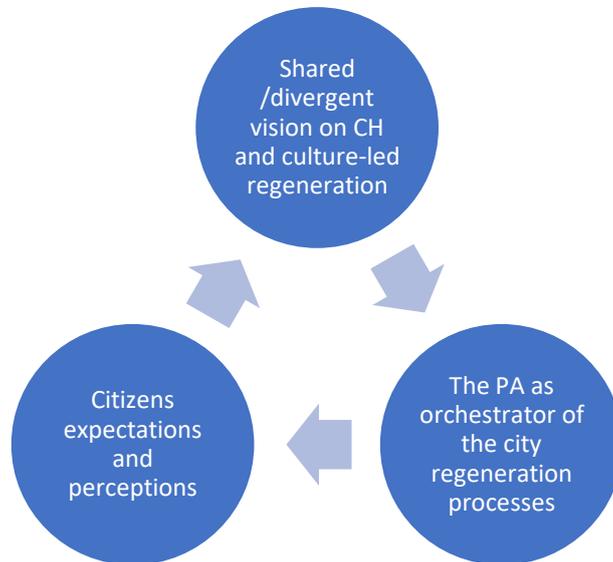
Insightful information was also obtained from a previous survey launched by the Municipality under the broader project “Urbino per Bene”, based on semi-structured questionnaires and interviews addressed to Urbino citizens, tourists and university students. Additional information was extracted from the analysis of public documents such as the municipality website, public speeches and the city strategic plan.

All the conversations were recorded, and notes taken during the meeting formed the basis to write more extensive reports at a later time. In our analysis, we found the use of excerpts highly worthwhile, as they draw attention to the interviewees’ perceptions. On a regular basis, the team members shared the outcomes of the interviews during face-to-face meetings and teleconferences to discuss questions arising from the empirical investigation and identify the main features of the observed phenomenon.

#### **4 Findings and discussion**

Findings from interviews reveal divergences of vision, resistance and even political tensions. In attempting to understand these dynamics, the interrelated aspects depicted in Figure 1 and emerging from our study, are discussed in the reminder.

Figure 1-Refinement of selected concepts



#### ***4.1. The strategic vision on CH and culture-led regeneration projects***

Starting from the analysis of the purposes of the DATA project, different visions of city regeneration emerged from the interviews.

From the point of view of the former Councilor for the city planning who acted as the orchestrator of the DATA project, this latter initiative in itself represents a way to activate a catalytic process of the energies present in the territory. *“Experimenting with the DATA possibilities of use - letting an old space to live and living the space to make it alive and trigger ideas, energies, relationships and contaminations among different actors: youths, schools and university students, entrepreneurs, artists, etc.- made it possible to verify the concrete feasibility of the cultural, economic, tourist revitalization project, leveraging local excellence”*. From his words, as well as from the interviews conducted with other economic actors, a predefined conception of the city’s vocation does not emerge, but rather the awareness of the existence of cultural heritage and knowledge that can be recombined and revitalized through experimentation. *“The co-working activity has already generated a start-up that aims to market local traditional foods with the “Sapori del Duca-Flavours of the Duke” brand. The start-up was born and survived in the context of DATA in collaboration with BP Cube which acts as an incubator”*.

On the other hand, representatives of local art schools express a vision of regeneration of the territory more anchored to the enhancement of the exceptional nature of its cultural heritage. Although the cultural heritage of Urbino, recognized all over the world, dates back to the Renaissance period, they believe that an important example of revitalization took place in the 900s, thanks to great men of culture (including Italian writers such as Volponi, Luzi, Parronchi and even the Noble Prize Ungaretti; scholars such as Carlo Bo and internationally renowned architects such as De Carlo) who have been able to appreciate and enhance the city, seen as an example of beauty and culture. In this perspective, the words of the Director of the Academy of fine arts are exemplary: “*the historic center of Urbino must rediscover its own identity and express a new renaissance, based on the principles of Humanism*”. Consistently, the DATA project should be “a space *Devoted to Ars (Latin word that stands for talent/genius) and Techne (ancient Greek word for know-how)*”.

The conception underlying the new functions to be attributed to heritage assets is, therefore, that of offering spaces to develop new technologies and skills for arts. “*A fluid space, a laboratory that recalls the humanistic conception of the knowledge of the enlightened Cortegiano, artist, scientist and scholar at the Duke's court*”. The renewal of the city must therefore focus on the enhancement of art, beauty and quality of life.

In summary, the historical legacy is an important lever for the renewal of Urbino according to all our interviewees, but its enhancement is conceived differently. However, without a common and concerted vision on the overall regeneration project of the city, the risk is to remain at the level of individual initiatives that disperse potential of innovation.

#### ***4.2. The stakeholders/citizens expectations and perceptions of the PA action***

Findings from the interviews revealed different visions of the city of Urbino and how the local government guides the city development. Visions are linked to the different interests and needs of each stakeholder category. For example, on one hand, entrepreneurs complain that “*the culture and practices of Urbino have remained unchanged over the years*” while there are grand societal challenges to face; “*Urbino is a place of dreams, it does not innovate, politics does not think about the future*”. On the other hand, representatives of local art schools indicate that Urbino is famous because of its artistic heritage, dating back to the Renaissance time but also to the recent artistic graphic design

movement of early 900s. Therefore, Urbino's future shall be based on its physical cultural artefacts and artistic spirit: *"public investments should be devoted to the creation of libraries, museums and activities that can employ young people and artists, so that they will not leave the city after the degree.....investments should also focus on aesthetic education of small traders, entrepreneurs and inhabitants that offer or ask for services that are in sharp contrast with the artistic beauty of the city"*.

Despite such differences, common bonds, attachment to the legacy of the place, and proud of belonging to an ancient and important city of the Italian history were considered strong enough to raise active collaboration from different stakeholders around a specific goal: making a public space named DATA a lively place where the regeneration of the city could start. The local municipality identified the desire for city regeneration as a shared interest capable to activate collaboration and generate change. The DATA project was born *"to serve as a common place to bring the energies of the territory and convey them to sustain the economic, cultural and touristic revitalization of the city"* as reported by the Councillor for Tourism. The local municipality was actually the orchestrator that initiated the public debate and organized meetings on the usage of DATA and it was the entity that allocated funds to this project. Discussions and great participation in meetings seemed promising. One year of experimentation in using the three floors of DATA to organize events, exhibitions, public meetings and open a co-working space for start-uppers, a library, a showroom of local products and a bistro also seemed successful in its attempt to attract artists, inhabitants, entrepreneurs and tourists. However, as reported by one interviewed *"the DATA project is still a work in progress....After one year of experimentation the project stops and it is not clear the vision of the place"*. Most importantly, the project did not develop capabilities in the community useful to continue creating civic wealth. The civic vibrancy given by the encounter of inhabitants, artists, students and entrepreneurs in the DATA space stopped very soon. One key strategy was partially missing: the engagement of all stakeholder categories. While the participation of supporters (i.e., the local municipality) was clear and demonstrated by the commitment in supplying financial and human resources and institutional endorsement to the project, community members and enterprises moderately contributed. Limited participation of students and inhabitants did not favour community empowerment and poor involvement of businesses did not favour the development of effective and long-lasting entrepreneurial solutions that can nurture the regeneration of a city after the stop of public funding (Young, 2006).

Strong communication and public meetings with citizens promising a participatory decision-making process in designing the uses of the DATA space generated an initial phase of enthusiasm and resource mobilization. Besides the restored building of the DATA, volunteers, professional networks and personal relationships were devoted to the project and contributed as material and immaterial resources to civic wealth creation by building cohesiveness and strengthening mutual interactions among stakeholders. But except a few cases, the sharing of ideas, knowledge and expertise in such meetings did not fully translated into practice with concrete collaborative innovations outcomes.

#### ***4.3. The PA as orchestrator of the city regeneration processes***

The strategic plan of the city (Municipality of Urbino, 2016) represented a first attempt to directly involve multiple actors and implement a HUL (UNESCO, 2011) approach to the urban regeneration project of the city centre, thus changing the top-down approach that was prevailing in the previous years when the PA acted more as a “patron of the heritage”. In this vein, the project “Urbino per bene” was conceived as a tool useful to trigger and improve dialogue with citizens and city users and collect new and fresh insights (i.e., by addressing attention to the perceptions and perspectives of youth, tourists, city users and inhabitants of the centre). Hence, the results obtained from the questionnaire administered in early 2018 to students, tourists and permanent inhabitants (Del Baldo & Demartini, 2021) allowed the municipality to understand the coexistence of different and sometime conflicting viewpoints, needs and perceptions among city users, and collect suggestions to trigger innovative ideas to make the historical centre more attracting, and to engage citizens (included youth) in the renewal and regeneration of the cultural and socio-economic fabric. (Sacco & Segre, 2009).

The local PA played a key role in initiating collaborative actions, aimed to fostering dialogue and facilitate the composition of single “voices” and views, eliciting several projects, and among them, launched the DATA project. From the municipality perspective “*the DATA project represents an experimentation to learn how to better involve citizens in the protection and revitalization of the site*”. As the city planning councillor states “*DATA was -born as a common place to bring the energies of the territory and represented a space for hosting and sharing, and a useful laboratory to trigger ideas, relationships and contaminations among different actors: youths, schools and university students,*

*entrepreneurs, artists, and other city users. The experience made it possible to verify the concrete feasibility of the cultural, economic, tourist revitalization project, leveraging local excellence*". Hence, drawing from the PA point of view, it could be considered as a first initiative of a regeneration path embedded in the strategic plan of the city and in the UNESCO management plan.

The local PA played a key role acting as a stimulator in starting collaborative actions and supporting the process of involvement and awareness of the various communities and city users and initiated a participatory governance approach (Biondi et al., 2019). Its role was similar to that of "an orchestrator" - that entails gathering together diverse actors, ranging from public to private, industrial associations, local communities, as well as citizens (Abraham & Platteau, 2004; Della Lucia & Trunfio, 2018; Farinosi et al., 2018). *"The current urban regeneration project requires a great amount of financial resources; to complete it, new funding is needed. Private actors (i.e., entrepreneurs, associations, and citizens) begin to move. All this in line with the UNESCO management plan approved in 2013 which contemplates public-private synergies"*.

However, the PA is still at an initial step, that requires to progress and we deem that the role of PA was rather that of a stimulator and a participatory governance approach is still in its infancy stage (Abraham & Platteau, 2004; Sacco et al., 2014; Della Lucia & Trunfio, 2018; Farinosi et al., 2018). Other interviewees, point out that different visions exist about the value they attributed to CH in driving the socio-cultural and economic regeneration of the place. Such visions mirror and underpin different interests and expectations among stakeholders on the quality of life in a historic center like Urbino and the perspective of urban revitalization expressed by different communities with "different souls".

## **5 Conclusions**

The case study analyzed revealed that culture and artistic knowledge and capabilities that belong to the tradition of a city rich in heritage can be the lever of innovation and boost civic wealth. Searching the past for looking to the future is however a difficult task.

Empirical data allowed to identify the main challenges that a city manager has to face: attract talent, create jobs and trigger the spur of new ventures; establish spaces for artists and cultural activities; preserve and promote local know-how; develop a strategy to attract SMEs belonging to the cultural and creative sector. Moreover, it shows the relevance of

involvement of multiple stakeholders in societal change initiatives and the importance of managing assets through public-private cooperation. However, it also identifies the missing elements that hindered the city to continue exploiting its potential related to cultural heritage (e.g., absence of a financing ecosystem available for the creative and cultural sector, scarcity of resources). Lastly, the paper highlights the power of participatory cultural initiatives (Biondi et al., 2020) be used for the preservation, restoration and revitalization of physical heritage assets (Dameri & Moggi, 2019).

The practical implications of our research are as it follows.

Preserving the city's identity while enhancing and revitalizing traditional knowledge is a challenge for policy makers, called to experience innovative, collaborative and circular systemic approach for adaptive reuse of historic city centres by implementing a repertoire of successful heritage-led regeneration initiatives. Additional issues may affect historical World Heritage sites (WHS) where local communities and local people's attitudes towards conservation of the cultural environment and a WHS status can diverge (Jimura, 2011). In such contexts administrations and inhabitants have a dual challenge: "on the one hand the urban fabric has to be preserved; on the other, support must be given to the vitality of the city's cultural heritage" (UNESCO, 2008:10). The sole preservation of buildings and monuments cannot save historic cities and could generate a "museum" phenomenon (elitist revitalization), thus freezing any development opportunities and hindering social revitalization.

Our findings reveal that the PA is still tackling with an initial step that requires to progress the efforts in stimulating sharing and participation in the current review of the strategic plan of the city and the UNESCO management plan. Therefore, we deem that the role that the PA can play with reference to initiatives aimed to leverage cultural heritage as an engine of development of Urbino historical center should be conceived as flexible and dynamic in nature, being that the role of orchestrator should be merged (or transformed into) that of a mediator of interest.

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<sup>1</sup> Further bibliography (full list of reference) is available on request.

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