



10. NAPLES

Jonathan Pratschke, Lucia Cavola and Enrica Morlicchio

Naples – the industrial capital of Southern Italy until the end of the 1980s – is attributable, at least in part, to the way in which the city condenses aspects of Southern European society. At the same time, its specificities – its rich history, creativity and cultural vibrancy, but also its widespread poverty, political clientelism and organized crime – make it a rather extreme case, and one which is particularly relevant to the study of social polarisation. During the 1990s, as Moulaert and colleagues were theorising the links between social needs and social innovations and the challenges that the latter pose for governance, the Neapolitan case provided an opportunity to assess the resulting ideas in a context characterized by such contrasting trends.

These themes and issues were explored in the course of a series of European projects, including SINGOCOM and URSPIC. SINGOCOM included a detailed analysis of the Quartieri Spagnoli and the Piazziamoci network in Scampia (Moulaert, 2007), whilst URSPIC studied the development of a new business district in an ex-industrial area (Moulaert and Swyngedouw, 1999). These projects shed considerable light on the socio-spatial dynamics that characterized social and economic development in the centre, in deprived peripheral housing estates and ex-industrial sites.

This comparative research generated a number of interesting findings. It showed that the pronounced forms of social and spatial polarisation observed in Naples are driven by rather different mechanisms to those found in Northern Europe. Secondly, it revealed that large-scale urban development projects – where these occur – are driven less by neoliberal policy prescriptions than by “traditional” corporatist interests. Thirdly, socially innovative projects in Naples tend to take shape largely outside and in opposition to the local state. Fourthly, there is a relatively extensive network of voluntary bodies which play an important role in tackling social exclusion at neighbourhood level. Finally, the local state is embedded in particularistic forms of interest representation which generally preclude popular participation.

These results focus attention on the role of power and governance systems in facilitating or obstructing innovative ways of satisfying social needs. A 2007 article draws together these strands with an aim to theorize the mechanisms underlying social exclusion in European cities using a unitary framework (Moulaert et al., 2007c). It shows that the same factors are crucial in all cities, although they can function in different ways and affect different groups. In Naples, reliance on informal family and friendship networks, informal or illegal (but not necessarily criminal) activities and neighbourhood life generate quite a conservative model of self-reliance, characterized by lack of trust in external institutions. Pratschke and Morlicchio (2012) make similar arguments in their analysis of social polarisation in European cities, carried out as part of the SOCIAL POLIS (<http://socialpolis.eu>) project.

The end result is a cyclical pattern in which bottom-up social innovation is widespread in Naples, but largely confined to specific contexts due to the shortage of resources and the unresponsiveness of the political and administrative systems. Rather than feeding into a virtuous cycle of reform and social learning, innovative actions often become part of a vicious cycle of social isolation and adaptation. The weakness of demand for labour across the city and its segregated and polarized nature make it difficult for individuals from lower-class backgrounds to get ahead by studying, and it is equally difficult to achieve results by protesting. Spontaneous political mobilisations – such as the long-lived *organized unemployed* movement – tend to degenerate, becoming dependent upon political patronage and ad hoc forms of assistance.

Although Moulaert et al., (2007c) do not reach firm conclusions regarding potential solutions, they make several useful observations. Firstly, they emphasize the importance

of spatial scale and the need to integrate different levels of analysis. This appeal to integrated and scale-sensitive approaches is associated with an allegiance to macro-level political economy perspectives as well as micro-level studies of innovation and participation. In the Neapolitan context, this suggests that localized forms of social innovation cannot lead to sustainable ways of satisfying basic needs unless they are accompanied by innovative policies, mobilisation and collective participation at higher scales. This implies that the mutually reinforcing structures which reproduce poverty and social exclusion in European cities require an integrated and *global* response. ◀