

Article

Suburban Landscape and Public Housing: The Post-Occupancy Evaluation as a Tool for Built Environment Regeneration: A Case Study in the City of Naples, Italy

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Abstract: The European Landscape Convention (ELC) acknowledges that the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere, in urban areas and the countryside, in degraded areas as well as higher quality areas and recognized as being of outstanding beauty, as well as in everyday areas. Nowadays, many suburbs, arisen as public housing neighborhoods and originally located in peri-urban areas, in addition to constituting a substantial part of the built heritage, are increasingly being configured as new strategic areas, redefining the daily landscape of its users. With the post-occupancy evaluation method (POE), it is possible to assess several aspects of the performance of buildings or open spaces from the users’ perspective, taking into consideration objective and subjective factors. It is a multi-method approach, combining interviews, customer satisfaction surveys, behavioral observation, etc. With this perspective, the article, dealing with the ‘Parco dei Murales’, which is a complex of public housing localized in the Ponticelli suburb in the city of Naples (Italy), aims to understand the visual and qualitative perception of the suburban landscape in the light of the transformation processes that have occurred in recent years. For this purpose, starting from the results of the first application of a user satisfaction survey, the post occupancy evaluation has been applied, analyzing the functional, social, and perceptual attributes of the open spaces of the park.



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1. Introduction

The European Landscape Convention (ELC, 2000) defines landscape as an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. The landscape is recognized as an important part of the quality of life of people everywhere, in urban areas and the countryside, in degraded areas as well as areas of high quality, and in areas recognized as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas [1]. The Convention, therefore, according to a comprehensive approach, involves the entire territory and covers natural, rural, urban, peri-urban, and suburban areas. With specific reference to ‘peri-urban’ and ‘suburban’ terms, these are used by the ELC to refer to such ‘intermediate categories’ that are between urban and rural, both conceptually and spatially. In any case the terms indicate ‘places where people are key components: they are lived-in environments. The majority of peri-urban areas are on the fringe of established urban areas, but they may also be clusters of residential

development within rural landscapes. Peri-urban areas are most frequently an output of the process of sub-urbanization or urban sprawl' [2]. More generally, from a global perspective, this form of landscape has, in every language, its own specific term: outskirts, suburb, *banlieue*, hinterland, but also neighborhood, edge city, and, with more dramatic accents, *bidonville*, *favelas*, etc. Also, if any classification of the peripheral space of the metropolis is controversial [3], international scientific research has addressed this subject from different perspectives. From a European perspective, and with specific reference to 'suburb', and in accordance with Hesse and Siedentop [4], since the 1960s, the European urban landscape has been deeply transformed by forces of residential and economic de-concentration. The suburbanization of population and economic activity is still a general and powerful characteristic of urban restructuring in continental Europe.

Assuming 'the *typology* definition', as suggested by Forsyth [5], the commonly used subset of typologies conceptualizes suburbs in terms of 'eras of building'. In Italy, as in Europe, many suburbs arose as public housing neighborhoods after the end of the Second World War. A milestone was Law 167/1962, which instituted the Zonal Plans for Economic Public Housing—PEEP—through which much of the public housings on the outskirts of several Italian cities was realized. This gave rise to peripheral areas that are densely populated and characterized by the phenomena of degradation, marginality, social disease, insecurity, and poverty. The causes are multiple, including first of all, the planning choices (the idea of a city—neighborhood that is self-sufficient), together with high-density settlements, bad quality of construction, absolute lack of maintenance, the absence of community facilities, social degradation, insecurity, etc. The basic solution strategy, moreover, practiced across Europe is urban regeneration [6,7] through programs aiming to improve the social, economic, and physical conditions of these spaces. In Italy, an integrated approach to the regeneration of public housing stock has emerged in disadvantaged neighborhoods since the 1990s, through a series of physical and socio-economic regeneration programs financed with EU funds (URBAN I 1994–1999; URBAN II 2000–2008). Furthermore, additional programs, including the so-called 'complex programs' promoted by the Minister of Public Works ('Programmi di Recupero Urbano', 'Programmi di Riqualificazione Urbana', 'Contratti di Quartiere', 'PRUSST') were also implemented [8]. Most recently, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021), as part of the Next Generation EU program, allocates resources for interventions that are promoted by Metropolitan Cities and aims at urban regeneration and re-functionalization of the existing building heritage, with particular attention to the suburbs.

In accordance with Boeri e Longo [9], 'nowadays, the redevelopment of suburban areas is not limited to just their physical or environmental recovery; it also consists in their overall regeneration, through actions that have an impact not only on the architectural, urban, technological and economical fields, but also on the social and relational ones'. The same concept of urban regeneration more and more concerns 'socio-cultural interventions aimed to improve the general living conditions of territories and its inhabitants, becoming important, particularly in the context of spatial/urban policies, to think about forms of citizen involvement through which their needs are listened and their skills enhanced' [10,11]. Worldwide, urban governments have been increasingly utilizing the community-based participatory approach to build collaborative decision-making processes [12,13] for regenerative interventions in less-advantaged urban contexts by means of several innovative methods, such as co-design, co-creation, and collaborative platforms [14–17]. In these contexts, often characterized by culture-led initiatives [18,19], public art is used 'as a place-making device to drive urban regeneration and boost social capital' [20]. According to Zhou et al. [21] 'Public art is not only about making a place more beautiful or adding decoration; it addresses pressing social problems, gives the voiceless a voice, and facilitates

social transformation. The artists who employ this approach deal with environmental justice, urban renewal, community empowerment, and cultural identity. They use their works as tools for critical discussions and podiums to launch community actions’.

From this perspective, ‘urban creativity’, understood as graffiti writing, street art, and new muralism [22], represents one of the powerful activities ‘regarding the accessibility of a politically symbolic or pure abstract expression of the artist to the public’ [23]. Increasingly developed in the suburbs of major cities, urban creativity allows artists and communities to seek diverse ways to express their identity and reclaim often neglected spaces [24].

Regeneration processes, more than being governed by the public administration, have frequently found efficacious ‘activators’ in spontaneous practices of ‘urban creativity’ [10], with meaningful impacts of a social nature [25] and, sometimes, also economic in nature [26]. Located in positions that, in the meantime, have become strategic for accessibility and are proximal to important metropolitan facilities and new services, commercial and leisure attractors, these suburbs, in addition to constituting a substantial part of the ‘built heritage’ - an essential dimension of the ‘urban sustainability’ [25]—thanks to practices such as street art, have become a relevant and recognizable component of contemporary landscapes, redefining the daily landscape of its users. Street art has spread almost everywhere recently, with different impacts in relation to the contexts where it has been carried out, sometimes even provoking ‘tensions and contradictions that challenge policymakers, owners, communities, and those involved in their creation’ [26].

Nevertheless, at an international level, several cases have demonstrated how this form of urban art can activate artistic requalification and social regeneration, playing a meaningful role in creative placemaking and tactical urbanism [27]. In the U.S.A., where street art emerged in New York City in the 1960s, one of the most successful examples is Philadelphia, nowadays recognizable as the City of Murals thanks to Philadelphia’s art program [28]. Other remarkable street art cities are Miami, Atlanta, and Toronto in Canada, and the South American painting powerhouse cities of Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Rio de Janeiro [29]. In Europe, the development of street art [30,31] is part of an old tradition of expression in public spaces, with significant examples of ‘street art capitals’ like Berlin or Lisbon. Also, in the UK, street art has its strongholds, such as London with the ‘Banksy effect’ [32], or Belfast, with its political murals [33]. In Italy, the phenomenon of street art mostly emerged on the outskirts of metropolitan cities, where meaningful impacts of a social nature [34] and, sometimes also, an economic nature [35] have been found. The intention of several Italian municipalities to recognize the value of street art becomes evident where this form of art has been inserted into institutional programs, often also with resource investments [36].

According to the principles of the European Landscape Convention, knowledge of these specific landscapes necessitates the study of their location, their extent, and their tangible characteristics, integrated by an analysis and evaluation of their intangible aspects. That is their qualities, which are the result of public perception and social representations. Specifically, landscape ‘assessment’ aims to ‘highlight the particular values assigned to landscapes by the interested parties and the population concerned’ (art.6). To assess the public perception of the landscape, post-occupancy evaluation (POE) is one of the approaches suggested, as in the recent report (2022) ‘Thoughts and proposals for the implementation of the Council of Europe Landscape Convention’ [37].

Defined by Preiser et al. [38] as ‘the process of evaluating buildings in a systematic and rigorous manner after they have been built and occupied for some time’, post-occupancy evaluation, as has been evolving in the last several decades [39], has broadened its scope and methodologies. Results from a POE can be used to improve not only the specific buildings being assessed but also to advance the overall knowledge about users’ expectations and

needs [40]. While its application in the performance of the built environment has spread significantly worldwide, the literature that deals with post-occupancy evaluation on a large scale, such as in neighborhoods, public spaces, or landscape architecture [41–43], is still relatively ‘meager’. As Churchman and Ginosar ([43], p. 267) highlighted at the end of the 1990s, ‘the literature which deals with the post-occupancy evaluation of neighborhoods is relatively meager when compared with the literature on the evaluation of more limited and more easily defined environments, such as student dormitories, public institutions, such as hospitals or schools, and office environments, or open spaces such as play areas and parks’. In accordance with Boarin et al. [40], there is no established standard or guideline for the application of POEs at large scale. There exist diverse approaches that can be followed and POEs are usually developed according to the specific requirements of each context. The present article is aimed at researching how the suburban landscape is experienced by its users. A POE was carried out to verify the level of user satisfaction regarding some interventions of street art created at a public housing complex, the Parco Merola, located in the Ponticelli suburb, in the city of Naples (Italy). Several works created over the years were conceived as part of a public art project that aimed at the social and cultural regeneration of the suburb. The territorial context and the study area are described in Section 2, with an in-depth explanation of the INWARD project. The third section, starting from the results of the first application of the POE at the building scale, presents the approach applied at the neighborhood scale, the results, and the discussion.

2. Material and Methods

2.1. The Territorial Context

Ponticelli is an eastern suburb in the city of Naples, Southern Italy, with an approximate population of 50,000 inhabitants. Together with the neighborhoods of Barra and San Giovanni a Teduccio, it is part of the VI Municipalities of the city. It is the fourth most populated suburb of the Neapolitan city, and it is characterized by a very high level of unemployment and school dropouts. The suburb is composed of an ancient agricultural farmhouse with small rural aggregates surrounding it and large heterogeneous residential parts, which is mainly the result of a policy of massive public housing interventions developed continuously from the 1950s to the present day (Figure 1). It is, therefore, a predominantly public housing suburb that is served by urban highways and community facilities, which are considerably lower in number than the number of inhabitants. Although it hosts schools of all educational levels, it has only one municipal library. There are two public hospitals in the area, and the urban zone is connected to the city center and neighboring Vesuvian towns by the ‘Circumvesuviana’ railway service. Public green spaces are limited to the public parks ‘Parco Fratelli De Filippo’ and ‘Parco De Simone’, both of which are not fully accessible and poorly equipped for the local community. The urban landscape is, thus, mainly ‘grey’, dominated by the reinforced concrete buildings of public housing. One of these is the Parco Merola, built in the early 1980s according to the provisions of the ‘PSER’ (‘Programma Straordinario di Edilizia Residenziale’ of Naples 1980–1985) to face the housing emergency following the earthquake that occurred in 1980s, with the allocation of the houses in 1997 [44]. Currently, the owner of the entire complex and land is the Municipality of Naples. The residential complex consists of four buildings. Three of the residential buildings are all the same height. They are placed along straight perpendicular axes, visually creating the effect of an open courtyard on one side. The fourth taller building is located at a right angle to the courtyard (Figure 2a). Each building is composed of four modules that are easily identifiable by a single staircase-elevator shaft. There are two flats on each floor that are systematically repeated. The complex has 160 residences, housing approximately 800 people [45].



Figure 1. Localization of the Ponticelli suburb in relation to the Metropolitan City of Naples and the Parco Merola in relation to the Ponticelli suburb (source: authors' elaboration from Google Earth satellite images).

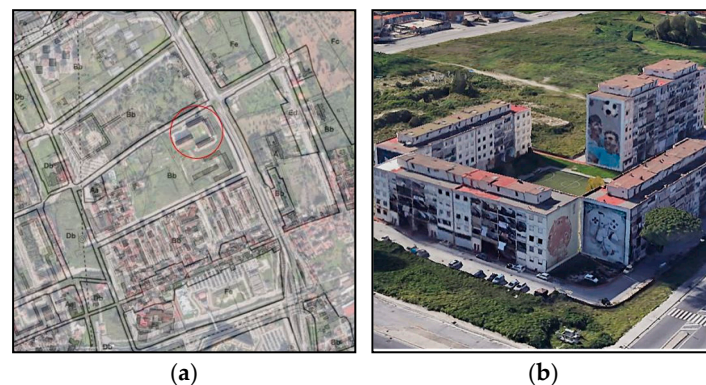


Figure 2. (a) Geographical framework—overlay of the satellite image from Google Earth and the draft of the general land use plan variant, showing the location of Parco Merola in the red circle (source: authors' elaboration); (b) satellite image of Parco Merola from Google Earth.

Since 2015, thanks to an idea of the Association Artèteca-INWARD (International Network on Writing Art Research and Development), the residential park has become an urban canvas, known as the 'Parco dei Murales'. Buildings characterized by physical and social degradation are recovering an identity due to the powerful social change of urban creativity (Figure 2b).

The social significance of the huge paintings brightening up the façades, with the strong identity that the artists have restored to the complex, has attracted the attention of tourists, researchers, artists, and journalists. In addition, the strategic location—less than 1 km from the new hospital complex 'Ospedale del Mare'—could contribute to making the residential complex more attractive, thus prompting an improvement and redevelopment of the entire urban context, which is currently degraded like other Neapolitan suburban contexts. Regarding the real estate market in the Ponticelli area, it is not possible to verify the correlation between murals and the increase in market values of dwellings because these are public housing properties. However, other types of economic impacts can be observed. First, the media attention on 'Parco dei Murales' made it more attractive, so a variety of street art tours were launched, along with several television and film productions. Naples International Airport has included the Parco Merola among the city's tourist attractions. The local administration became more sensitive to the needs of the suburbs, approving in

2015 the resolution for the functional recovery of the football field. At the same time, urban creative workshops and a project called ‘Androni Colorati’ were activated in the park, involving younger users in the readjustment of the buildings’ internal common spaces. Cases like this, together with other emblematic local examples, such as Felice Pignataro’s work in Scampia [46], which is a northern neighborhood of Naples, and Riccardo Dalisi’s work in the historic city center of Naples [47], prove how urban creativity can contribute to the regeneration of the built environment, promoting social sustainability. It can be regarded as a rehabilitation tool and as an added value that can improve urban places thanks to its extraordinary communicative power. From an estimative and evaluative point of view, more appropriate methodological approaches are essential to better capture, measure, and qualify the added value of urban creativity in its multiple dimensions [25].

2.2. Study Area

The ‘Parco dei Murales’ is an artistic redevelopment and social regeneration program conceived and produced by the INWARD National Observatory on Urban Creativity¹ and carried out in collaboration with the local community in the residential complex of East Naples known as Parco Merola. Initially born in 2015, not yet as a fully structured program, out of the need to create the first mural artwork in Naples on the themes of anti-racism², it developed over the following years and gained considerable success, including media attention, by 2018, with the completion of the eighth and final large-scale mural³. The transition from the first to the second and then to the third intervention gradually led to the development of a true socio-cultural program, within the same framework. The underlying methodological structure of the various activities also became increasingly evident. Furthermore, in alignment with similar initiatives occurring in other large and small cities across Italy, and in accordance with an initial ministerial provision, the collection of mural works at the Parco Merola has gained recognition as a ‘territorial system of urban creativity’⁴. The actions that generate the typical forms of urban creative phenomena often carry both denotative and connotative elements. In some cases, these elements are so intrinsic that, when such interventions originate in peripheral contexts with specific socio-economic and cultural characteristics, similar actions and forms will communicate the essence of those contexts even beyond their physical boundaries. Therefore, the influence of the context on the perception of an expressive act extends beyond its mere localization⁵. In the case of the ‘Parco dei Murales’, the local community played a significant role, being both the seed and the product of that specific socio-urban context. This context led to the question being raised by the community to the operators from INWARD on-site to carry out the planned activities: ‘why paint a murales when there is a lack of basic support and services for the community?’.

An uncertain and marginal space may be more interesting for processes of redefinition and development [49]. As scholar Rosalyn Deutsche argues, in the political practice of public art as democratic art, public space becomes a social space. Thus, the function of public art is to either construct or disrupt public space [50]. Indeed, the idea of creating new places of artistic and cultural interest, particularly in neighborhoods with little or no cultural attraction and, conversely, affected by severe educational poverty, was (and still is) both commendable and actively practiced. The peripheries are parts of the city that are built piece by piece, often by the inhabitants themselves, because it is precisely a certain, sometimes non-linear, use of this urban space that is subject to change. Urban planners have studied and optimized it for years, from a physical and environmental perspective, but only now, after years of theorizing, are we starting to work on the psychological, cultural, legal, and religious dimensions of space as aspects of an ecological space [51]. Activating mechanisms of participation and fields of micro-political action is not, however, a simple

task, although numerous positive outcomes are visible in various Italian contexts, still within the framework of urban creativity, with cultural production that is not imposed from above but is instead shared and participatory.

In the specific case of the ‘Parco dei Murales’, the first weeks of work in the area were characterized by many informal moments of interaction with the community. Initially, it was not easy to overcome the mistrust of some residents (especially adults), but constant engagement proved crucial for the operators involved. What emerged from this interaction, through several surveys, can be summarized as a general lack of trust within the community—in itself, in institutions, and in the future. The residents of Ponticelli expressed, through external interest, the need for a listening ear in a neighborhood where opportunities for existence had become increasingly scarce and where coexistence with one other had been complex, almost unimaginable. Having identified the difficulty in accessing spaces dedicated to recreational and leisure activities, the chronic lack of indoor gathering spaces, and the estimated rate of school dropout in the area, INWARD sought to address the concept of marginality by intervening in a site considered unsuitable, specifically through artistic experience and social engagement. The approach gradually took shape, building on previous activities conducted by INWARD in the same territory through the project ‘CUNTO—Creatività Urbana Napoli Territorio Orientale’ (2011), refining three specific and complementary fields of action: art, social, and promotion (Figure 3). The social dimension, structured around workshops and initiatives – whitt some taking place before the artworks were created and others during and after—was animated by numerous social and cultural operators, aiming for an initial understanding, followed by listening and ultimately dialogue with the community. The artistic dimension, on the other hand, distinguishes between the artworks and the artists. The former are the outcome of the primary social process (thematic exploration by operators, identification of critical issues through dialogue between operators and the community, and the empowerment of the community to address these issues). The latter are carefully selected based on their suitability to the socio-urban context, the emerging value, their interest and availability, appropriate style, and their ability to bring a new artistic quality (literally a requalification) to the site. The promotional dimension, lastly, is divided between the attention sought through the media system, with the expected cognitive and attractive outcomes, and the initially unthinkable perspective of guided visits, even tourist-oriented, to the challenging popular site on the periphery.

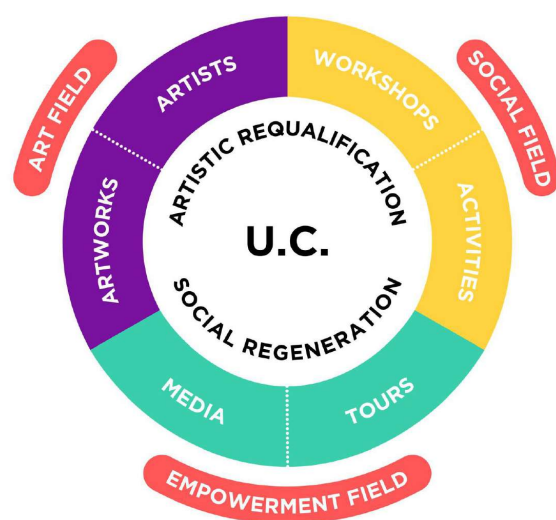


Figure 3. Graphic of the urban creativity program between artistic requalification and social regeneration (source: INWARD).

Ponticelli is one of those neighborhoods that, over time, has lost its original vocation and, for years, has been unable to benefit from significant transformation, as is the case in other similar areas. It is, in many instances, a battleground of opposing efforts, with shifting urban issues in relation to both the context and the community [52]. In such circumstances, urban creative interventions, while not seeking or intending to hide or eliminate the conflicts generated by urban processes [53], often become a tool to mitigate or alienate these problems. The extent to which urban creativity for social purposes has marked the territory and maintained a certain continuity can also be understood through the production of other murals created in the neighborhood around the 'Parco dei Murales'. The desire to enhance this contemporary urban artistic heritage is also rooted in the typical community need for affirmation and distinctiveness. Local administrations that, in cases like this, oversee or, perhaps even indifferently, accompany processes of 'urban regeneration' or 'neighborhood resilience' and discuss them in relation to certain visual and urban phenomena, but fail to implement concrete actions in the affected areas [54], should recognize, along with Adam Cooper, the representative of the 'Creative Industries' at the Greater London Authority, that attention to the value of so-called street art, such as graffiti, street art, and murals, throughout the developmental processes of a 'creative city' must go hand in hand with a deeper understanding of urban culture itself [55].

Starting from the initial modeling of activities at the 'Parco dei Murales', with a functioning, narratable, and perhaps exportable method, numerous meetings and conferences were held, bringing the topic across Italy into public forums to explore this model as a potential scalable tool that could be applied to various territories or urban creativity systems, both in Italy and abroad. Most of the time, the feedback was positive, but the analysis of the results from the entire urban creativity program (2015–2018) also reveals a certain number of failures, primarily due to the repeated difficulty in maintaining the long-term engagement of the resident community. Active community participation is, in fact, crucial for the long-term success of such a program of urban creativity for social purposes. In this regard, Kretzmann and McKnight argue that the lack of ongoing involvement of stakeholders leads clearly to project abandonment, especially when the initiatives are exogenous—introduced and adopted without the community feeling like an active part of the initiative [56]. Impact assessments, for example, which are intended to draw important revisions based on recorded deviations, often fail to consider the complexity of the social contexts in which they operate. Traditional evaluation methodologies may not adequately capture long-term changes, making it difficult to demonstrate the need to continue territorial programs [57]. In the construction of this story, the community plays a crucial role, and as previously mentioned, it has always been at the heart of the program through the activation of six annual workshops and more than twenty initiatives involving, respectively, children aged 5–10 years old and adolescents aged 13–14 years old. With the younger age groups and noting a certain gender disparity in the use of common spaces, the first breakdancing workshop was launched in 2016. It is a hallmark of hip-hop culture, not only as a potential physical, gymnastic, or sporting discipline but, first and foremost, as a means to bring together children aged 6–13. This engagement mechanism also had the advantage of providing continuity, regardless of the completion of the murals. This more frequent and intense relationship with the residents led to the creation of an initial post-project survey that was administered to all the families in the public housing complex.

Among the findings, there was an appreciation for the creation of play-based and creative workshops in response to a lack of local opportunities that were distant from the needs of families. However, it is noteworthy that there are non-profit organizations active in the area that are committed to fighting educational poverty and school dropout. On one hand, the process of regeneration following the program can be considered successful, as

new qualities were added to the blank walls of the public housing. On the other hand, it is also true that the process of regeneration triggered the local community, profoundly altering their own perceptions—both endogenous and, above all, exogenous to the park. The area, as was initially conveyed through word of mouth, had long been known as the ‘park of dirty necks’, a derogatory epithet from which the residents—first and foremost the children aged 10–13, but also the adults—gradually felt relieved, as the artworks began to dominate the urban space and, even more so, the collective critical consciousness, particularly that of the local neighborhood. Undoubtedly, the more positive atmosphere generated by the first two or three murals, replacing initial mistrust, facilitated the development of a unique form of hospitality for this peripheral context: tourist visits. The increasing number of visitors, curious onlookers, journalists, residents, and indeed, tourists to the ‘Parco dei Murales’ led to a more intense and deliberate phase of promotion, culminating in the launch of the first official tours. The recipients of such tours (currently guided and offered by operators from the Universal Civil Service, who are specifically trained for this purpose) come from all over Italy and frequently from abroad. Numerous tours have also been organized for specific events and in collaboration with local associations and organizations (around 50 since 2016). Initially, the mural tours were thought to provide micro-economic support for the younger residents, particularly for those most eager to change their neighborhood. However, the desired success was not always achieved, and it is important to note that many challenges were identified upon completion of the project. The promotional framework, consisting of press releases, guided tours, television coverage, and subsequent film sets, nonetheless facilitated the reconstruction of territorial identity, which continues to show a significant improvement in the pluralistic perception of the neighborhood. The need for belonging and recognition is central to every individual’s life, and even more so in marginalized neighborhoods. Thus, each action can generate a process of identification that may shift from the personal to the collective sphere [58]. Communities can determine the success or failure of a project, and it is only through sincere mediation that they can become its true custodians [49].

As part of the previously mentioned social actions, in addition to the contact workshops—i.e., initiatives designed to ensure continuity in relationships—dialogue with the community has been maintained over the years, not only by INWARD’s managers but also through the constant presence of volunteers from the Universal Civil Service, which was launched in collaboration with the Amesci Foundation as early as 2016. This is one of the few Universal Civil Service programs in Italy dedicated to urban creativity (graffiti writing, street art, and new muralism), which, over the years, has involved 36 volunteers at the Territorial Center for Urban Creativity, which is the operational headquarters of INWARD⁶. The proactive trigger in favor of a local community eager for redemption in its own way and, more importantly, for even the slightest, yet effective, initiative yielded positive results early on during the organization of the unveiling event for the mural by Rosk&Loste. A rap concert, produced by Ceres, marked the first time the park was opened to outsiders, and the residents were willing to embrace them. A second instance of socialization occurred in December 2017. During a tour, a TV report showcased the park more broadly, which caught the attention of a location manager who, in short, would soon bring the filming of several scenes for *Gomorra 3. The Series* to the park⁷. Particularly, those under 30 were recruited as extras for the television series, finding themselves as protagonists on the small screen. Over the following year and beyond, attention to the park increased, and the set was confirmed. Thus, in 2018, the ‘Parco dei Murales’—formerly the ‘park of the dirty necks’—became a film location, entering the catalog of sites registered with the Film Commission of the Campania Region. And finally, there was a celebration. Upon the completion of the eighth and final large mural, colored smoke bombs were set off from the rooftops of the buildings,

colored either brightly or faintly to match the hues of the murals, signaling the end of the program. Among the many guests, the most spectacular presence was that of the children from the 'Coro Mulan' of the 'Ciao Cina' Association, who performed both Neapolitan and Chinese songs in the same courtyard that had hosted numerous inclusion activities. This was a significant encounter between different cultures, aimed at promoting exchange and integration between communities that otherwise might never have met. In the same vein, and even more intensely, as if to close the circle, a visit from the children of the Roma camp in Barra, a nearby neighborhood district, was organized, accompanied by the carers and educators from the NeA association. Greeted at the entrance by the quiet smile of the young Roma girl from the first mural, the Roma children naturally made their way into the central space, and within minutes, the other kids from the park had already included them in the ongoing games⁸.

3. A First Application of Post-Occupancy Evaluation in the Parco Merola

The post-occupancy evaluation is a practice based on social, psychological, and behavioral research that focuses on user experiences and perceptions of buildings or public spaces [38]. This practice evaluates typological, technological, and performance aspects and can be applied both before and after construction. In 2017, the *Parco Merola* housing complex in Ponticelli was employed to evaluate the housing quality of social and economic housing buildings [45]. The buildings under investigation, considered as a 'public service' offered to the local community by the municipal administration, were selected as a case study because, although they did not differ from other public housing buildings in the area in terms of structural characteristics. It was a *unicum* of its kind. The huge blind façades of the buildings were used as a canvas, welcoming an extraordinary project of urban regeneration through art that made the housing complex famous as the 'Parco dei Murales'. The first evaluation analysis aimed at identifying the degree of user satisfaction with reference to the perceived housing quality. A customer satisfaction survey, applied *ex post* and targeted at residents, identified the factors contributing to satisfaction and dissatisfaction, forming the basis for potential redevelopment to enhance the service provided by the housing complex. The survey compared 'expected quality' (importance) and 'perceived quality' (satisfaction), assigning values to survey factors based on statistical relevance. The measurement system included the identification of the degree of expectation/importance (as an indicator of 'expected quality') and the degree of satisfaction (indicator of 'perceived quality') through a semantic scale of five levels of appreciation. The evaluation considered three thematic areas aiming at analyzing the quality of the outdoor collective spaces, the quality of the common spaces of the residential complex, and the quality of the housing. The relative overall customer satisfaction index was 66.67%, positively influenced by the high level of satisfaction with the quality of the housing. The negative aspects that emerged mainly concerned the inefficiency of public transport, the absence of attractive public green spaces, the lack of safety for pedestrians, and the unsuitability of the entrances for disabled users. These problems were included in a project to redevelop the public housing complex [45].

The 2017 survey involved *direct users* of the housing complex only. It was, metaphorically, a 'centripetal' analysis focused on the identification of the external factors affecting the perception of the housing quality of the 'Parco dei Murales'. The current investigation can rather be considered 'centrifugal', since it is intended to assess the impacts that the urban creativity project has made in the urban context in which it is set. It can be considered the first empirical and experimental approach for the qualitative assessment of the impacts that are attributable to the project. The original project to create a territorial system of urban creativity was confined to the perimeter of the residential complex, but the echoes of this intervention inevitably spread outside, modifying not only the perception of the buildings

themselves but of the entire surrounding urban landscape. The aim of this paper is to extend the field of research by expanding the investigation scale from the post-occupancy evaluation to the place performance evaluation [59] to assess how the project has shaped the perception of the suburban landscape. Even though the current survey takes the same residential complex as a case study, the innovation element is related to the scale of the survey, which allows for the performance of the territorial system of urban creativity to be assessed in the urban context and the neighboring landscape. The current customer satisfaction survey applied for was not only addressed to the direct users of the residential complex but also to its 'indirect users', intended as users of the performance. The purpose is to understand the level of users' satisfaction with the artistic interventions carried out six years after the conclusion of the regeneration project through urban creativity. The 'Parco dei Murales' has acquired a unique identity in the urban context of Ponticelli, redesigning the landscape and definitively changing the image of an otherwise grey and anonymous periphery. As an urban art project, despite formally affecting the residential complex only, it modified a public space and was offered to the community as a service. For this reason, the actual outcomes of the project are investigated in relation to the quality perceived by the entire local community.

The Assessment of Suburban Landscape of Parco dei Murales

The current survey aims to investigate the level of quality perceived by the local community in relation to the urban regeneration project of the 'Parco dei Murales'. To reach the performance assessment, according to the different values ascribable to the urban artworks, a customer satisfaction survey was administered to 'direct and indirect users' of the residential complex. A fully structured interview was developed for data collection. Since POE surveys are generally vulnerable to the subjectivity of the interviewer [60], easily understandable closed-ended questions were formulated and repeated in the same form to all the respondents, to achieve a 'standardized' interview model and to make the result of the collected data reliable. Once the focus of the topic had been established and in order to avoid answers that did not serve the purpose of the investigation, the survey was centered on the interviewer. The users who completed the questionnaire were able to choose only one answer for each question, using a five-point Likert rating scale. The respondents expressed their personal level of approval/disapproval, that is the 'perceived quality' of the performance as a free interpretation of the project experience. The respondent gave a score between '1' and '5' to each statement, where '1' corresponds to 'total disagreement' about the statement posed by the interviewer and '5' equals 'total agreement'. The questions were structured in advance to obtain explicit and functional data for the purpose of the performance assessment. The survey consisted of ten questions aimed at identifying the aspects/values that represent the level of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction with the territorial system of urban creativity.

The key aspects/values of public art were determined partially as established by the ixia evaluation model [61] to identify the different impacts and performances of artistic practices in the public sphere and partially according to the case under analysis.

- *For the visual-aesthetic relevance/enjoyment level*, this specific aspect describes the degree of aesthetic value attributable to the project, measured in terms of experience or appreciation. It determines how the project contributes to the improvement of the place and the appearance of the landscape in which it is placed;
- *For the place identity/recognizability level*, this aspect is indicative of the social value of a project and measures its ability to contribute to the affirmation (or shaping) of the place identity, making it recognizable within the urban context. In the case under analysis, the residential complex, thanks to the murals, has become an exceptional case in the

suburban area of Ponticelli. The murals made the residential complex identifiable and easily distinguishable within a strongly anonymous suburban tissue that is made up of buildings with almost identical architectural features and poor uniqueness;

- *For community development (with short/long term effects)*, the concept of ‘community development’ is a core value and potentially the main objective of a public art project or the unexpected spontaneous result of a regeneration process. The social value attributed to public art projects can be determined through the evaluation of factors such as the implementation of the sense of belonging to a place both in direct and indirect users of urban art projects. Urban creativity interventions can potentially improve the social fabric, especially in peripheral contexts that have high social complexity, such as the Neapolitan periphery. It is important to realize that some impacts on the community may be temporary and limited to the duration of project realization, while others might only emerge at a later stage or in combination with other factors in the long term. Projects such as the ‘Parco dei Murales’ have the capacity to restore ‘housing dignity’, activating a social redemption that can generate feelings of revenge and pride in the local community;
- *For place regeneration*, an urban art project (either stand-alone or part of a larger system, as in this case) can have the capacity to regenerate an otherwise degraded or neglected place, returning it to the community. This investigation aims to assess the existence of a correlation between the urban creativity project and the place regeneration, to understand if artistic performances have, in any way, contributed to improving the perception of decay and abandonment of this specific suburb;
- *For community consensus*, the survey aims to assess the level of appreciation of the *Parco Merola* artworks by the community. This factor is crucial for the positive outcome of urban creativity projects. A community that recognizes itself in the works and welcomes them would tend to safeguard and preserve them, limiting the risk of transfiguration or damage to the projects. An urban art project can generate in direct and indirect users a feeling of belonging to the place and increase the concept of community cohesion;
- *For community involvement*, involving the local community in the design and realization of the work, through participatory processes, not only ensures appreciation and greater acceptance of the project but can stimulate community cohesion. Engaging the host community through workshops and surveys to test in advance the possible effect of a work on the local community, but also actively in the realization of the work, results in a positive development of community feeling. The community will feel part—not only of that specific project—but also of a social network of cohesion and cooperation. Participating in the creation of public artworks can also encourage the development of new skills and improve work employability or the ability to engage in social and recreational activities.

Once the questions to be asked of users had been determined, the target groups to be interviewed were selected, and the locations where the interviews would be held were chosen. To ensure a homogenous pattern, the survey was applied to a sample of 100 people divided into four age groups (ranges: 12–17 years old, 18–30 years old, 31–60 years old, and over 60 years old). The data were collected in two meetings on weekdays, in community meeting places (the church and the local market) and commercial businesses close to the residential complex and conducted with the support of INWARD’s Universal Civil Service volunteers. For detailed information on the interview locations and questions, please refer to Appendix B.

4. Results

The collected data were subsequently organized and processed using Excel tables and diagrams. The survey questions were divided into six thematic categories according to the value/aspect investigated for data processing purposes:

- ‘Category 1’: assessment of the aesthetic, environmental, and landscape performance of the project;
- ‘Category 2’: assessment of the social impact and contribution of the project to the shaping of the place identity;
- ‘Category 3’: assessment of the cultural impact and the contribution of the project to the improvement of the degradation perception of the suburban area;
- ‘Category 4’: assessment of the level of appreciation/acceptance of the project by direct and indirect users;
- ‘Category 5’: assessment of the level of awareness of the potential impact of urban creativity on community involvement;
- ‘Category 6’: assessment of the level of awareness of the performance of the ‘Parco dei Murales’ in the local area.

‘Category 1’ includes two questions formulated to assess the aesthetic, environmental, and urban landscape performance and to measure the degree of visual appreciation of the project. The ‘Parco dei Murales’ project is an ‘intrusive’ intervention, which brought a strong change in the perception of the suburban landscape. The survey assessed whether this perception was negative or positive. The results in Table 1 are obtained from the average of each respondent’s answers to the two questions. The results given by the arithmetic averages have been rounded down to exclude mid-range values. The data were then processed and represented by means of pie chart in Figure 4a.

Table 1. Processing of data obtained from question 1 and 2 of the customer satisfaction survey (September 2024, source: author’s elaboration).

Category 1: Aesthetic, Environmental, and Urban Landscape Performance	12–17 Years Old	18–30 Years Old	31–60 Years Old	>60 Years Old
Score 1 = I absolutely disagree				
Score 2 = I disagree				
Score 3 = Neither agree nor disagree	3	3	4	4
Score 4 = I agree	7	10	9	7
Score 5 = I totally agree	15	12	12	11
Total sum	25	25	25	25

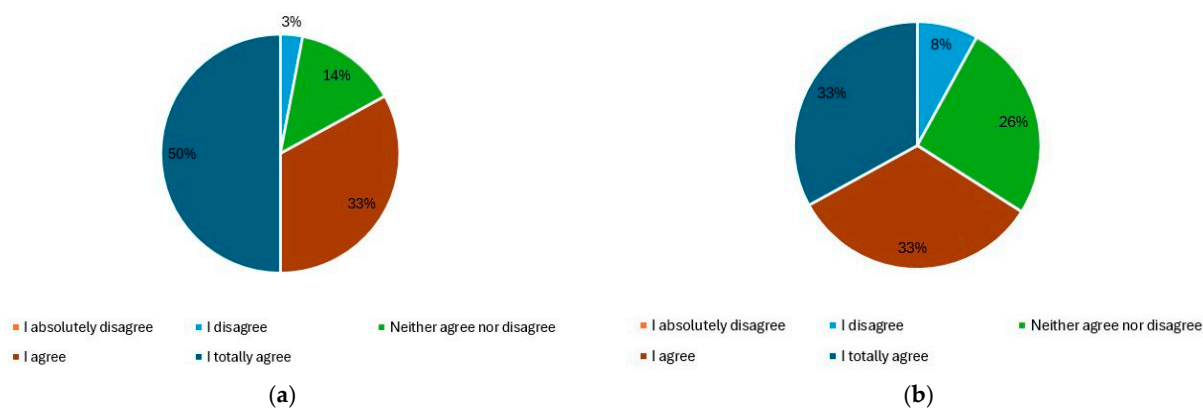


Figure 4. Graphical representation of the survey results for ‘Category 1’ (a) and ‘Category 2’ (b) (September 2024, source: author’s elaboration).

‘Category 2’ includes two questions formulated to assess the social impact and to measure the potential contribution of the project in the shaping of place identity. The results in Table 2 are obtained from the average of each respondent’s answers to the two questions. The results given by the arithmetic averages have been rounded down to exclude mid-range values. The data were then processed and represented by means of pie chart in Figure 4b.

Table 2. Processing of data obtained from question 3 and 4 of the customer satisfaction survey (September 2024, source: author’s elaboration).

Category 2: Social/Place Identity Impact	12–17 Years Old	18–30 Years Old	31–60 Years Old	>60 Years Old
Score 1 = I absolutely disagree				
Score 2 = I disagree	2	1	2	3
Score 3 = Neither agree nor disagree	6	7	5	8
Score 4 = I agree	11	9	8	5
Score 5 = I totally agree	6	8	10	9
Total sum	25	25	25	25

‘Category 3’ includes two questions formulated to evaluate the cultural impact and to measure the potential contribution of the project to improve the perception of degradation and abandonment of the area. The results in Table 3 are obtained from the average of each respondent’s answers to the two questions. The results given by the arithmetic averages have been rounded down to exclude mid-range values. The data were then processed and represented by means of pie chart in Figure 5a.

Table 3. Processing of data obtained from question 5 and 6 of the customer satisfaction survey (September 2024, source: author’s elaboration).

Category 3: Cultural Impact/Degradation Perception	12–17 Years Old	18–30 Years Old	31–60 Years Old	>60 Years Old
Score 1 = I absolutely disagree	3	4	2	2
Score 2 = I disagree	6	4	6	5
Score 3 = Neither agree nor disagree	8	9	7	10
Score 4 = I agree	6	5	5	6
Score 5 = I totally agree	3	3	5	2
Total sum	25	25	25	25

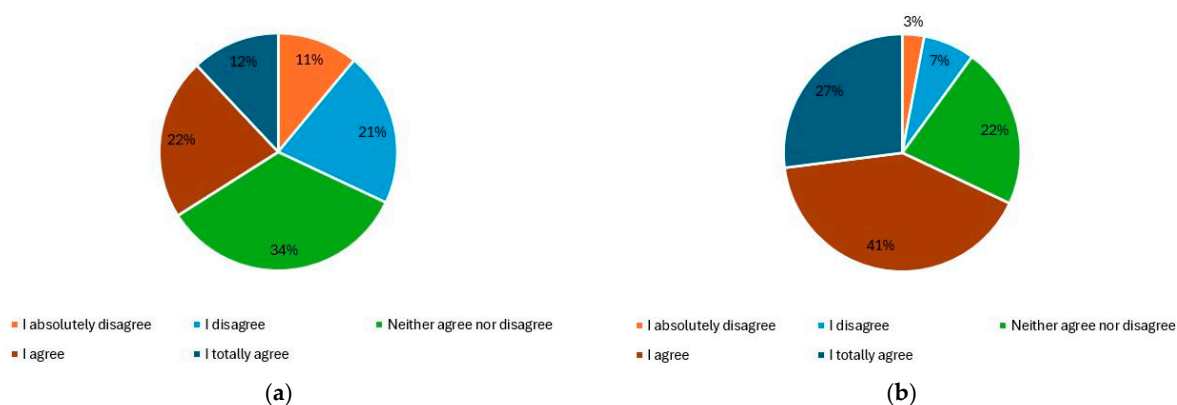


Figure 5. Graphical representation of survey results for Category 3 (a) and Category 4 (b) (September 2024, source: author’s elaboration).

‘Category 4’ consists of two questions formulated to assess the degree of appreciation/acceptance of the project by direct and indirect users. The results in Table 4 are obtained from the average of each respondent’s answers to the two questions. The results given by the arithmetic averages have been rounded down to exclude mid-range values. The data were then processed and represented by means of pie chart in Figure 5b.

Table 4. Processing of data obtained from question 7 and 8 of the customer satisfaction survey (September 2024, source: author’s elaboration).

Category 4: Assessment of the Appreciation/Acceptance by Users	12–17 Years Old	18–30 Years Old	31–60 Years Old	>60 Years Old
Score 1 = I absolutely disagree		1	1	1
Score 2 = I disagree	3	1		3
Score 3 = Neither agree nor disagree	3	7	8	4
Score 4 = I agree	11	12	8	10
Score 5 = I totally agree	8	4	8	7
Total sum	25	25	25	25

‘Category 5’ relates to a single question formulated to assess the degree of consciousness of the potential impact of urban creativity in community involvement. The results of the survey are reported in Table 5 and represented through a pie chart in Figure 6a.

Table 5. Processing of data obtained from question 9 of the customer satisfaction survey (September 2024, source: author’s elaboration).

Category 5: Community Involvement in Urban Creativity Projects	12–17 Years Old	18–30 Years Old	31–60 Years Old	>60 Years Old
Score 1 = I absolutely disagree		1		1
Score 2 = I disagree				3
Score 3 = Neither agree nor disagree	7		4	3
Score 4 = I agree	6	10	5	4
Score 5 = I totally agree	12	14	16	14
Total sum	25	25	25	25

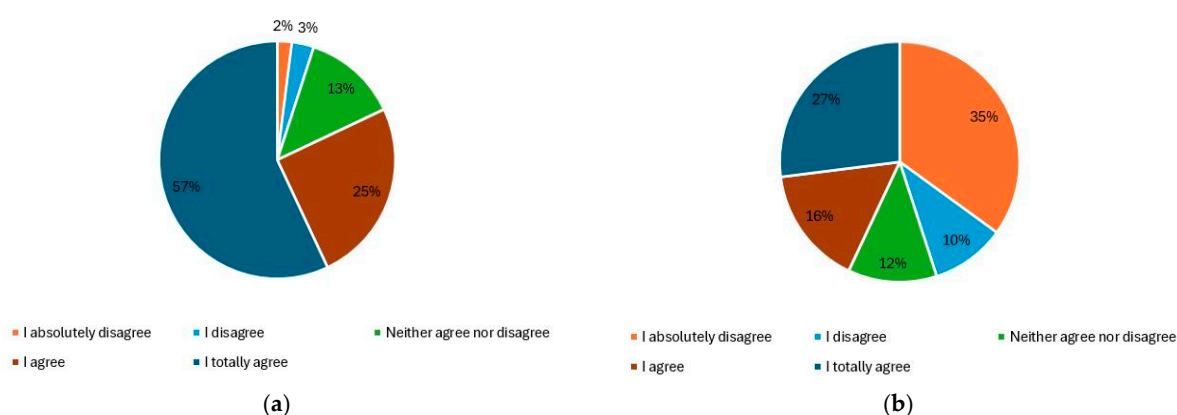


Figure 6. Graphical representation of survey results for Category 5 (a) and Category 6 (b) (September 2024, source: author’s elaboration).

‘Category 6’ concerns a single question formulated to evaluate the degree of awareness of the impact of the ‘Parco dei Murales’ on the territory. The urban regeneration project, assigned to urban creativity, has made the Parco Merola a virtuous example that has become the subject of studies and research, attracting the attention of scholars, researchers, and experts. It is also a ‘pilot project’ that has been emulated and applied in similar contexts

in Italy and abroad. The project not only consisted of the realization of the murales but also workshops and socio-cultural initiatives of major importance for the community. The last question of the survey investigates the degree to which the users are aware of the importance of the project. The results of the survey are reported in Table 6 and represented through a pie chart in Figure 6b.

Table 6. Processing of data obtained from question 10 the customer satisfaction survey (September 2024, source: author’s elaboration).

Category 6: Awareness of the Impact of the <i>Parco dei Murales</i> on the Territory	12–17 Years Old	18–30 Years Old	31–60 Years Old	>60 Years Old
Score 1 = I absolutely disagree	2	8	11	14
Score 2 = I disagree	4		3	3
Score 3 = Neither agree nor disagree	5	2	2	3
Score 4 = I agree	5	6	2	3
Score 5 = I totally agree	9	9	7	2
Total sum	25	25	25	25

The results obtained from the analysis of the 6 categories were then resumed in a summary diagram (Figure 7).

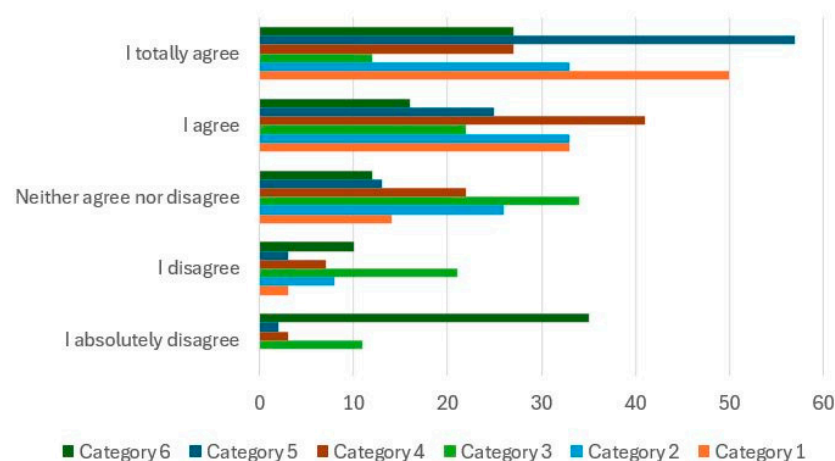


Figure 7. Summative Diagram of 6 categories (September 2024, source: author’s elaboration).

The under-12-year-old group was excluded from the impact assessment general survey. Special attention was given to users in the 4–11-year-old group. With the goal of involving users representing ‘future generations’, a simplified survey was developed to evaluate the same impacts and levels of satisfaction as the general survey. The simplified questionnaire was structured into five questions and administered to a probability sample of 20 children. Again, the respondents expressed their level of approval to a given question using a three-point Likert rating scale, where ‘1’ is associated with ‘not at all’, ‘2’ is associated with ‘I can’t answer this question’, and a score of ‘3’ is associated with ‘absolutely yes’. The collected data relating to the five different categories were then processed graphically (Figure 8a,b, 9a,b and 10).



Figure 8. Graphical representation of survey results for Category 1 (a): assessment of the aesthetic and landscape performance of the project and Category 2 (b): assessment of the social impact and contribution of the project to the shaping of the place identity—Range 4–11 (September 2024, source: author's elaboration).



Figure 9. Graphical restitution of survey results for Category 3 (a): assessment of the cultural impact and of the contribution of the project to the improvement of the degradation perception of the suburban area and Category 4 (b): assessment of the level of appreciation/acceptance of the project—Range 4–11 (September 2024, source: author's elaboration).

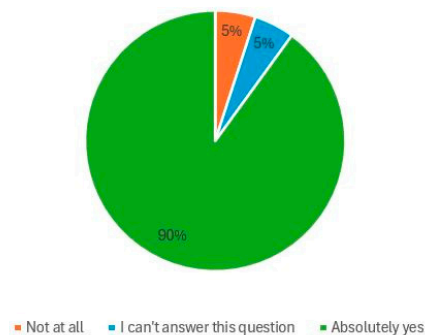


Figure 10. Graphical restitution of survey results for Category 5: assessment of the predisposition level of users to participate in urban creativity projects—Range 4–11 (September 2024, source: author's elaboration).

The results obtained from the analysis of the 5 categories were then resumed in a summary diagram (Figure 11).

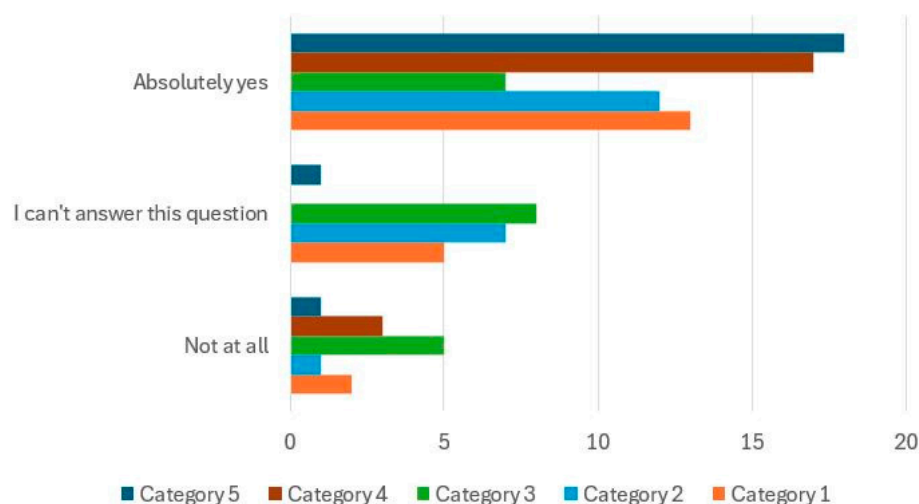


Figure 11. Summative diagram of 5 categories—age 4–11 (source: author's elaboration).

5. Discussion

The results for 'Category 1' (assessment of aesthetic, environmental, and landscape performance) define a very positive level of visual appreciation of the project. The degree of appreciation, with a score of five points, exceeds 40% in the different age groups, while for the 12–17-year-old group, it is even higher. The high degree of satisfaction can be translated into the characteristic of urban art to generate dynamism in the context in which it is set, revitalizing it through colors and social messages, as in the case of the 'Parco dei Murales'. The project's contribution to improving the aesthetic performance and perception of the suburban landscape can be beneficial and is capable of transforming the typical greyness of the suburbs into a place more similar to the centers of major cities, where art and culture are able to describe a more contemporary and lively reality.

'Category 2' (assessment of the social impact and contribution of the project to the shaping of the place identity) also meets with consensus, with a medium–high general appreciation, above or equal to a score of four. Based on the results, it is possible to state that the 31–60-year-old and over-60-year-old generations seem to be more receptive to the project's potential in the shaping of place identity and the affirmation of a sense of belonging.

While the other categories present a certain coherence of results, clearly defining the highest levels of satisfaction, the results of 'Category 3' (assessment of cultural impact and the contribution of the project to the improvement of the perception of the degradation of the suburban area) prove to be much more fragmented. In this case, it is necessary to consider the assumption of a very complex social fabric, with the degradation conditions leading to frequent criminal episodes and high levels of criminality. The general perception of the local community is one of total abandonment by the authorities and public administration. The incoherence of the results was, therefore, to be expected in response to the questions concerning the measurement of the project's potential contribution to improving the perception of degradation and abandonment of the area. It is superfluous to argue that urban creativity alone cannot repair the decaying condition of an entire periphery in the absence of adequate policies and interventions aimed at increasing public services and safety. The results of the survey, according to this category, show a condition of absolute indecision on the side of the respondents. The most recurrent score for the different age groups is '3', which on the rating scale is equivalent to 'neither yes, nor no/I cannot answer this question'. This shows an alarming level of insecurity, as well as a condition of powerlessness and low trust in the future, probably fueled by the insufficient possibilities offered by the outskirts. The average position of the level of satisfaction highlights two fundamental aspects. On

one hand, the underestimation of the actual condition of degradation, which can also translate into the hope of a margin of improvement, on the other, the tacit acceptance of a social assumption that is rooted in the history of the local inhabitants, surrendered to abandonment and unable to hope for better services and the benefits to which they are instead entitled.

‘Category 4’ (assessment of the level of appreciation/acceptance of the project by direct and indirect users) shows a positive response, with higher scores above four. The ‘time’ factor should also be considered. The Murals Park project started in 2015 and finished in 2018. It was not a small intervention. It was a project that completely changed the aesthetic appearance of the entire residential complex. Jorit’s work was not only the first work realized as part of the project but also the first work of huge dimensions executed in a public housing complex. The outcome of the survey can therefore be understood as representative of the still-in-progress phase of acceptance, which indicates that the users are gradually becoming accustomed to the presence of urban creativity in the local context.

‘Category 5’, aimed at assessing the degree of awareness of the potential impact of urban creativity in community involvement, received the highest scores of the survey for all the different age groups. This highlights a strong desire of the community to actively participate in urban creativity projects. In relation to this outcome, one more factor plays a key role. The cultural, recreational, and educational offerings are absolutely lacking in the Ponticelli periphery. For example, equipped public green space in the area is limited to the Fratelli De Filippo urban parks (8000 square meters, not fully accessible) and the De Simone Park, which is smaller and in a totally neglected condition, serving the 52,284 local inhabitants. The interviewees obviously valued the potential of urban creativity to offer a participatory activity for cultural and recreational purposes, especially for the young and future generations.

The purpose of the ‘Category 6’ question is to assess the degree of awareness of the Parco dei Murales’ performance in the urban area. The 12–17-year-old and 18–30-year-old groups responded very positively to the survey, declaring a high awareness of the successes and recognitions achieved by the project. Certainly, the use of social networks is a decisive element for these generations, facilitating the dissemination of images and information regarding events and initiatives involving the ‘Parco dei Murales’. For the 31–60-year-old group, a clear gap emerges between a large majority of respondents who are fully aware (five points) and an equally large majority of users who are completely unaware (one point). For the over-60-year-old group, there is a very high percentage of total ignorance of the impact of the project in the local area and beyond.

6. Conclusions

In accordance with the principles of the European Landscape Convention, a landscape ‘assessment’ aims to highlight the values assigned to landscapes by the interested parties and the population concerned. The present study focused on the assessment of a particular type of landscape, namely a suburban one in the city of Naples where an anonymous public housing complex (Parco Merola) was involved in an ‘urban creativity’ program that, in addition to contributing to social and artistic regeneration of the park, has affected the perception of its users. The survey was conducted to evaluate the performance of the ‘Parco dei Murales’ project as perceived by its primary beneficiaries—the residents of the suburb. The study also served as a tool to measure the project’s impact on the suburban landscape by analyzing how the artistic intervention was experienced by the community. Additionally, the research identified other factors that influenced these perceptions, such as the murals contributing to altering the sense of abandonment in the area and the community’s desire to engage in urban regeneration projects. Although the project was highly valued by the local

population, the persistent perception of degradation and decay—characteristic of Napolitan suburban areas—remains a challenge that cannot be resolved through urban creativity alone. Sustainable urban regeneration requires targeted political strategies and catalysts for socio-cultural activation. As indicated by the survey results, although they cannot be the sole form of effective participation to engage residents [62], and as directly observed by the operators, urban creativity programs for social purposes appear to be highly appreciated by children and adolescents for various reasons, including the opportunity to express themselves, the formation of social bonds, and a sense of belonging. These activities offer opportunities to improve social skills, such as communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution. The survey results from ‘category 3’ (assessment of cultural impact and of the contribution of the project to the improvement of the degradation perception of the suburban area) reveal that social projects can address specific needs and provide creative solutions, but only public policies truly provide the necessary framework for lasting change. Thus, communities need meaningful interactions with institutions to develop participatory governance of a high quality [63]. It should also be considered that, based on the press review analyzed, it appears that the ‘Parco dei Murales’ is better known outside the suburbs. In fact, most visitors to the park come from other parts of Italy or Europe. Surveys conducted within the INWARD organization also raise the need for more targeted and effective communication and promotion of the project, potentially through combined itineraries in the peripheral areas of the city. In 2025, the ‘Parco dei Murales’ will celebrate its first decade, and thus, an analysis of its critical aspects was necessary to understand what adjustments or transformations the program will have to undergo, as a scalable and replicable model, to demonstrate its sustainability and longevity. Undoubtedly, the challenges that emerged from the context also positively support the future of the program, fostering discrete and sustainable tourism that respects the resident community. Assuming that the ‘Parco dei Murales’ is a pilot project, which, through a place-based [64] process of regeneration (both physical and social), has substantially contributed to defining a new landscape, the place performance evaluation with the POE approach could be essential to assessing its long-term impacts and to define new projects over time that involve the community and increase the level of housing quality. Educating users about the project’s tangible and intangible impacts could significantly contribute to the community’s social development, fostering a stronger sense of place and belonging and generating pride and resilience. These factors are crucial for improving the quality of life in this and other similar suburban contexts. In a more general statement, the place performance evaluation with the POE approach can be assumed to be a tool to assess the impact of a defined project or service after the user experience. Such evaluations can help the public administration monitor the inhabitants’ perceived housing quality, identify any latent needs, and act early with improvement plans or new strategies. In addition, monitoring at time intervals would make it possible to track potential behavioral changes in the local community and to anticipate the requirements expressed by the users to ensure a high quality of housing. In the framework of the impacts of urban creativity on urban contexts, this approach can be adopted to monitor the dynamic and constant transformation of the urban and suburban landscape and to assess how these changes are perceived by local communities.

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Appendix A Art Works in the *Parco dei Murales*

In April 2015, the mural *Ael. Tutt'egual song'e criature* (Figure A1) was created by the Neapolitan artist Jorit. Painted to commemorate the International Day of the Rom, Sinti, and Travelers, a theme particularly relevant for a peripheral neighborhood, the work recalled an unpleasant event that occurred in 2008, which led to subsequent movements of revenge and revolt against the Romani camps on the Via Argine. For this reason, Jorit, chosen for his realistic style, after a visit with Caritas to other Romani camps in Naples, where it was said that displaced individuals from Ponticelli had found new accommodation, painted the face of Ael, a young Romani girl who timidly faces the neighborhood, symbolizing the importance of hospitality and integration rather than the memory of conflict. Nearly ten years after the creation of the mural, the books and a *strummulo* (spinning top), initially painted and later erased by the artist, are no longer visible.

It was precisely the *strummulo* that inspired the transition to the second artwork. In the meantime, the operators had gathered numerous testimonies, and none of the children seemed familiar with the ancient and simple toy, beyond its curious dialectal expression. This led the project group to shift their focus from the disappearance of the basic game to the dangers posed by digital games and the extreme concerns regarding the alienation they might cause. This resulted in the creation of a new intervention dedicated to the significance and quality of play, by the artist Zed1, titled '*A pazziella 'n man' 'e criature*' (Figure A2). At the center of the mural, a large wooden puppet recalls the Neapolitan mask of Pulcinella and the Tuscan Pinocchio (due to the artist's origins), barely surviving, along with other traditional toys, under the weight of more contemporary ones. The broken limbs suggest the loss of social interaction, which seems increasingly alien to many young people, leaving them sinking into a sense of deep unreality, while the broken rifle distances any association with violence. The presence of a stage and curtain-like drapery offers the viewer the spectacle of a dangerous societal shift.



Figure A1. Jorit, *Ael. Tutt'egual song'e criature*, 2015.



Figure A2. Zed1, *'A pazziella 'n man' 'e criature*, 2015.

At the outset of the third work, the feeling was that a pictorial cycle was being created, based on the dissemination of universal values (integration and play), a concept later confirmed in the intervention dedicated to football, created by the Sicilian artists Rosk&Loste (Figure A3). Their intervention vividly recalls an everyday occurrence, observable even in the paved area at the center of the park. Every day, children and adolescents use this space to play football and engage in other activities. For many of them, it is a gathering spot, while for every resident of the complex, it remains a concrete expanse, still marked by an unfulfilled municipal promise to build a proper playing field. Thus, the large mural communicates in simple and direct language and depicts two children gazing at a football, as if it were an object of veneration, while playing. The significance of this mural is preserved in the decision by the City of Naples to eventually construct the football field.



Figure A3. Rosk&Loste, *Chi è vuluto bene nun so scorda*, 2015.

During the first year of work, the operators observed a sense of discouragement, particularly among the younger age groups, from 6 to 13 years old. There was a strong belief that collective and personal improvement was unattainable or unimaginable for those living on the periphery. From this observation, alongside a collection of data on the disaffection with the object 'book', the necessary value of reading emerged. Reading was recognized not only as a form of personal enrichment but also as a true stimulation of imagination and a creative rethinking of reality. This mural was created by the artist Mattia Campo Dall'Orto (Figure A4), who is closely aligned with the realistic drawing movement. He photographed the inhabitants to use as reference models. In the expansive mural, the lower section depicts a real girl and boy reading a book (*Lo cunto de li cunti* by

Giambattista Basile). In the upper part, there are the ‘effects’ of this creative reading. The people of the park, initially photographed and later painted by the artist, are transformed into characters, signaling that the world around us can be changed and imbued with imagination, countering resignation.



Figure A4. Mattia Campo Dall’Orto, *Lo trattenemiento de’ peccerille*, 2015.

After the first four murals, dedicated to children and adolescents, the operators noted the need to also engage other target groups, such as adults and young mothers residing in the area, in order to create moments of socialization. The mural by La Fille Bertha, born Alessandra Pulixi, a socially conscious artist and refined illustrator, features a large icon titled ‘*A mamm e tutte e mamm*’ (a Neapolitan term for the Madonna; Figure A5—on the right-side), depicting her as a figure who welcomes and protects two children under the wings of her broad cloak. The artist was inspired by the well-known iconography of the Madonna della Misericordia, a subject frequently depicted by 15th-century painters, including Piero della Francesca. In this case, the artwork aims to convey a positive vision of parenthood. The numerous meetings that followed provided an opportunity to reflect on the sixth ‘value’ of this extensive pictorial cycle. Many references to the importance of sharing and community, suggested directly by the children and adolescents to the operators, were gathered. Building on this concept, discussions focused on the need to represent the value of solidarity to lay the foundation for a shared interest in one’s common space. In this spirit, workshops were organized to repaint the corridors opposite the mural interventions, and from this collective effort to create things together, the work *Je sto vicino a te* by the artist Daniele Nitti (Figure A5—on the left side), known as Hope, came to life. On a typical starry sky-blue background, stilted buildings emerge. Among these structures, small bridges (*Ponticelli*, like the neighborhood) are visible, with residents of the park walking back and forth across them carrying or transporting items.



Figure A5. Daniele Nitti, *Je sto vicino a te*, 2017 (on the left-side); La Fille Bertha, *'A mamm e tutte e mamm*, 2017 (on the right-side).

When the residents were asked who Merola was, the individual after whom their residential complex was named, no one seemed to know the distinguished scholar, who was one of the most prominent directors of the Royal Botanical Garden of Naples. Taking advantage of this question, children, adolescents, and parents were involved in a guided tour of the garden, with the opportunity to see for themselves the majestic greenhouse named in Merola's honor. The visit, conducted in the heart of the city of Naples, aimed to bring the residents closer to the history of their local territory, starting with the curiosity of the younger generation. This knowledge journey culminated in photos taken by both adults and children of plants and flowers, which later served as valuable material for the mural artist Fabio Petani in the creation of his large work, titled *'O sciore cchiù felice* (Figure A6—on the left side). The central essence of the painting is the Gigaro Chiaro, a local flower traditionally placed in children's cradles for their protection. The 'Parco dei Murales' thus becomes a peripheral greenhouse, with the new mural serving as a guardian of its future.

For the eighth intervention, there was consideration of accumulating everything that had been made up until that point into a symbolic final act. The idea was to celebrate the delivery of what had been created to those who would continue to live in space. Care, therefore, became the value to be expressed in the intervention, and the representation of the community would embody this idea. The artist Zeus40, originally from East Naples, worked with photographs of the residents taken by photographer Vasiliki Ioannou and drew the silhouettes of four residents of the four units of the residential park, creating an ideal family—representing the collective of people who share a space. The title of this work, *Cura 'e paure* (Figure A6—on the right side), references the song 'Kevlar' by the band 24 Grana, and behind the four painted figures runs the motivational phrase: 'Take care so that beauty will take care of you'.



Figure A6. Fabio Petani, *'O sciore cchiù felice*, 2018 (on the left-side); Zeus40, *Cura 'e paure*, 2018 (on the right-side).

Appendix B Detailed Information on the Interview's Locations and Questions

The interviews were conducted on the 29th and 30th of August 2024 by four volunteers from INWARD's Universal Civil Service and one of the authors (Yvonne Russo). Weekdays were chosen because, although Ponticelli is inhabited by a large number of people, the area in which the 'Parco dei Murales' is located is mainly frequented as a place of 'transit'. The residential complex is located at a crossroad of two large driveways, which are poorly equipped and rather dangerous for pedestrian traffic. The only days on which the area is particularly busy are Mondays and Thursdays when the local market is set up in Viale L. Califano, which is a road parallel to Viale A. Merola and where the 'Parco dei Murales' is located.

On Thursday, the 29th of August the interviews were collected at the local market, which is about 250 meters (in a straight line) from the residential complex. Another meeting place for collecting the interviews was the church of Ss. Peter and Paul, which is one of the main places of worship in Ponticelli and is about 480 meters from the 'Parco dei Murales'. The following day, the interviews were collected at the area's commercial businesses, both in Viale A. Merola—thus close to the residential complex—and in the three parallel streets, namely the Via Argine, Viale C. Miranda, and Via A.C. de Meis, which are about 510, 210, and 400 meters far from the residential complex (in a straight line). The two roads that perpendicularly cross the Viale A. Merola, namely the Via L. Pacioli and Via M. Malibran, were excluded, as there are no commercial businesses there. The last place where the interviews were collected was the 'Grazia Deledda' municipal library, in order to interview younger inhabitants, whom we had not met in the previously mentioned places. The places where the interviews were conducted were indicated on a map in Figure A7. Only about 15% of the total respondents reside in the residential complex. This percentage was deliberately reduced, as this survey was assessing the performance of the urban creativity project and its impact on the landscape and socio-cultural context of Ponticelli, thus in terms of the perception of the suburb's inhabitants and not only of the ones living in the residential complex.



Figure A7. Map of the locations where the interviews were conducted (source: authors' elaboration from satellite images from Google Earth).

A list of the generic questionnaire's questions follows.

- (1) The murals in the Parco Merola have positively changed the aesthetics and landscape perception of Ponticelli.
- (2) The murals make Parco Merola recognizable and noticeable even from afar;
- (3) The murals have positively changed the appearance of the *Parco Merola*, now recognized as the 'Parco dei Murales'.
- (4) The murals in the Parco Merola have given a new identity to the urban context.
- (5) The murals in the Parco Merola have qualitatively changed the perception of degradation and neglect of Ponticelli.
- (6) The 'Parco dei Murales' has created a different—more liveable and less neglected—idea of suburbs.
- (7) Murals (in general and in the Parco Merola experience) can be used to regenerate a degraded place and can valorize it.
- (8) The murals (in general and in the Parco Merola experience) are appreciated by the local community.
- (9) Murals can be used to involve the local community in participatory processes and foster a sense of belonging to a place.
- (10) 'Parco dei Murales' has become an important place for the city of Naples and a case-study for national and international research. I am aware of its success and importance.

A list of the 'future generations' questionnaire's questions are as follows.

- (1) When you see a mural on the street, on the wall of a building, do you think they can make the buildings and streets more beautiful?
- (2) Do you think murals can make a suburb famous, recognizable, visible from afar?
- (3) When you see a building or a street painted with murals, do the streets or buildings look more cared for and not abandoned?
- (4) Do you like murals?
- (5) Would you like to be involved in workshops to make a mural or see an artist painting a mural?

Notes

- ¹ The term ‘urban creativity’ was developed and introduced into the public debate in Italy by the INWARD National Observatory on Urban Creativity, in collaboration with other cultural operators in the field, towards the end of the first decade of the 2000s. It conventionally aims to bring together, based on common or similar traits and for specific reasons—though without any intention of linguistic dominance—the visual cultures of (graffiti) writing, street art, and (new) muralism.
- ² INWARD (and its cultural association ‘Artoteca’) was commissioned by UNAR, the National Office Against Racial Discrimination under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, to conceive and produce three large mural works on themes related to anti-racist thought in three different Italian cities.
- ³ For detailed information on each individual work, consult Appendix A. For further numerous anecdotes, as well as profiles of the artists, workshops, and other initiatives carried out during the ‘Parco dei Murales’ program, see: www.parcodemurales.it.
- ⁴ Following the evolution of urban creativity across Italy, and in the relevant international contexts, one encounters specific ‘sets’ of interventions and artworks, groupings of signs and expressions that are more cohesive and interconnected—true networks of meaning. In many cases, this has led to increasing use of the term ‘territorial systems of urban creativity’, which can be found not only in peripheral areas but also in small historic centers or villages already rich in art and culture.
- ⁵ The American art historian Miwon Kwon outlines a ‘genealogy’ of site-specific art, the field within which urban artistic practices emerge and are situated, proposing an epistemological approach capable of generating a new theoretical perspective, particularly from the viewpoint of the viewer [48].
- ⁶ The projects supported so far include: Urban Creativity between Redevelopment and Regeneration (2016); Urban Creativity between Redevelopment and Regeneration (2017); Urban Creativity between Redevelopment and Regeneration (2018); Urban Creativity for Social Change: Youth for Territory and Community (2019); Let’s get it ST.ARTed (2020); Park Factory—Rethinking Spaces for Youth Aggregation and Creativity (2021); and Draw on the Wall—Draw on the Walls (2022); PartecipARTE (2023). So far, seven Universal Civil Service projects focused on urban creativity for social purposes have been supported.
- ⁷ Fiction produced by Cattleya, Fandango, Sky Atlantic, and Beta Film, based on an original idea by Roberto Saviano.
- ⁸ There are reports of other spontaneous initiatives by the community in the following years, such as the creation of a dog park, a small community garden within the outlines of the flowerbeds, and a ‘giglio’ (a traditional festival float) for the park.

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