



## Article

# Creativity and Social Capital: The Pillars of Venice's Success in the New European Bauhaus Programme

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**Abstract:** This article explores six craft-based urban social innovation initiatives implemented in Venice between 2014 and 2021, considered decisive for the candidature of the city in the New European Bauhaus programme. Adopting a qualitative approach based on multiple case study methods, it reconstructs how the promotion of traditional craft enterprises entered the local policy agenda through mechanisms that strengthen the embeddedness of the issue. The article emphasises the polycentrism of social innovation initiatives and highlights the importance of creativity as a tool to trigger co-design processes, of the projects as contexts for knowledge and information sharing, and of events and happenings as contexts for strengthening social capital and increasing its accessibility. In the final part of the paper, some limitations that are emerging and new research lines for the future are suggested.

**Keywords:** urban social innovation; New European Bauhaus; Venice; craftwork; policy agenda



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## 1. Introduction—Creative Craft Enterprises as an Emerging Actor in the European Social Innovation Strategy

The paper explores the ways in which the creative craft enterprise has become a pillar of urban social innovation policies in Venice. The policy window is a fascinating concept in public policy analysis, illustrated by John Kingdon in his book *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* (Kingdon 1984). In this book, the author described public decisions as flows, not completely random but also not completely rational, of problems, solutions, and actors, which sometimes come together to produce public choices. Policy windows are those occasions when new issues enter political agendas, changing them so that certain problems are creatively addressed. As we are going to see, Venice has been appointed as a pilot city of the New European Bauhaus programme, i.e., one of the first cities where the European Commission will experiment urban innovation programmes co-created with citizens. Our preliminary assumption is that the initiatives analysed in this paper were fundamental in order to push the topic of craftsmanship to the attention of city institutions and other local actors and to prepare the local community to face the challenge of the ambitious New European Bauhaus project. This preliminary assumption depends on the theoretical framework on which we base our research, i.e., that of the embeddedness of economic action (Granovetter 1985). Individuals and organisations act within systems of connections; thus, social actors do not act in an atomised manner as individuals and independent units, but are rooted in concrete social networks and this influences their beliefs, the information, and the opportunities they have access to, their values, and consequently also their actions. Initially, scholars who followed Granovetter's proposal have mainly focused on the effects of relational and structural embeddedness; however, treating embeddedness in this way makes the concept appears vague and difficult to use (Zukin and DiMaggio 1990; Nee and Ingram 1998). To address these limitations, Zukin and DiMaggio (1990) extended this conception by proposing that embeddedness refers to the contingent nature

of economic activity on cognition, culture, social structures, and political institutions. For them, the emphasis on the interconnection between power, culture, and organisation is the distinctive contribution of embeddedness approaches in economic sociology, and in doing so, embeddedness research seeks to find a balance between behavioural rationality and economic efficiency (Smelser and Swedberg 1994). Embeddedness arguments take economic activity seriously but look beyond the rhetoric of intentionality and efficiency and make a strong commitment to understanding the relational aspects of organisations (Marsden 1981). Finally, research on embeddedness is characterised by assuming very rich empirical contexts and getting one's hands dirty (Hirsch et al. 1990). From this perspective, attempting to understand Venice's success in craft-based urban social innovation through past initiatives offers the possibility of identifying and explaining which factors have strengthened embeddedness mechanisms. Analysing the phenomena from this perspective could help us to throw light on the mechanisms that foster the processes of embeddedness. At the same time, it helps us to understand which factors placed the creative craft enterprise at the centre of the local policy agenda; the embeddedness perspective can help us to understand the perspective scenarios used by policy scholars.

Since 2010, social innovation has become a key strategy of the European welfare state (Fougère et al. 2017, pp. 819–43; Moulaert et al. 2013), through which two different logics of intervention can be combined: the first one is related to the activation of civil society in order to face social challenges that both the market and the state have not been able to cope with by developing new products and services (Murray et al. 2010; Mulgan 2006, pp. 145–62); the second one is related to the transformation of social relations in order to promote processes of empowerment for the benefit of the most disadvantaged target groups (Oosterlynck et al. 2020). In the first case, social innovation is a new way of responding to social needs, while in the second, it is an agent of social transformation and re-stratification.

The third sector has long been identified as the privileged place of social innovation (Anheier et al. 2019), but it has gradually lost its monopoly and is now one of the many places of social innovation. Today, social innovation finds more and more space in forms of collaboration between firms and public administrations (Iaione 2016), in neo-craft enterprises (Ramella and Manzo 2018), in creative workers (D'Ovidio and Pradel 2013), and in social enterprises such as BCorp (Aoyama and Parthasarathy 2016). In this scenario, the idea emerges that craft work, as technically founded creative work, can represent a key sector for fostering innovation. This idea is translated into dedicated public policies such as the New European Bauhaus, launched by the President of the European Commission in 2021. The premises of this strategy are confirmed by the two phenomena widely analysed in the literature. On the one hand, there is the historical use of artisanal work by work integration social enterprises (Borzaga and Loss 2006; Borzaga and Fazzi 2011), which have used it as a privileged strategy for mixing therapeutic activities and paths to social and labour inclusion. On the other, the growing processes of coercive isomorphism (Pestoff and Brandsen 2010) towards public bureaucracy with which they share the field of the welfare state may have progressively reduced the dynamism of the third sector and its capacity for innovation (Nyssens 2014), opening spaces for new actors and organisations.

In this way, social innovation does not expand the traditional arenas of welfare (Ferrera and Maino 2015) only because it promotes forms of co-design and networked welfare between conventional agents of social welfare, but also because it increases the type of subjects from which a contribution in terms of social innovation is expected.

The New European Bauhaus initiative (from now NEB) is an expression of this trend, and as such, it deserves some reflections. The NEB is a creative and interdisciplinary initiative that produces a meeting space to design future ways of living, located at the crossroads of art, culture, social inclusion, science, and technology (European Commission). This goal is already summarised in the payoff “beautiful, sustainable, together”, where beauty is described not only in terms of aesthetics but especially of a more equal, inclusive and creative society (European Commission).

In its intentions, the NEB represents an opportunity to promote the renewal of cities, basing it on the exchange of scientific, technical, and artistic knowledge of citizens, with the aim of proposing territorial, social, and cultural regeneration projects capable of being open laboratories for territorial innovation, in a way quite similar to the governmental innovation laboratories (Timeus and Gascó 2018).

In the launch dossier of the initiative, the European Commission identified three key dimensions that define the projects to be proposed: (a) sustainability and circular economy; (b) quality of materials; (c) socio-economic inclusion of citizens with respect to the project. Presenting the initiative, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, emphasised sustainability as a central element of the European Bauhaus, however:

«Their focus can range from natural building materials and energy efficiency, to demographics, future-oriented mobility or resource-efficient digital innovation; always combined with culture and art. As creative, experimental labs and docking points for European industries, they will be the starting point for a European and worldwide network that maximises economic, ecological and social impact beyond the individual Bauhaus». (European Commission 2020a, 2020b)

The first point in common with the social innovation strategy is co-creation: the NEB, like social innovation, aims to activate European citizens in a collaborative way (Nambisan 2009) towards the development of an inclusive and sustainable economy. The first two key themes—inclusion and sustainability—also connect social innovation and NEB because they represent two key goals in both policy fields (Oosterlynck et al. 2013). The third theme, beauty, involves many of the new protagonists of social innovation: fabbers (Manzo and Ramella 2015; Ramella and Manzo 2018), co-workers (Mariotti and Akhavan 2019), creative workers (D’Ovidio and Pradel 2013), artists (Tremblay and Pilati 2013).

Furthermore, what seems to bind together social innovation (as a goal) and artisan enterprise (as a means) is creativity as a cognitive-operational resource associated with problem-solving activities linked to the social and urban transformations. The creative use of advanced knowledge then becomes the way in which attempts are made to address social and urban problems according to patterns of open innovation (Chesbrough 2003).

In doing so, through the enlargement of the welfare arenas and the activation of new actors in a collaborative way, social and economic goals represent a counter-movement that seeks to limit the process of dis-embedding of economic action from society (Polanyi 1944; Vicari Haddock and Mingione 2017).

In this framework, the artisan-creative enterprise acquires the status of a potential agent of social innovation as an organisation proficient in combining specialised knowledge, cultural heritage, and social objectives, in line with what is pursued by the NEB.

All these considerations contributed to the definition of the research question that this paper attempts to answer: How did previous local initiatives influence the success of the Venetian nomination in the New European Bauhaus programme? This is the first question that we had, and it gives us the opportunity to explore how the local embeddedness influences the raising of an urban issue.

The limited references found in the literature on the nexus between artisan enterprises, social innovation, and urban transformation highlight how the distance between these worlds still remains wide, at least on a theoretical level. Furthermore, this automatic association of the two phenomena has a normative characteristic since the value ascribed to the phenomenon is linked to the idea towards which they aspire to. Additionally, for this reasons, today, the greatest risk is the mechanical association between social innovation and artisan enterprise, which instead represent independent social phenomena, with their own rules and autonomy. This is the reason why this paper deals with six cases of social innovation based on the protagonism of creative craft enterprises with the aim of opening a critical debate on the relationship between craft enterprises, creative processes, and social innovation policies and initiatives.

## 2. Research Setting—Venice Italian Candidate of the New European Bauhaus

In September 2022, it was announced that Venice was included in the list of the cities of the NEB programme, and this made our work even more important; the article highlights the processes that fostered this success. In order to understand this result, it is important to start from the beginning.

A few months after the launch of the European flagship project (January 2021), the main Venetian institutions announced (Ca' Foscari University of Venice, 2021, April) their willingness to nominate Venice for one of the five pilot projects of the NEB deadline for 2022. The project was initiated by Ca' Foscari University and quickly joined by other Venetian universities, the Veneto Region, the city of Venice, the Academy of Fine Arts, the Benedetto Marcello Conservatory, the Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio, the Venice Biennale, the Venice Foundation, the Port Authority, Confindustria, and the International Private Committees for the Safeguarding of Venice. The main local institutions were therefore very quick to converge on a shared candidacy project. This also happened thanks to the consolidated partnerships in the specific theme (Paladini and Busacca 2023). The city's nomination initiates a co-design process that involves the main city institutions, which in September 2021 will organise an international event entitled Bauhaus of the Seas, an initiative dedicated to the launch of the application and to the development of a shared reflection with other European cities that share maritime issues with Venice (see <https://bauhaus-seas.eu/>, accessed on 1 July 2022). The conference marked the official start of the planning phase and the final project will be submitted to the European Union by January 2022. As stated in the opening speech by Rector of Ca' Foscari Tiziana Lippiello:

The purpose of the project is to promote an ethical and aesthetic development linked to the different ways in which we interact with the sea. [...] the seas are conceived as an innovative observatory and source of energy and creativity, as well as the glue of our hemisphere, the place that gives continuity to different yet complementary ecosystems. Land and Sea, the landscape as an integrated ecosystem (2022).

The Rector herself also recalls that the candidacy of Venice as the world capital of sustainability is an action that reinforces the role of the city in the New European Bauhaus and that the project has the objective of launching an interdisciplinary school for sustainability to train new professionals capable of contributing to the search for solutions.

More than a year after the first announcements (September 2022), the application file has still not yet circulated and is a document considered private. This seems in contradiction with a city and a candidacy that instead claims the role of social actors in participating to the construction of a widespread culture on the social and economic potential of art and craftsmanship. Consistent with what was argued by Morgan and Cooke (1998), most urban innovation actions base their effectiveness on governance processes characterised by close collaboration among local actors (Stoker 1998). In the Venetian case, this seems to be confirmed. As Fabrizio Panozzo, one of the inspirations of the candidacy and associate professor at Ca' Foscari, recalled during the public event of 13 December 2021 entitled 'Craft and the City' «Thanks to her history and her ability to establish close social relations, Venice embodies the inspiring principles of the New European Bauhaus'». The current position of the city is then influenced by the many interventions of enhancement from creative and artistic work, and craftsmanship realised over the past decades (Cacciatore and Panozzo 2022). This shows that the whole city—and not just the local institutions—played a key role in creating the conditions for the candidacy.

Through the study presented in this paper, the intent is to propose a predominantly empirical, but also, theoretically grounded, reflection to explore what factors favour or hinder the attempt to combine the dimensions of social innovation and creative craft enterprises. The paper has consequently focused on reconstructing the processes that have contributed to the position of Venice as a special place for experimentation in creative, cultural, and craft-based social innovation, in an attempt to understand how the processes of governance of the phenomenon influence urban orientation with respect to the issues

posed. To do so, it was chosen to investigate some initiatives of urban transformation through processes of enhancement of craft enterprises and creative work carried out in the Venetian context from 2015 to 2020. Six case studies were developed between 2015 and 2021 in Venice, selected according to four main criteria:

1. Projects which have explicitly pursued joint objectives of social innovation and urban transformation;
2. Initiatives with wide media coverage;
3. Projects that have been recognised or financed by public institutions;
4. Projects able to intercept also economic or material resources from private subjects.

On the basis of these criteria, thirteen potential cases were initially identified, eight of which were promoted by the Venice Metropolitan CNA, which, following an initial exploratory study, also emerged as the most proactive organisation in terms of initiatives planned and implemented. Of the six cases selected for research, five of these have been designed and managed by the above-mentioned trade association, which has proved to be a particularly proactive player in projects for local development and innovation carried out through microenterprises.

This paper is organised as follows: in the next section (Section 3), we present the research design; then, in Section 4, the paper introduces the six selected cases, presenting the structure and the main features that characterise their objectives and framing them with respect to the context; Section 5 discusses what emerged, highlighting the main elements of convergence and divergence between the cases, taking care to summarise the issues raised and to highlight possible further research developments; the Conclusions draw some lessons learned and propose new avenues of research.

### 3. Research Design

As highlighted in Section 1, what we are dealing with in this paper is an extremely recent field of research, with few articles and books. For this reason, we feel it is useful to adopt a methodology that is more oriented towards understanding than explaining phenomena. However, we are aware that this approach reduces the paper's potential for generalisation.

Following the proposal of [Nowak and Raffaelli \(2022\)](#), in this paper we adopt the Polanyian perspective that identifies the influence of social institutions in the forms taken by innovative social actions. The experiences of social innovation can be placed on a continuum from entrepreneurial approaches that satisfy social needs using competitive private market methods to collective, democratic, and emancipatory approaches passing through hybrid forms in which redistribution, reciprocity, and market exchanges are mixed. By exploring how different levels and types of embeddedness interact to influence social innovation processes, it is possible to understand how the position on this continuum shifts according to institutional structures. These structures define the logics that influence the interactions between actors and the context in which they are embedded.

That said, from the perspective of this work, the re-integration of economic action into society takes place by pursuing a twofold objective: on the one hand, orienting the action of the craft enterprise (and other economic actors) towards social goals such as the regeneration of the territory and local social relations; on the other hand, adopting action strategies based on cooperation between local actors according to a perspective of sharing resources, knowledges, and competences.

The lens through which we observe these phenomena is the one of social cooperation ([Corning 1982](#)), going to look at the goals and the role of the different actors who participate in the initiatives. The chosen path was to investigate the selected case studies by focusing on the processes of social cooperation among the actors involved in an attempt to capture the forms and orientations.

The research was guided by two key questions: what is the potential of craft enterprises in terms of social innovation? What governance processes contribute to the realisation of that potential? These are in turn supported by other guiding questions related to the factors

that can foster or hinder such contributions and the systems of relationships among the actors involved in these processes.

The underlying hypothesis, in fact, is that if the four elements that link social innovation and NEB—cocreation, sociality, culture, craftsmanship—are socially constructed, then the reasons for their success/failure must also be found in the social processes that generate them and that interconnect them with each other and cannot be artificially reconstructed elsewhere.

We opted for the multiple case study method because it was considered the most appropriate in achieving the aims of the research. The case study method is not intended to deeply analyse case studies but it is an excellent strategy for defining cases and exploring the conditions for understanding their characteristics (Yin 2009). This means that the case study is not useful for generalising a phenomenon but for exploring certain interpretative hypotheses. The difference between a single case study and a multiple case study is that in the latter, the researcher studies multiple cases in order to identify and understand the differences and similarities between the cases (Stake 1995). Another difference is that the researcher is able to analyse data both inside each situation and by comparing different situations (Yin 2009). Consequently, multiple case studies can be useful for understanding the reasons for contradictory or similar results and in this way the researcher can consolidate the results obtained (Eisenhardt 1991). Data analysis was carried out through research on the most *salient themes* (Miles and Huberman 1994) using an iterative analytical approach, in which we moved back and forth between data and theory.

In order to choose the six cases, an initial exploratory survey was conducted based on three open interviews addressed to the City Councillor Paola Mar (delegated to heritage, toponymy, and relations with universities, as a protagonist of the process of the candidacy of Venice as a partner of the NEB), to the can Regional Secretary Matteo Ribon (the chief of the regional artisans' association, selected by virtue of the activism of the association on the issues under investigation, reconstructed after an activity of press review and social media), and to Luciano Gamberini (Professor of Work and Organisational Psychology at the University of Padua, Delegate for relations with research funding bodies and Director of the Human Inspired Technology Research Centre, which places him in close relation with the business world).

We collected data from March 2015 to December 2021 during and after the implementation of the projects. Currently, data collection is continuing for future research. The interviews were meant to reconstruct the presence (or not) of projects that can be traced back to the scenario introduced in the first section of the paper and summarised in the quartet 'cocreation—sociality—culture—craftsmanship', that is, with precise objectives of social innovation through strategies consistent within that of the NEB. A total of thirteen cases were mentioned in relation to the city of Venice, and among these we chose to focus our attention on the six cases most mentioned by the interviewees.

Besides the first three interviews, the six selected cases were reconstructed through 45 semi-structured in-depth interviews (Table 1) with artisans (13), university members (9), cultural workers and artists (10), trade association staff (5), city officials (6), and city councillors (2).

The three people initially interviewed were re-interviewed here. The 42 new people were chosen through a saturation snowball method. The first interviewees were the project managers of the six initiatives, identified through documentary sources available online and through press reviews. Each interviewee was then asked to name two other key figures in the project. Key people were described as having significant shares of power (influence and authority to dictate whether the project was a success or not) within the project partnership and were simultaneously involved in the execution phase of the initiatives (i.e., with high knowledge of the processes implemented). Chains of key stakeholders (one per initiative) were interrupted when the last person interviewed gave names of people already interviewed three times in a row (i.e., after getting six names).

**Table 1.** The interviewees.

Interviewed Code	Membership Organisation	Role in the Organisation
1	Glass artisan	Business owner
2	Mask artisan	Business owner
3	Wood artisan	Business owner
4	Pearl artisan	Business owner
5	Glass artisan	Business owner
22	Construction artisan	Business owner
27	Mask artisan	Business owner
33	Metal artisan	Business owner
35	Digital artisan	Business owner
11	Glass artisan	Business owner
39	Wood artisan	Business owner
40	Mask artisan	Business owner
41	Glass artisan	Business owner
21	Ca' Foscari University	Full professor
10	Ca' Foscari University	Associate professor
12	Iuav University	University researcher
18	Ca' Foscari University	University researcher
19	Ca' Foscari University	Associate professor
28	Academy of Fine Arts of Venice	Full professor
13	Iuav University	University researcher
25	Ca' Foscari University	Full professor
26	Ca' Foscari University	Associate professor
30	Professional/Own organisation	Artist
29	Professional/Own organisation	Cultural worker
14	Professional/Own organisation	Cultural worker
15	Professional/Own organisation	Artist
32	Professional/Own organisation	Artist
23	Professional/Own organisation	Artist
36	Professional/Own organisation	Artist
37	Professional/Own organisation	Cultural worker
42	Professional/Own organisation	Cultural worker
44	Professional/Own organisation	Artist
7	Trade Association staff—CAN	Director of Venice office
38	Trade Association staff—CAN	Director of Veneto area
8	Trade Association staff—Ecipa	Director
9	Trade Association staff—CAN	Official of Venice area
45	Trade Association staff—CAN	Official of Venice area
16	City of Venice	City Councillor
17	City of Venice	City Councillor
20	City of Venice	City official
24	City of Venice	City official
31	City of Venice	City official
34	City of Venice	City official
43	City of Venice	City official
6	City of Venice	City official

Source: Own processing.

The interview was structured in seven sections to which correspond as many dimensions of analysis. In the first part, the aim was to reconstruct the case from the point of view of some of its protagonists, stimulating them to describe the initiative (the story of the initiative) and the main actions that marked it (the outputs). In the third section, we focused on the key players involved in the initiatives and their different roles and functions (the actor framework). The fourth section was devoted to explicating the goals of the overall initiative and those specific to the partner of which the person is a representative (the objectives). In the fifth section, we focused on the implemented strategies (implementation strategies) in an attempt to pursue the set objectives. The sixth section reconstructed the sources of financing and their characteristics in terms of volume, flow, and (dis)continuity

(budgets). An attempt was then made to explore any elements of innovation present in the different dimensions (elements of innovation).

Once the interviews were collected and transcribed, they were qualitatively analysed using the Atlas.ti software. The purpose of the process was to collect, organise, and understand the meaning of different social constructions of reality, i.e., the ones that were socialised by the interviewees in the course of their professional and life experiences. However, the choice of conducting research with a precise theoretical context suggested not to take a grounded attitude toward the interviews but to analyse them in light of the predetermined structure and based on predetermined analysis dimensions, to which parts of the interviews were traced. Through this work, it was possible to identify some key topics that will be explored in more detail in Section 5.

The choice of adopting seven dimensions of key analysis (narratives of initiatives, actions, actors, goals, strategies, funding, innovations) favoured the use of a comparative perspective between cases in the analysis of results. This phase required extensive and repeated discussion among the authors, whose purpose was to question some reconstructions of the different subjective experiences in order to find elements of convergence and/or divergence. To do this, the authors first developed their own analyses, then revised the co-author's analyses, and then revised them in light of the observations collected. It was only after this double review that the two authors made their analyses consistent and integrated and so reconstructed an overall framework of analysis.

#### 4. Case Studies—Between Craftsmanship and Social Innovation

The presence of craftsmanship in the city of Venice is 24% of the total number of businesses, as shown by the Confartigianato Imprese Venezia on Infocamere data (Vettore 2019). There are currently 1087 craft businesses in the Venice historic centre, one-fifth of those in the entire municipality and 6% of the entire metropolitan area. The dynamics triggered by mass tourism have led to phenomena that are absent in other parts of the metropolitan area, including, just to name a few: the increase in rents for stores, the decrease in the number of resident citizens, growing competition, the worsening of the phenomenon of counterfeiting, the increasing number of 'hit and run' tourists compared to the overnight tourism of past decades.

This depicts a city that associates the NEB strategy with a precise attempt at urban regeneration that centres on the weak sectors of the urban economy, namely those of arts, culture, and crafts through an integrated development model that would consider physical, economic, social, and cultural aspects (Sun and Chen 2021).

The case studies analysed are represented below (Table 2) and summarised in seven key dimensions.

**Table 2.** Case studies.

Case Study	Description	Output	Involved Actors	Goals	Employed Strategy	Budget and Access Modes	Innovation Elements
Fondamenta della Misericordia area (2015)	Regeneration of the Fondamenta della Misericordia area through crafts and public art.	Two public art events with over 5000 participants each. Increased area appeal.	Cultural associations, artists, productive activities, Municipality, University.	Valuation and increase of the attractiveness of the place. Development of two territorial marketing events.	Involvement of cultural institutions and local artists to promote the social legitimacy of the event.	7000€ per project, of which 2000€ of self-financing and 5000€ from the University.	Contaminating public art and craft/commercial enterprise.
AltroLato (OtherSide) (2018)	Regeneration of the area opposite the Calatrava bridge through crafts and public art.	Area signage panels installation. Art and business contamination. Event with over 2000 participants.	Productive activities University, artists, trade associations, Municipality, Chamber of Commerce.	Revitalising the impoverished area targeted by the intervention. Creation of a network of local actors.	Preventative involvement of the Municipality. Activation of cultural institutions, students and artists to focus city attention on the project.	20,000€ from Public announcement of the Chamber of Commerce.	Tactical art incursions as a regenerative tool.



Table 2. Cont.

Case Study	Description	Output	Involved Actors	Goals	Employed Strategy	Budget and Access Modes	Innovation Elements
Venice Original (2019)	Regeneration by developing and promoting three thematic routes (gondola, glass, masks) and one related to the specific place identified.	Development of ritual chains of interactions. Network of local artisans. Public (and free downloadable) itineraries to enhance local craft heritage. Realisation of events.	Craft enterprises, trade association, Municipality, Third sector, industry, Chamber of Commerce.	Creation of four paths of valorisation of the traditional and artistic productive activities.	Activate artisans among project coordinators to obtain effective participation of craftspeople. Prior involvement of the municipality. Social legitimacy through events.	Self-financing for 10,000€. 30,000€ from public call of the Chamber of Commerce.	Digitisation of the territorial offer. Reorganisation of Venice tour proposal.
San Basilio area (2019)	Temporary co-management of a space dedicated to traditional, service, and artistic craftsmanship.	Development of ritual chains of interactions. Co-management of a space. Cooperation and knowledge between different categories of artisans. Workshops. Micro events to strengthen social capital. Final event for 100 participants.	University, local businesses, municipality, artisans, trade association, professionals, Chamber of Commerce.	Creation of a network of local actors to enhance craftsmanship. Co-management of a dedicated public space.	Active involvement of local artisans. Co-design with the University. Social legitimacy through events and political involvement.	20,000€ from public announcement of the Chamber of Commerce.	Interaction and cooperation between different sectors and supply chains.
Venice Travel (2020)	Realisation of six integrated paths between craftsmanship, commerce and eno-gastronomy.	Six thematic pathways. Strengthening of the identity of the place. Materials for the tourist promotion of the place.	Productive activities, trade association, Municipality, Third sector, Chamber of Commerce.	Enhancement of productive activities of excellence. Promotion of the identity of the place.	Realisation of a project of an exclusive nature (aimed only at local excellence), to generate demand for participation.	30,000€ from public announcement of the Chamber of Commerce.	Digitalisation of the territorial offer.
Bottega Attiva (Active Shop) (2021)	Development of actions to support local entrepreneurship and a proactive and positive narrative of the Piave neighbourhood.	Development of ritual chains of interactions. Creation of a network of local workshops. Event with over 1000 participants. Micro events to strengthen social capital.	Citizenship, productive activities, trade associations, Municipality, University, Chamber of Commerce.	Creation of a local actors network. Realisation of visual marketing and place branding activities.	Activation of local workers to foster social legitimacy. Participatory process with local residents, Third sector, and practitioners. Social legitimization through events and political involvement.	20,000€ from Public announcement of the Chamber of Commerce.	Social Capital. Definition of a new brand for the area.

Source: Own processing.

### Fondamenta (2014 and 2015)

The projects named Fondamenta 3.0 and Fondamenta 4.0 (2014–2015) are temporary urban regenerating festivals developed through contemporary arts that took place for two consecutive editions in the sestiere of Cannaregio in Venice, along the fondamenta of Misericordia and Ormesini. The initiative has involved in each project twenty management students from Ca' Foscari University and six young curators of contemporary art from the Veneto Region in operational activities and training on the themes of urban regeneration based on culture. The working group has mapped the urban space chosen for the project by surveying the characteristics, needs, and desires of the resident population, and then shared the results with the team of artists and artisans selected through an international call (hosted in the city for a short artistic residency). For a weekend in May, installations, sound, workshops, music, and interaction design, have transformed the Fondamenta in a space in which stores, bars, houses, streets, and walls have been subject and object of the artistic intervention.

In each edition, organised by the cultural association Venetiae Alumni, a partnership was activated involving more than twenty-four public businesses in the area, several cultural associations, the Chamber of Commerce and the city of Venice, Ca' Foscari University, and the social cooperative Sumo. The cultural associations and the social cooperative

managed the activities related to the obtaining of permits, the setup, the working groups, and the project communication. The municipal administration has issued the patronage, the authorisations, and has allowed the free use of public land.

The purpose of the intervention was to create a public art event able to bring out and interact contemporary artistic expressions with Venice and its inhabitants, through the creation of a temporary creative district, activated by the collaboration between the actors involved, who wanted to make social and artistic innovations to generate new opportunities for economic development in the field of arts and culture.

The sources of funding were as follows: self-financing (2000€ collected from the merchants involved) and the grant from Ca' Foscari University of Venice (5000€).

The great concentration of public in the area (over 4000 participants per edition) has, however, attracted controversy from some residents and some local businesses. Among the most unusual elements that the project has been able to put in the field, there are both the calls that have been able to attract the interest of operators, volunteers, and international artists to enhance the area of Fondamenta, and the contamination between artisans, traders, and artists, realised through the instrument of public art.

#### **AltroLato (OtherSide) (2018)**

The project was made in Venice by the can of Venice in January 2018, through a series of incursions of artists and artisans aimed at enhancing the area of the Fondamenta della Croce, San Simeon Piccolo, and Tolentini and favouring the economic businesses in the area, affected by economic losses due to the construction of the Constitution Bridge (Calatrava Bridge) that changed the flow of tourism which reduced the business in the area.

In order to make artistic incursions in the urban space, teachers and students of the Academy of Fine Arts of Venice have been involved. Even though the available time was limited, they created an episode of public art in order to rethink, in an ironic and situationist way, that specific portion of the urban fabric as a temporary creative district. The regeneration intervention was presented through a public event in the Fondamenta, involving thousands of people in an active way. Among the outcomes of the initiative there is the installation by the municipal administration of Venice of vertical panels that indicate the possible alternative route, defined here with 'other side', than the one mainly used by tourists.

The initiative has built a large network of local institutional actors, including two universities (Ca' Foscari and the Academy of Fine Arts), the Municipality of Venice, the Chamber of Commerce of Venice, thirty companies in the area, the organising trade association, an important hotel in the area, and thirty artists and students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice.

The project was made possible thanks to funds (20,000€) provided by the Chamber of Commerce of Venice as part of the fund dedicated to urban regeneration in 2018.

The initiative has attracted critiques compared especially to the late temporal response with which the initiative came to life.

#### **Venice Original: The art kilometre (2019)**

The urban project 'the art kilometre, an evolved creative urban district', presented by the CNA of Venice in response to the call for proposals 'Bando per la riqualificazione urbana dei distretti del Commercio' of the Chamber of Commerce of Venice in 2019, has provided the use of the model of the cultural district, dividing the artisans involved into categories able to represent the most knowledge and ancient crafts of the Venetian tradition (gondola, glass, and masks). The project actions have created four paths that have involved a large part of the city in the partnership, including, in addition to CNA, the city and the Chamber of Commerce: the Conservatory Benedetto Marcello, Ca' Foscari University Venice, the association of *Mascareri* of Venice, the association El Felze (related to the manufacturing of the gondola), the photographic association Marco Polo, and the Academy of Fine Arts. The associations of trades have pointed out the main authentic, traditional, and relevant workshops to be included in the paths, while the institutional partners have favoured

the development of the initiative through sponsorships and concessions of the use of free spaces (conservatory, public land, etc.).

In the main area subject to renewal intervention (called the kilometre of art), a specific intervention/path of ‘corporate artistry’ has been self-defined, in which the languages of contemporary art have been put in relation to some of the few and historical artisan stores remaining in the identified area. This itinerary has been called ‘Insigni’ and has been realised by actively involving another ten artisan stores.

The initiative has followed the ambitious goal of enhancing the value of craft stores with historical and traditional character in the historic centre of Venice, identifying them with the application on the window of a distinctive mark of quality craft ‘Venice Original’, and bringing them on the web portal, as a place where you can know these activities.

The project has been realised thanks to the contribution deriving from the adjudication of the above-mentioned announcement of the Chamber of Commerce equal to 30,000€ and through 10,000€ of self-financing by the CNA.

Following the project, making a synthesis of the expectations and needs of the artisans involved in the developed activities, a further project proposal was realised: ‘Venice Original e-commerce’, which found financial support from J. P. Morgan (390.000€), which supported the production of an e-commerce platform of Venetian artistic and traditional crafts, currently under development ([www.veniceoriginal.it](http://www.veniceoriginal.it), accessed on 1 June 2022).

#### **San Basilio (2019)**

The project, organised in 2019 by the CNA of Venice, has created an experimental space—Palazzo Cosulich, granted free of charge by Ca’ Foscari University—to create a temporary shop able to become both a place of sale and a point of discussion for the Venetian crafts.

The space was managed thanks to a process of co-design curated by Ca’ Foscari University and the active involvement of local artisans, who in turn activated and included in the design process their colleagues working in the area of operation.

The discussion and comparison activities developed in this space have produced the experimentation of innovative processes (also through the use of digital platforms) and contamination of ideas. Among the activities conducted, a training course on sustainability was held by Ca’ Foscari staff.

The tight timetable for the implementation of the funded activities (three months) and the reduced budget available allowed only a small number of artisan enterprises to participate in the co-management of the space, generating complaints from other artisans who were excluded.

The initiative was made possible thanks to 20,000€ allocated following the awarding of the urban regeneration tender issued by the Chamber of Commerce of Venice.

#### **Venice Travel (2020)**

The activities and the program of interventions carried out with the Venice Travel project (<https://travel.veniceoriginal.it/>, accessed on 1 June 2022), later integrated into the Venice Original e-commerce project website ([www.veniceoriginal.it](http://www.veniceoriginal.it), accessed on 1 June 2022), were conceived by the Venice CNA in response to a call for proposals for tourist enhancement by the Venice Chamber of Commerce.

The project has realised photographic and video services for the companies involved, which have constituted the material for building a dedicated website in which six itineraries for slow tourism, integrated between craftsmanship and food and wine offerings, have been included.

Among the project activities there was an online training course (webinar) specifically on the theme of tourist reception and business communication as well as place marketing.

The project activity had the aim of enhancing the areas covered by the routes/itineraries through the web promotion of video storytelling made with an active and attractive approach, also aimed at strengthening the relationship between memory and identity of the place.

The strategy adopted to define the members of the platform has provided to include only stores and production realities of excellence, recognised as historical and renowned

stores. This made the project exclusive and its inclusion desirable, thus generating demand for participation. However, this has also generated numerous complaints.

The resources allocated to the initiative by the Chamber of Commerce's announcement amounted to a total of 30,000€.

Among its innovative elements, there is the digitisation of the territorial offer that, for the first time in a single portal, has collected more than 100 companies highly representative of the identity and history of Venice. In addition, the project has triggered a high degree of digital innovation in the businesses involved, strengthening the way they present themselves to tourists and visitors with a view to the full and best possible welcome.

#### **Bottega Attiva (Active Shop) (2021)**

The project intervention, coordinated by the CNA of Venice, has conducted a series of territorial marketing actions to regenerate the so-called Piave district of Mestre (the mainland of Venice), an area strongly disqualified from the point of view of urban decay and safety. The main production chain that the project has involved refers to commercial activities and craft service for citizens (food, catering, home sector, plumbing, electronics, restoration, repairs, services, etc.), which act as real social garrisons able to ensure quality to the area and the development of relationships and social capital.

The initiative involved on one side the social components and active citizenship present in the area (Associazione Ecity and Gruppo di lavoro via Piave) and on the other side the productive activities (21 companies), enabling a participatory process coordinated by the Iuav University of Venice.

The initiative has defined and produced an online map, able to represent the various commercial and handicraft productive activities present in the area, emphasising at a promotional and marketing level the places of interest and services for citizens and tourists. The map has been inserted in the project web platform.

The realisation of a widespread event has then given notice of the activated participatory process, involving and promoting the stores in an active way, through partnerships with artists and artisans of the cultural sector and a series of artistic incursions by actors of local theatre companies, which have involved and attracted the attention of those present in the area.

The project partners were: the Municipality of Venice, the Chamber of Commerce of Venice, working groups, and cultural/social promotion associations operating in the area; shopkeepers, traders, and artisans of the area.

The main strategy to reach the project goals was the realisation of a participatory process that involved businesses, citizenship, and local associations, activated by the Iuav University of Venice in collaboration with the temporary project manager, chosen among the cultural operators active in the area concerned. From this process were generated the main actions that were carried out.

The project was made possible thanks to the allocation of 20,000€ for the awarding of the call for proposals on urban regeneration (2021) of the Chamber of Commerce of Venice and Rovigo.

The creation of a new brand for the area and relational initiatives for consolidating, developing, and implementing social capital were the main innovative elements put in place by the intervention.

### **5. Results and Discussion—How the Urban Issue of Craftsmanship Rises to the Top of the Policy Agenda: Analysis and Discussion of Cases**

The analysis of the interviews enabled us to collect, organise, and understand the material collected. A synthesis of the results of the analysis is presented below and then exemplified in the table through some key quotations (see Table 3) associated to the main themes emerged. Here, we decided to discuss only the topics that are most shared between respondents. The following table shows the main topics highlighted by the coding work. Topics that recur in at least 60% of the interviews and were therefore considered to be

cross-cutting across projects that were included. Other few sentences are quoted directly in the text to exemplify the concepts presented here.

**Table 3.** Quotations.

Quotation	Project	Topic	Frequency
In these years of privileged observation of all city events, I have rarely seen projects that use art in such an innovative way put forward by cultural associations (n.6).	Fondamenta	Use of art as a means for urban social innovation.	75%
AltroLato's objectives refer to an innovative way of seeing and understanding the city, in which creative energies from below detect a criticality and create the political and institutional conditions to find a solution through art and creativity (n.10).	Other side		
Despite the lack of significant dedicated public funding, the project has been able to organise itself, involving a broad partnership and gathering resources both among the exhibitors and through the networks of volunteers and artists who have joined the project cause (n.21).	Fondamenta	Broad partnership.	85%
I think no craftsman would like to be excluded from these paths. I'm honoured to be a part of this project, says an artisan working in the bookbinding industry (n.39).	Venice Travel		
Let them propose these initiatives at home, they only bring movida and young people who are certainly not the quality clientele we need (n.17).	Fondamenta	Events as a tool for urban social innovation.	60%
Activities that give us visibility are welcome, but 10 years after the inauguration of the Calatrava bridge, economic activities have been halved! (n.13).	Other side		
A strong discontent was creating between the excluded ones since 100 enterprises are not enough to represent the venetian excellences (n.38).	Venice Travel	Inconsistency between objectives and strategy.	65%
I am participating because I would be the only one not to participate from my street, but I think you are only wasting my time because this little initiative will not make people want to come to Via Piave (n.41).	Bottega Attiva		
To actively involve more than 40 artisans and work on the city's tourist offer was possible only through the activation of a temporary manager who was sufficiently well known and appreciated among the artisans, as well as the prior involvement of the City Council so that what was done could find space in official city channels (n.9).	Venice Original: The art kilometre	Use of a temporary project manager chosen from among the beneficiaries of the intervention.	60%
The first refers to the reorganisation of the Venice tour offer based on the artisan sector; the second concerns the digitisation of this offer, which up to that moment had a scarce presence on the web, since most of the artisan companies involved did not have a website or a social network profile (n.28).	Venice Original: The art kilometre	Digitisation and innovative process.	80%
Among the strategies taken to reach the goals was the prior involvement of multiple city institutions relative to the project, and the use of multi-channel advertising campaigns, which in some ways forced the parties to take a stand (n.8).	Other side		
I've lived here for 40 years and I'm very familiar with the local crafts, yet I didn't know more than half of the craftsmen you've involved and put in the maps/paths. I think it's a useful tool that can raise awareness of the excellence of Venetian craftsmanship, beyond the usual knowns (n.29).	Venice Original: The art kilometre		
I've never had the opportunity to meet with master glassmakers and shipbuilders before, and never mind with construction workers and terrazzo workers. And yet, thanks to these meetings, I've had confirmation that we're all in the same boat! (n.33).	San Basilio		
This project has become the Tuesday event of October. I have to admit that I enjoy coming to these meetings because we all speak the same language here (n.27).	San Basilio	Social capital development and trust relationships.	90%
After the project I started a collaboration with the master glassmaker Carlo Pagan (n.5).	Venice Original: The art kilometre		
I would never have thought of sharing parts of my know-how with the competition; in fact, this opportunity for comparison, which for us in Murano is an absolute rarity, has not only been useful but has allowed me to learn new things and approaches to my working technique (n.22).	San Basilio		

Source: Own processing.

In line with models of open innovation (Chesbrough 2003), the six case studies involved actors from different institutional spheres by developing broad partnerships (Table 4). These actions took the form of urban co-creation labs (Iaione 2016), which were based on multi-purpose coalitions. One interviewee says that «thanks to the project I met

colleagues who I didn't think had the same problems as me and together we discussed and looked for possible solutions . . . even when we didn't find a solution we had ideas which we then tried to realise» (interviewee n.3). These initiatives show, therefore, the collaborative nature of the relationships between the actors mobilized by the projects (Moulaert and MacCallum 2019). The heterogeneity of the partnership appears to be an added value both in terms of mobilizable resources (following the logic of expertise) as well as in terms of mobilizable knowledge (following the logic of social problem solving). From the reconstructions of the projects, a logic of action based on integration and complementarity emerges, where innovative solutions to problems are not searched within specialised disciplinary perimeters but through interdisciplinarity, which becomes a key resource.

**Table 4.** Actors.

Case Study	N. Companies	N. Associations	N. Cultural Operators	N. Universities	N. P.A.	N. Labs, Workshop	N. Private Events	N. Public Events
Fondamenta	16	9	32	1	2	2	2	17
Other side	15	3	18	2	2	4	1	2
San Basilio	21	3	4	1	2	9	7	3
Venice Original	40	6	12	3	3	16	4	12
Venice Travel	108	5	3	2	2	1	1	1
Bottega Attiva	25	6	5	2	2	4	2	4

Source: Own processing.

Connected with this, the role given to knowledge as a key resource in social innovation processes strongly emerges. One interviewee says that «I had never been at a meeting with university professors, city councillors, other politicians and artisans my colleagues to talk about our problems and what can be done» (interviewee n. 15). These projects have stimulated paths of innovation and change both in the organisations that have participated in them and in the governance of local development processes, in particular thanks to the ability of artisan and cultural enterprises to also give an identity and symbolic value to the actions carried out, easing the mechanisms of exchange of resources and skills between enterprises, institutions, and local communities (Tricarico and Geissler 2017). These companies have worked on the possibility of connecting local resources and skills to give rise to initiatives strongly linked to the local community, demonstrated a significant ability to systematise widespread cognitive resources for the creation of opportunities for growth and change (Tricarico 2018), and contributing to transform the relational networks that constitute local spaces and their governance (Bartels and Turnbull 2020). Knowledge becomes a key resource of creative processes, which employ craftsmanship as a tool to achieve social innovation goals. Technologies, although present, do not seem to be the fundamental technical-cognitive ingredient but rather a tool to enhance the impact of cognitive resources contained in actors operating in the field of research and/or art and creativity. The creativity (as a tool) more than technology appears as what ties together social innovation (as an end) and artisanal enterprise (as a means) becoming a cognitive resource associated with problem-solving activities. In fact, in these projects academics and artists participated in the production of the initiatives, promoting or coordinating specific project actions, and contributing to the definition of the strategies and objectives to achieve them. In addition, the researchers and artists activated in the projects, driven by research interests and/or civic or political passion, mobilized themselves by bringing along the university or the arts organisations as partners. This relationship between the university, arts organisations, and the city strengthens the two-way relationship between the world of research, the arts, and urban actors, who can direct their strategic lines and the use of their economic resources through the knowledge provided by academics and artists.

Therefore, the activation of multiple actors does not count only for questions of representativeness or influence, but also for the possibility they offer of sharing ideas, projects, knowledge, skills, and other cognitive resources. However, this appears possible

when there is a diffuse awareness of the opportunities created by system actions over others and a widespread trust in the mechanisms of cooperation among actors. In fact, as the difficulties of the small entrepreneur to collaborate with other companies have long been known, and despite the strong social drives against collaboration in favour of closures in circles of belonging (Liedtka 1996), we might have expected a certain distrust towards collaborative dynamics. Instead, the projects register a marked reticularisation of relationships between organisations (DiMaggio 2019). This is based on chains of events, happenings, and actions aimed at fostering opportunities for interaction between the participants, thanks to which the projects have encouraged the development of chains of interaction (Collins 2005). One interviewee says that «at the beginning I thought, but I know that others did too, that the project initiatives were a bit useless compared to the real problems but later I found these events very valuable to get to know and deal with many people» (interviewee n. 33). These actions (laboratories, workshops, public presentations, meetings for operators in specific sectors, etc.) have been fundamental to the development and consolidation of relationships, knowledge, the production of social capital and trust between the parties (Trigilia 1999; Torsvik 2000), and the reduction of opportunistic behaviour (Lin et al. 2001). Social capital is seen as a resource (information and trust) that can be used by actors to pursue their interests (Coleman 1990), allowing the value of tacit knowledge and human capital as a competitive advantage linked to productive specialisation (ibid.) and these initiatives seem to contribute to expanding the channels of access to social capital and broadening it. From this, the projects emerging are those that take the form of communities of practice (Wenger 2010), capable of holding together a cultural proposal (itineraries, attracting political and institutional attention to a place, co-management of a space, activation of workshops that were previously disconnected, etc.) in close connection with technical know-how and the intangible heritage guarded by master craftsmen. The events, then, were first of all occasions for dialogue between different subjects and organisations, and experiments relating to dialogue, rethinking one's own role and relation with other actors in the field, sharing stories, tools, and ways of dealing with recurring problems (Jacobs 1961). In such social learning contexts (Wenger 2010), a nexus was created between knowledge, community, learning, and personal and spatial identity as a shared identity was defined around a domain of interest, characterised by the sharing of information and the building of relationships that allowed participants to learn from one another through these experiences.

## 6. Conclusions

What emerges from this study is that collaboration between actors produces meaning frames and routines that foster convergence towards shared strategies for dealing with common problems. Here, social problem solving not only socially produces solutions but also aligns actors' perspectives. Expert and creative knowledge reinforce this process by producing forms of a posteriori rationality, rationalised myths (Zan et al. 2007) that identify and legitimise certain social goals, and the appropriate ways to achieve them. Urban social innovation based on creative craft enterprises is rationalised because it is believed to drive objective techniques rather than moral ones, and there are delegations of specific activities to certain professions considered adequate, the so-called social innovators. The alignment of flows is not only rooted in existing relational structures, but also in courses of action and routines, which lead to the sedimentation of shared priorities and behaviours among actors.

What we seem to have learned from this study is that craft enterprises can provide a strong impulse to urban social innovation processes through the sharing of expert and creative knowledge, strengthening of social capital, and the creation of trust and other collective assets for the competitiveness of local actors. Craft enterprise connects to social innovation through the shared and creative use of cognitive and technical skills. It is creativity—understood both as a strategy and a tool based on a mix of inventiveness, imagination, and reason—that connects social innovation (goal) to artisan enterprise (means). Creativity becomes more effective in terms of initiatives and influential in terms of the

policy agenda the greater its level of embeddedness. This embeddedness is not only social but also cultural, political, and historical. Only at this point, the issue of craftsmanship becomes a shared policy issue between many local actors and can become the key element of Venice's candidature in the New European Bauhaus programme. From this point of view, the New European Bauhaus seems to capture perfectly the potential of craft enterprises in urban social innovation. However, creativity alone is not enough. The examples of the projects presented here show the process and multi-actor nature of these interventions, where there must be mobilised a diffuse set of actors willing to collaborate. In Venice's case, even if this is not fully reflected in the networking and co-design process that set the stage for the city's candidacy in the Bauhaus of the Seas project, it is present in the process that put the topic on the top of local policy agenda (Kingdon 1993). Today, the risk of treating the relationship between social innovation and craft enterprise in a normative way risks undervaluing the role of local actors who have contributed to the creation of a context oriented towards culturally based social innovation. Another condition for the initiative's success is the care taken in the construction of a system of actions that favour continuous confrontation between local actors, aimed at building relationships of knowledge and trust between them. This, in addition to a generative function typical of open innovation processes, also has a relational function, becoming a strategy through which to strengthen the bonds of trust between local actors and, consequently, the availability of social capital, understood as a system of relationships that makes local resources more easily accessible and mobilizable, both material (e.g., space and money) and immaterial (e.g., knowledge, ideas, and relationships).

The research methodology adopted and the research results have some limitations that can be further investigated in the future.

First, the analysis of each case did not take into account the evolution of the connected social networks over time. Thus, it is not possible to highlight the effects on the local policy community of multiple occasions of interaction.

Second, sometimes the interviewees presented as a positive outcome processes and events that tend to reproduce the logic behind some of the city's problems, e.g., overtourism and depopulation. The article does not investigate the effects of the initiatives on these processes.

Finally, the success of the New European Bauhaus initiative may have been influenced by other factors not considered here. The article does not take into account the factors that contributed to the creation of a policy window.

These limitations will be the focus of further analysis and research in the future.

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