## **Next**Nuove Energie X il Territorio



# Cosmopolitan Palermo Inquiry on the future of the city

Research funded by Fondazione Banco di Sicilia further details www.nuovenergie.org

#### Scope of research

"Cosmopolitan Palermo" describes the recent changes that have occurred within the urban texture of the sicilian capital, focusing on places and artefacts connected to international exchanges.

The research is based on the hypothesis that change in contemporary cities is increasingly dependent on flows of capital, people, knowledge and skills. In other words, large cities are cosmopolitan because they mix references, investments, trajectories with highly differentiated backgrounds.

More generally, one can talk of a "cosmopolitan urban regime" manifesting itself through the forms of the local governance and the urban texture. A regime that requires social actors able to manage these culturally different references.

Starting from this perspective, "Cosmopolitan Palermo" considers urban forms and actors of cosmopolitanism present in the city in a lapse of approximately fifteen years (1992-2008). The research focuses on recent transformations of the city centre. More specifically, it identifies and analyses a series of urban transformations produced by interactions between local logics and global networks. Through an in-depth study of these changes it clarifies the relationship between flows of people, ideas and capital, on the one hand, and the production of new urban forms on the other.

#### Why Palermo?

Palermo quite clearly changed "urban regime" at the beginning of the 90's, opening itself up again to visitors, information and capital from abroad. Palermo is affected by processes that are analogous to those observable in other European cities, even if the pace and level of change has often been more important elsewhere.

The recent character of this phase of globalisation in Palermo brings an advantage to the researcher: it allows to observe these phenomena in a better way, precisely because they are emerging.

#### Method

The research, carried out through statistical and documentary analysis, in-depth interviews and fieldwork observations focuses on the following points:

- the recent evolution of the political context and patterns of local governance

- the recent evolution of (mainly in-coming) flows and urban forms
- the in-depth analysis of a series of 18 places and urban artefacts, which are representative of the globalisation of the city centre

The interviews involved three categories of actors:

- opinion leaders and policy makers
- actors involved in the creation, design and use of the new urban forms
- foreign residents (businessmen, artists, students, professionals)

### Mapping of new urban forms

The choice of places and artefacts expressing a cosmopolitan turn in Palermo is based on a typology of interventions in Palermo:

- reconversion of brownfields (former industrial areas)
- rehabilitation and re-use of historical buildings
- international design hotels and bars
- public spaces
- multifunctional cultural spaces.

A sample of 18 urban forms belonging to these five categories have been investigated to trace their genealogies and creation process, on the one hand, and their actual use, on the other. Designers, architects, entrepreneurs, users and customers have been interviewed



to understand the relationships between urban forms and flows (local/non local influences and references etc.) which criss-cross Palermo and the lives of some of its actors. One of the outputs of this inquiry is a first step towards an /Atlas of urban innovation/ which maps the places of innovation and explains how they have been created: a cd-rom with graphic interface in flash, containing analytical accounts, pictures, maps and videos for each of the selected urban forms in Palermo's city centre.





