

PRATO CIRCULAR CITY

Design & Development:
City of Prato

Year:
2018

Location:
Prato, Italy

More info:
www.pratocircularcity.it

Scales:
City

Resources:
Water, Reclaimed Materials

Design Approaches:
Regenerative design

R-Strategies:
Refurbish, Remanufacture

Aspects:
Resource Flows, Management,
Economy, Stakeholders



The city of Prato (around 200.000 inhabitants) is famous worldwide for its textile district, representing about 3% of European textile production. Prato Circular City is an ongoing project, started in 2018 and promoted by the Municipality of Prato, to enhance the city's transition towards a circular economy. Historically, the town was strongly characterized by a homogeneous production district, a fertile ground for this transition. Textile recycling techniques led to Prato being considered one of Italy's most progressive and innovative industrial cities.

Therefore, today, the city aims to be at the forefront of the circular transition of the built and industrial environment. However, rather than shaping this as a top-down and linear initiative, Prato has developed an integrated and holistic approach, considering the circular economy a horizontal priority within its long-term urban agenda. With this project, the city aims to achieve three main objectives:

- Strengthen the image of Prato as a "circular city" and promote shared,

integrated and participatory actions towards the understanding of the circular economy,

- Establish a permanent table with the stakeholders of the territory to promote shared circular economy actions and build a governance model of the circular city.
- Create circular city governance.

1. Conceptualization of Circularity

What is the circular idea, theory and approach behind this project? What is the aim and purpose of it?

Prato has fully embedded the circular economy in its urban agenda, aiming to turn the city into a national and international benchmark for circular practices. In fact, Prato has represented Italy since 2016 in the *EU Urban Agenda Thematic Partnership on the Circular Economy (UAPCE)*. This partner allowed the city to design a solid vision and strategy and participate in a specific task force dedicated to circular city governance. Notably, the plan has undergone a structured process of multi-stakeholder participation, called '*Prato al Futuro*', with a dense program of both physical and virtual meetings which have gathered the local administration, citizens, entrepreneurs, grassroots associations and the broader plethora of local actors into a collective discussion about the future social, economic and cultural development of the city. The process has been documented and reported openly via *Prato al Futuro's* platform, which also contains clear and systematized information about the main policy initiatives contributing to the city's urban agenda. The conceptualization that the city of Prato has been proposing for some years at the European level is that of a "circular city" based on three fundamental focuses: innovation, regeneration, and cohesion.

For the textile district, global market challenges require innovation in production processes towards more sustainable and innovative models to strengthen inter-district relations, increase competitiveness, and consider the product's life cycle. In particular, the industrial district of Prato arranges a closed water cycle to reuse the wastewater more than once and clean it before returning it to the environment.

The *Prato Circular City Strategy* also aims to develop an urban reuse agency for managing abandoned or semi-used spaces and buildings under the *Rethinking the City Initiative*, which aligns with collaborative economy principles. Moreover, the project aims to reduce waste by limiting the waste produced from the construction and demolition of buildings where many materials are recyclable or reusable.

Lastly, at the core of the conceptualization lies the strengthening of social cohesion by promoting participatory processes and active citizenship that improve the quality of life.

2. The Sectoral Dimension

On which economic areas is the circularity focusing? What kind of system, supply chain, and flows is the project addressing?

In Prato, the circular economy ambition and vision are deeply rooted in the textile sector, which has allowed, over time, the federation of local SMEs (Small & Mid-sized Enterprises) and enabled competitive advantages based on a more extensive and interconnected mobilization of knowledge and assets. Prato's textile tradition of recycling and reusing started in the nineteenth century and made a fortune in this area. Through the recycling of textile waste, the Prato district is the first in the world to join the *Greenpeace Detox* project to reuse waste and water pollution from the fashion industry. To reduce textile waste and pollution derived from textile processing, the project aims to eliminate, by 2020, 11 classes of pollutants discharged into water courses during textile manufacturing processes.

Next, to focus on the textile sector, other key priorities and actions include promoting circular practices in urban regeneration via new regulations on property development and standards that favor the reuse of construction materials and are open to new uses such as co-working and co-housing. Furthermore, the *Prato Circular City Strategy* focuses on the urban governance sector by establishing specific economic incentives and reduced taxation for service-based reconversion of previous industrial buildings and for virtuous firms that adopt circular practices. Within focusing on the governance sector, the strategy aims to improve wastewater and textile

To learn more about the six dimensions framework visit www.circularityforeducators.com

waste treatment policies, also via close collaboration with European initiatives.

Lastly, the Prato strategy seeks to extend the adoption of green public procurement and the identification of 'paradigmatic areas' in the city, which shall operate as testbeds for circular and greening experiments. In this context, we shall mention the *Urban Innovative Actions* project *Urban Jungle* and other urban forestry initiatives.

3. Sustainability Framework & Transition Concepts

What is the context of the project? What is the socio-economic, legal, and political structure established to develop the project?

Prato municipality's sustainability framework approaches the circular economy with a broader objective of environmental sustainability, coupling specific circular-related interventions with greening and climate-change-related initiatives. *Prato Circular City* is promoted by the *Department of Economic Development, Innovation and Digital Agenda* and the *Department of Urban Planning, Environment and Circular Economy*, with the support of the offices of the *Europe Desk* of Prato. Moreover, the project is part of national and European frameworks.

On a national level: through *Recò*, an annual festival on the circular economy, Prato makes circularity more accessible to the general public. Together with the Italian cities of Lucca and Santa Croce, events are organized on circular topics, such as in the 2020 edition: textiles, paper and leather. The event's success led Prato to further develop other showcases on the subject, with operations currently in place to scale it up to the regional level and to all regional districts in close collaboration with the Tuscany Region. Events such as TED talks and open factory tours in circular firms are organized, and concerts to appeal to a large audience. The funding for the festival comes from the Tuscan region.

On a European level: the city joined the *Urban Agenda Partnership on Circular Economy* in 2016. This partnership of European cities, member states, and institutions stimulates the transition to a circular economy in European cities with research, knowledge sharing, and

communication activities. The municipality of Prato coordinates, among other things, the partnership's working group on *Pay as You Throw (PAYT)* systems. This working group published a toolkit for the implementation of *PAYT* in European cities. In addition, they published a handbook for sustainable and circular reuse of buildings and spaces.

4. The Social Dimension

Is this project bottom-up or top-down in its approach, and what role do local inhabitants, stakeholders, and circular innovators play? Does it have a flagship / pioneering character for others? Does this project view people as consumers, users, or pro-sumers in the context of a circular economy? Does it have a pioneering role, with impact beyond its region?

Prato's circular strategy promotes and shares participatory actions. The result is the creation of a permanent forum involving all local stakeholders to co-create and implement shared circular economy actions and collaborate at the governance level. The strengthening of social cohesion aims to contribute to the creation of an inclusive and solidarity-based community. The circular social dimension is based on the principle of sharing and creative reuse as a means of stimulating innovative driving forces for business activities and social purposes within collaborative economy initiatives. Thus, the approach followed by Prato Municipality focuses on the following:

- Promoting sharing & functional economy and developing a long-term collaboration. By setting up cooperation between city departments - with a monitoring cabin on a circular economy which involves the relevant stakeholders.
- Raising awareness and coaching citizens. For example, by coaching developed by local universities during thematic workshops dedicated to NGOs and citizens.
- Supporting bottom-up initiatives. By collecting ideas from citizens and SMEs of Prato during the *Reco'* festival, stimulating local symbioses, and promoting new startups in the circular economy.
- Creating incentives to attract circular businesses. By communicating success stories – with a dedicated city portal and during main city events.

5. The Territorial & Spatial Dimension

What is the scale of the project? Are urban planning policies design strategies cross scale? If yes, how and which flows are involved? What is the role of space and territory in this circular project?

The project focuses on the city scale, both spatially and from the governance level, and its relationships at the regional level. Regarding urban planning, the municipality considers collaborative governance a fundamental aspect of the strategy's success. A specific mandate for circular economy has been created and managed within the Urban Planning and Management Department. In particular, a multidisciplinary team coordinates the development of the circular strategy at the city scale and within the Urban Agenda Thematic Partnership on the Circular Economy.

Locally, the governance structure attempts to follow a network structure, arranging several thematic working groups, including high-level research and innovation, dense partnerships between local enterprises, and international competitiveness. This model also uses living labs to support broad involvement, participation and constant dialogue with citizens. It develops through territorial marketing operations that promote an overall image of Prato as a vibrant and virtuous territory.

Overall, the municipality plays a coordination and steering role. Significantly, the city is also leveraging these working groups to better prepare the whole territory for the next EU programming period, ensuring that all actors are ready to respond to the Green New Deal with competitive proposals that align with the city's urban agenda.

Lastly, several ongoing initiatives are at the city level, and some practices included in the Prato circular strategies are at a neighborhood level.

6. Assessment & Monitoring

How are strategies and policies monitored and evaluated? How is the qualitative and quantitative success of a project evaluated?

Although the development of the initiative is still in the early stages of 2018, several

private and public initiatives and actions have already started. Within the Epson Report, '*SHARING Stocktaking and assessment of typologies of Urban Circular Collaborative Economy Initiatives. Case Study Prato – Regeneration of Urban Spaces and Social Cohesion*' this activity has been evaluated and assessed.

As a summary, for this study, five initiatives have been selected. Three of them are cultural associations promoting art, architecture, design, food waste and urban regeneration initiatives. Their actions are mainly (but not only) focused on regenerating the *Macrolotto Zero* area. The other two initiatives are carried out by the Municipality of Prato and correspond to the regeneration of outdoor and indoor spaces to make them accessible to citizens and, in turn, improve the livability of the neighborhood where the specific areas are located.

The expected impacts to arise are relative to environmental, economic and social potential. These activities have then been evaluated through SWOT analysis.

Colophon

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