



RISERVA  
DI  
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DIVIETO DI PASSAGGIO



N.EST Napoliest presents:

# Digging memories, performing the future. Once upon Naples East.

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## #Chapter 1: Fragile records

Midday is the moment I like best, if I'm in southern climes. When the sea is at its brightest, even in winter. Everywhere, from the oily waters of Vigliena to Capri's azure, from Corsica's deep blue to Turkey's emerald green ... Behind Naples' main train station ... I never before went there as often as I do now. I remember that chunk of suburban periphery stubbornly trying to become part of the city – and maybe also episodes of quick sex stolen in and around Via Brin. Or further night rides, getting lost along those huge roads. And dense forests of new warehouses, interstices with industrial carcasses still standing around, abandoned for the last twenty years.

I started exploring the streets three years ago, wandering adrift, without any particular destination. A map on the web [www.napoliest.it](http://www.napoliest.it) - to be filled with my emotions, to describe where I am in this world and the direction my city is taking, starting from its tangled and bitter periphery; to see what the arts can do for the life I'm going through right now. Sometimes I ride without a helmet as killers often use motorbikes and wear crash helmets when they strike here, in the poorest districts of Europe: people go without so as to be recognizable. There are loads of kids here, longing only for a place to play football.

In 1984 my granny and I escaped a terrorist attack, simply because we missed our train to Milan, which explosives ripped apart before it arrived there. Adolescence, being gay and, sometimes, hard confrontations with my cultural background kept me away from Naples. Then Buddhism arrived in my life. I discovered it when I was abroad, while making a series of attempts to reach satori. Which I did only once, back in Naples, which has since again became my home. I live in a difficult neighbourhood, Sanità, on the edge of the historical centre. Sanità hosts my art studio and they wanted me to leave it, to abandon Naples again. But I feel linked to this city more than ever. Especially when my art dealers wanted to turn me into an ex-pat artist in order to better sell my pieces: they thought me emigrating to Berlin would have been more cool.

Well, I actually went to Berlin. And the chemistry and physics of life continued to obsess me there too. I wanted to dissect its mechanisms – from life to death, combustion and entropy. To understand all the processes leading to the creation and dissipation of energy in that part of the world where most of mankind lives now: in cities. My lot today - when I feed on the Buddhist practice, on the performance and the theatre that I continuously blend into my sculptural and pictorial language – is to live in that same neighbourhood: the one in which was born the 'camorra' boss who supplied explosives for a terrorist attack on a train – the attack I miraculously escaped as a child.





## #Chapter 2: Coming out?

I'm fascinated by perimeters. It's the same fascination that a frame exercises over a canvas, the attraction provoked by borders, edges, margins. I study the edge, the limits of human dynamics. Tracing a permeable border is a preliminary action, necessary to establish the range of further enquiry.

Just as happens when we look at a slide under a microscope – or when we look at an emotional map, like N.EST – life within a border revolves around the small but infinite portion of attention it is able to attract in us.

Periphery is the big perimeter around the city centre. And as in Naples East<sup>2</sup>, it contains nuclei of satori, necessary for the comprehension of a greater dynamic. The outskirts are often the future of a city while at the same time they represent its degradation, the coming loose of the grid that holds together the sense, the meaning of its life. If the grid comes loose, uncontrollable phenomena sometimes re-conquer empty spaces. The concatenation of these phenomena will help determine new shapes that will contaminate the centre.

I'm fascinated by the margins and I love to make up new 2- and 3-dimensional shapes, collecting the sense of my goings adrift.

Via Brin is a street fading into nowhere. It ends in a multi-storey parking lot, ideal theatre wings for sexual encounters and body chemistry.

*Bordo* (Pal, 5'58", 2005, N.EST [www.napoliest.it](http://www.napoliest.it)) is the frame of physical and chemical reactions that have been taking place along that street for decades. Via Brin has been waiting for decades for a practical and consistent chance to be inhabited. Waiting, ever since nearby fuel stocks burnt down in 1985, in a fearsome fire that killed few but deprived thousands of Neapolitans of their health. Waiting, ever since the terrible earthquake of November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1980 left a building abandoned and in ruins, marking the toponymy of this and other districts of Southern Italy forever.

I met N.EST and its authors, real urban *flaneurs*, as one would come across a new story told by Creole voices around the streets – through the grapevine. It was 2005. I was still a white cube artist and a performer in the pitch-black night of independent theatre.

*Bordo* was, by instinct and by reason, my puzzle piece to describe this part of city that is, for many Neapolitans only a big black hole stretching from Central Station to the Sea of Vigliena, from the oil pipelines in Ponticelli to the big abandoned warehouses in San Giovanni a Teduccio and up to the shocking Bronx in Barra. Without this encounter I wouldn't have known how to use the street and its enormous creative potential; yet an artist cannot describe a city without using neglected spaces, residual and timeless places; spaces crossed by a varied and uncontrollable humanity.

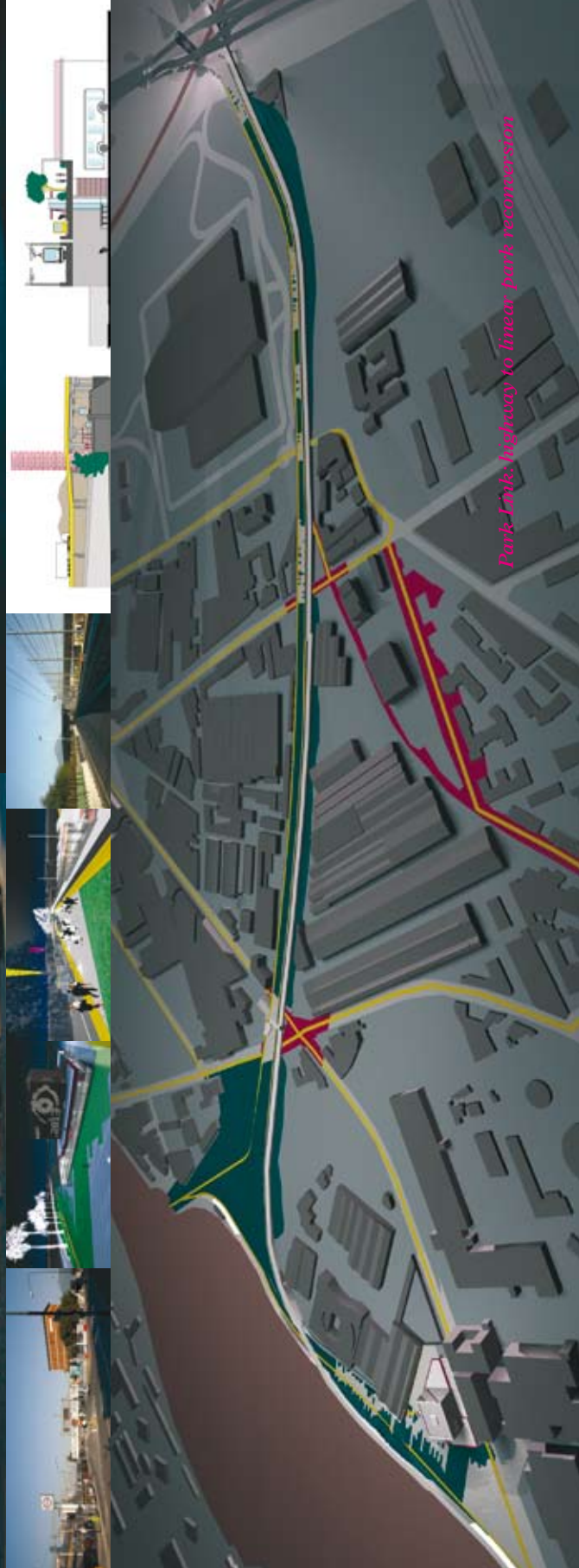
**A random audience fills artwork with the authenticity of real life.**

I discovered "my" Via Brin could be much more besides. For N.EST, for instance, it was a different piece of the puzzle<sup>3</sup>. The multi-storey parking lot turns into a luminous sculpture. It becomes the landmark of this wasteland. Like a Guggenheim suddenly appearing, defining, which allows the inhabitants to say that there is something beyond Central Station after all, lighting up the night of prostitutes and *viados* who have made their home in the shadows of the building. Whilst to me it's a background for love, the parking lot is for N.EST the scenery for an arty half-pipe and a bus stop all in one.





Art Station: artist platform, bus shelter, light installation



Park Links: highway to linear park reconstruction

Surrounded by street-walkers – the real prowlers of this night-time jungle – surrounded by degradation, thousands of peoples wait for the bus in Via Brin by day and by night. This N.EST project intends to give these people new dignity as citizens, by creating a linear park that will improve connections with the rest of the city: an urban amenity for pedestrians and cyclists, designed as a means to reclaim the ever-changing city, with a focus on the people who live in Via Brin or pass along it.

After *Bordo* I was still hungry for more. I used N.EST as a palette of colour and an emotional language with which to get back in touch with my father. He used to work at Mobil Oil, a big company formerly active for twenty years in Naples East. Now my dad loves alternative technologies and dedicates himself to wind power but he was previously the engineer of another modernity. Together we went to see how Naples East is today. My brother is an engineer too. I am an artist. It took me time to talk to my father. And likewise it took him time too - an engineer, seeing the sunset of his times<sup>4</sup> - to talk to me about his emotional turmoil. Speaking with the obvious grammar of cities, he had lost his place in the world.

### #Chapter 3: Walking and searching for everlasting return

We started a journey together. To find out what Naples East is to each of us. Understanding the perimeter of life will help us to understand each other's life. Naples East closely surrounds the old Greek and Roman city, breathing over its neck, in hot and constant pursuit, like death over life and life over death. I had to look for the point of everlasting return; a place to make the city anew.

My father and I had a strong smell of oil in our nostrils. The same one I used to smell as a child when he came home. The same one I used to smell as a teenager during my lovely nights in Via Brin, surrounded by gasometers. But there was more to it. The love my father feels for the past is the same love I feel for things in my present life. I had to transfer this love to what I saw, to give it shape in forms and images, so I could give it back to him.

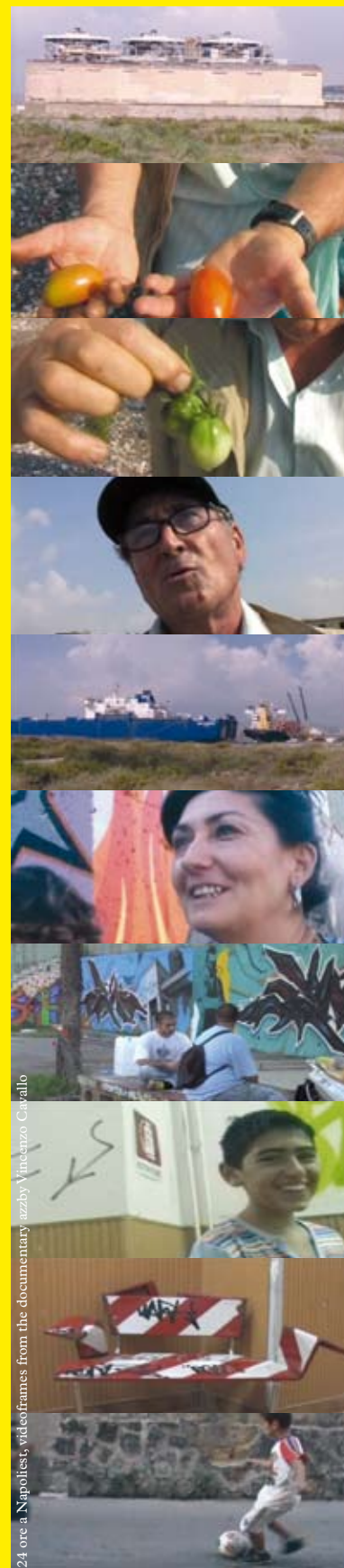
My dad and I were together on a red double-decker open-air tourist bus. In winter 2008 N.EST organized a visual art show and every Saturday visitors, white cube connoisseurs, were invited to *Walk* - an actual itinerary through the places described on the online database, the five districts of Eastern Naples, in the company of the artists who had already explored and depicted them in their work on the web. I decided to invite my father to *Walk* - on a cold and clear January morning in 2008.

We went to Vigliena, the beach in San Giovanni district, where there were once factories and food manufacturing industries. Where a tourist harbour will be built, just a few steps from the Oil Docks and a big electric plant - one that was soon to become a hunting ground for other N.EST artists. Black and white pictures by Aniello Barone and video by Boris describe the plant as a cloud of light - transfigured like a *wunderkammer*.

On Vigliena, my father's words mingle with those of an elderly man who lives a short distance from the chimney of the old Corradini foundry, closed down in the 50s but still there today. My father talks about the days when the Docks were refining oil to full capacity. Now they only store large quantities of oil, dangerously close to Italy's most densely populated metropolis.

The old man - a post-modern farmer<sup>5</sup> - harvests whatever Vigliena's abundant, spontaneous growth has to offer. "I get whatever I need from Vigliena, according to the seasons: tomatoes, figs, also apricots, rocket, spinach..." he says proudly, showing what he had picked that day: a full bag of tomatoes.





24 ore a Napoli est, video frames from the documentary *Wozzy*, Vincenzo Capallo

**I remember, I got rid of anything I didn't need when I was facing a crisis; I had a big seasonal clear out. Our post-modern farmer instead incessantly accumulates any local produce, just as N.EST records all of our artistic visions.**

Even in the most derelict and polluted of Italian seaside resorts, nature can give its best fruits. Patrizia Sannino thinks so. She is the District Councillor for Culture and Education. We went to visit a big perimeter wall with her. Yet another margin holding in disasters - but one that still continues with its creative editing of a world it can keep captive. We are at the edge of a horrible block built after the earthquake. The balconies seem to touch one another so narrow is the vital space thousands of - mostly unemployed - people are bound to live in. It doesn't matter whether they are legally entitled to live in the city council housing block or if they are squatters - the hood is called the Bronx because it is hell. A crew of local writers has asked to use the perimeter wall of the Bronx of Barra to create a Hall Of Fame. A 2-dimensional Hall, like a canvas - a grey, very high frame, containing thousands of stories, re-invented every day via layers of graffiti and tags. "I love their art. I think it really is art", says Patrizia, who also gave the same crew another space not far from the wall: a former school, temporarily dedicated to other cultural activities. We visited it at the end of the day, with the Tck graffiti crew, who work on the wall and have sessions all around the area with other European writers.

**Writers fascinate me. They are the real storytellers of contemporary cities just as minstrels were in 17th century Baroque. I want to steal the osmosis they have with these places - me: a fancy gallery artist and avant-garde theatre performer. I want a third option. I'm looking for a way of expressing my modernity and the white cube is not enough for me. And the stage that acts like the Maginot line, as a screen between the theatre audience and my body is not enough either. I really want to walk the streets and feed everybody my language.**

The school rings with young voices, the sound of a harp and the maestro's voice, maternally encouraging the pupils to do better, to do more. Next to the singing class is a chair fashioned from red and white roadblocks: a border chair. It is an artwork made by one of the Tck crew's guests during the graffiti contests. The writers' creative den shares its spaces with the bel canto singing school and other local cultural associations. A peaceful creative cohabitation in an obscene building, with chipped walls, windows and doors recycled from garbage. "Better than nothing", the writers say. "Here, in this abandoned school, we can draw, make our pieces, have hip-hop parties and stay together. Even if the kids from the neighbourhoods - who are interested only in playing football - vandalize or steal anything we manage to collect - a pc, an old stereo player ..." Sport classes cost 50 euro a month, too much for the families living in this area.

I went also to Gianturco, another district, to discover a rather peculiar soccer pitch in the street: two lines for a goal post, the street framed by two high walls, a big public lamp-post for games in winter when it gets dark very early. Bansky, who was often in Naples, would have loved seeing those lines scribbled over the tarmac. The author is not an artist but a father who spends his days surrounded by pasta packets and parmesan cheeses, because he is the local grocer. At weekends he trains the neighbourhood kids. "I prefer keeping them on the streets like this, rather than letting them go to.... more dangerous streets! We came up with a soccer tournament, with a couple of baseballs as the final prize. It's more than enough because they're good boys. They are just unlucky because they don't have much."<sup>6</sup>



## #Chapter 4: Open databases: our community-builder

I must admit: I told a few little lies. I didn't go to see the soccer pitch during the *Walk* with my father. On N.ESTube (N.EST's site-specific web TV), I watched a feature film N.EST had produced about 24 hours spent wandering around the area, which was a way of exploring really intense stories about the districts involved in this art and urban online project. It was through this video that I met the kids from the football pitch, the father/grocer/trainer and the writers. And I wanted to find a way of opposing Tck – the writer crew – in its sharp judgement of the other street dwellers - the gangs of baby football players, for example, whom they saw as a permanent threat.

Actually, I wanted to look for another place to add to N.EST's database and map, somewhere to make a piece of work. Even better, to find a place to really put my art on the street.<sup>7</sup> I wanted to re-trace and keep alive that precious dialogue begun with my father. With "his" world, with what that world produced. With the future we are both awaiting in our violent struggle with Naples.

So I followed the straight line drawn by the Park Link N.EST designed, the one starting from Via Brin, starting from the sharpest edge of my emotions. And I hit up against five huge rolling shutters, the clenched mouth of an old tyre factory warehouse, just a few steps away from Naples Central Station: the exact gloomy point where the Eastern area starts. I found my point of everlasting return: a point to start out from and come back to, in order to quench my thirst for experience and dialogue; my need to care for even the smallest things, an infinite number of times.

I have been lucky. The shutters, of a brownish colour, have been attacked by the salty air of the sea and by rust, but they are enclosed in a space limited by a gate, which has shielded them. The entrance to the old abandoned warehouse and shutters has, over time, become a shelter for a group of homeless North-African people. I delicately moved their stuff. I cleaned the place, telling myself I would bring them something better than an old blanket with which to face the winter. I took up all the space covered by the shutters and punctuated it with paintings on paper. Large collages, pasted over in black, white and brown. Finally I put the homeless people's furniture back into place.

My father is a man who believed in a certain kind of modernity and in a way, he represents all of them, all those white males in a position of power who thought that heavy industrialization was the answer to the demands of progress. Today that kind of modernity as an answer to the demands of progress is no longer sustainable. Dissolution is raining down on us from the peripheries strewn with bodies, surrounding Naples and every other industrial city, and we are waiting. I am waiting to tear through indifference and lay the foundations of a new spirituality.

My innocent drawing of baroque patterns – a gift to the city, to N.EST, to its homeless people and passers-by rushing in and out of the station – stands as a monument to the fallen of that modernity. A new, small satori for times being. Starting from those rusty shutters, it creates – almost by force – a new hunting ground, new waters to fish. A large and silent owl climbs up at the edge of delirium – the former industrial zone of Italy's third largest major city – and claims the right to be cured; the right to a brilliance shared by spirituality and the murky waters of Vigliena alike.









## #Epilogue:

Marco Zezza (artist, performer and theatre designer, \*1974) is the fictional narrator of this real tale. He did not write it but the words and the flashbacks come from the creative process he entrusted to N.EST. Danilo Capasso (designer, artist, urban media theorist \*1971) is a founding member and coordinator of the N.EST Napoliest project.

Diana Marrone (journalist, event designer, \*1973) is a founding member and fundraiser of the N.EST project and also responsible for PR.

Daniilo Capasso, Giovanni Ferrarelli (architect, \*1970) and Diana Marrone founded N.EST Napoliest in 2004. Massimiliano Rianna (architect, \*1975) joined them in 2007.

As part of its mission to use art, design and architecture to improve urban conditions in former industrial areas, the N.EST web-site hosts digital artwork about Naples East by over 50 independent artists. N.EST also initiates shows and urban events, performance and lectures.

Marco Zezza joined N.EST in 2005 with a piece of video art called 'Bordo' and an art gallery show.

In 2008 he designed and made Monumento, a series of pictorial collages for a public space, now on view in Naples East (in a redundant Pirelli storage dept. on Via G. Ferraris).

All the artworks mentioned in this text can be viewed for free at [www.napoliest.it](http://www.napoliest.it).

Artists, architects and designers are invited to join N.EST by responding at any time to our Call for Entries.

For details of how to submit proposals or artworks, please see: [www.napoliest.it](http://www.napoliest.it).

All the artworks quoted in this text are freely viewable at [www.napoliest.it](http://www.napoliest.it).

Artists, architects and designers are permanently invited to join N.EST by submitting to the Call for Entries published on [www.napoliest.it](http://www.napoliest.it).

N.EST has exhibited at the following venues respectively events, amongst others:

Sensi Contemporanei, Incursione Vesuviana (Venice Art Biennial in South Italy, 2004),

Festival Della Creatività (Florence, 2007),

Annali dell'Architettura e delle Città (Naples, 2007),

MADRE Art Museum's Project Room (Naples, January-February 2008).

Selected lectures and audio-visual performances were given at:

Fabrica Europa Theatre Festival (Florence, 2006),

Bauhaus University (Weimar, 2006),

COMPACT (Salone della Comunicazione della Pubblica Amministrazione, Rome, 2006),

Dancing with Domus (Domus Magazine, Milan, 2007),

Future Habitat (Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, Rome, 2008).

Selected publication:

Reconnecting Naples RSVP#12A (Volume Magazine, april 2008).

N.EST is backed by the funds and commitment of its members, who work and live in Naples.

N.EST is always searching for brilliant partners.

## #footnotes

<sup>1</sup> N.EST is a think-tank for art and architecture that developed from an online project and has since come to include exhibitions, lectures, performance, urban activism, design and architecture.

The online project, started and financed still by its members, consists of a grid, a bilingual database and a search engine but N.EST's core nucleus is an emotional map of Eastern Naples, which depicts the topography of five districts - the streets, warehouses and industrial spaces of the city's poorest neighbourhoods - as well as the critical issues and potential developments that affect them.

With its site-specific web TV (N.ESTube), content randomizer (N.EST TV) and blog, the whole online platform is open to anyone who wishes to contribute. N.EST asks artists and citizens active in any discipline or profession to join it in trying to create a city from the bottom up: a grass-roots city.

<sup>2</sup> Naples East, the city's eastern periphery, covers over 25 km<sup>2</sup> and includes two formerly autonomous towns, San Giovanni a Teduccio and Ponticelli, which were annexed by Naples City Council in 1926 and consequently became impoverished. The first was formerly a rich industrial centre, the second a village dependent on agriculture (with settlements dating back to Roman times).

The Naples East periphery starts in the first inner-city industrial area of Naples, Gianturco, which lies only 2km from the old Greek centre of the city, behind the central railway station on Piazza Garibaldi.

<sup>3</sup> N.EST proposed an urban regeneration project intended to transform a stretch of highway (that in the city council's new master plan was initially earmarked for demolition) into a pedestrian-friendly linear park incorporating stair-links to key areas of the Eastern districts, cycle paths and efficient public transport. It would thus serve to catalyse new social activities in shattered areas that are now dominated by private cars. 'Park Link' is one of several projects in the *Urban Amenities Program* launched by N.EST in 2005. It was presented in various architectural exhibitions in Italy and abroad. *Park Link* has two main entrances. The main one is in Via Brin, where we imagined an *Art Station*, an amenity that serves both as an artists' platform and as bus shelter because, despite the huge bus terminal here, bus shelters for the public in this derelict area were not provided.

<sup>4</sup> The city's main industrial area since Italy's special Industrialization Law came into effect in 1904, Naples East was badly hit when heavy industry went into serious decline in the 80's. Most factories closed down or relocated their plant outside the region. The unemployment rate in Naples East is the highest in all 27 countries of the EU.

<sup>5</sup> Vigliena is the most polluted area listed in Italy's official State Register of Severely Polluted Sites. Despite citizens' demands for decontamination measures, new local and national anti-pollution legislation, and the large amount of public funds spent on this issue over the past 5 years, essentially nothing at all has changed. The area is still abandoned. Access to the seafront was fenced off for security reasons, i.e. to prevent people from sunbathing and swimming in contaminated areas. Yet crowds of locals tear down the fences and continue to go there, ignoring restrictions. Furthermore, the vortex created when the electric plant's cooling turbines suck up seawater has caused several deaths by drowning. Huge quantities of hydrocarbon and polluting metals affect all the sand and ground around. Despite the high health risks, many inhabitants continue to cultivate areas around the beach, to fish, and to pick the wild fruits that grow there every season.

<sup>6</sup> The very goal of our work is to reclaim as a valid part of the city those districts and neighbourhoods that are now unfairly considered to be 'peripheral', despite their geographical proximity to the city centre. The lack of local institutions that could improve living conditions in these districts for marginalised people - a large number of Romanians and Roma living in improvised camps, for example, job seekers, workers on the poverty line, young people at risk, etc - has led certain groups (like Nomad no-profit foundations) and individuals (such as the grocer) to initiate support networks. Like N.EST, everyone is trying to provide a sane future for this part of city. For further info: [www.napoliest.it](http://www.napoliest.it).

<sup>7</sup> N.EST is an online database that welcomes and publishes artists' work in digital form. All that is envisioned and stimulated by the artists (who re-write the areas on the database and map) can catalyze a new future for Naples East - at least, N.EST and its allies hope it can! Marco Zezza was one of the first artists involved to want to act in public space without the mediation of the web. In other words, to place a piece of art first in the street and then on the online database, in the portion of the grid that refers to the real street in which the artwork can be seen by the public.

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