



Best practices in Italy

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As already highlighted, in Italy a real urban regeneration policy at the national level is lacking. However since the 1990s some national programmes have introduced a certain degree of innovation to the traditional urban rehabilitation approach, especially in terms of integration, governance and community participation. Local administrations reacted to these changes in a diverse and fragmented way. Sometimes, lacking national directives, local authorities (LAs) ingeniously overcame the inadequacy of the administration machine facing the experimental and contractual nature of new programmes. In these cases it is possible to talk of best practices, which often begin as pilot projects always carried on by strong leaderships, and then proceed following different paths towards stabilization. Today many questions are still open, although what seems important is to overcome local specificity, in order to highlight strengths and critical points in a perspective of comparison and dissemination.

Turin Council, Special Periphery Project

Among Italian experiences, Turin represents the most exemplar case of how, lacking a precise national policy and thanks to the flexibility (given to Regions and Councils) to locally adapt existing instruments, the LA successfully responded in terms of institutional innovation through the experience of the Special Periphery Project (Progetto Speciale Periferie, PSP).

PSP was born in 1997 as an experimental project: the purpose is to create a structure (transversal in respect to different administration departments) able to internalize skills and competence useful to work on the territory with integrated urban regeneration policies, derived from the profitable season of programmes promoted at the European and national level (Urban, Neighbourhood Contracts, Urban Rehabilitation Programmes). This structure works through projects on specific deprived areas of Turin: the peripheries. The underlying rationale is incremental in order to enable local development and community empowerment. Another important objective is inscribing the area-based initiatives inside a wider strategy for the whole city conceived, in this way, as a polycentric system where local specificities and identities shape the new centralities of the fringe. To achieve the target of holism and integration typical of regeneration processes, PSP works through inter-sectorial teams (belonging to different council departments) who act as bridges between the administration and the local community, working both from the office and on the field.

At the local level the PSP promotes: resident participation to decision-making, networking of existing stakeholders, building of social boards and local development agencies. This kind of tools make possible to release the regenerating action from contingencies, and to start up self-managed processes (from the local stakeholders) therefore sustainable over time (particularly successful the case of Via Arquata).

In its path towards institutionalization the Special Periphery Projects began Periphery Department in 2001, Urban Regeneration and Development Department today, but there are still open questions related to its dissemination and stabilization. It is worthwhile to consider that the PSP was born in its experimental stage as a “public adventure” (quoting Eleonora Artesio, that time councillor of Decentralization and Urban Integration Department), in a particular ambience characterized by specific political contingencies, dependent upon exceptional funding and upon strong leaderships no longer acting today (regional and council directors who contributed to the creation of the project). Furthermore,

in the transition from a pilot experience (*Special Periphery Project*) to a stable office (Urban Regeneration and Development *Department*) it seems that the project lost its main vocation to be a transversal structure and became something more like a weak department inside the public administration, therefore it is not working any more as a platform for integration, and it has more limited influence for the dissemination of an innovative *modus operandi* to the others departments. With the new denomination also the intention of building a comprehensive policy for the whole city seems to deaden. Similarly the idea of inscribing local actions inside a polycentric vision of the city seemed to fade with a consequent minor influence of single projects on the territory and a major introversion that might threaten their success and durability.

Rome Council, Participated Periphery

In Rome there are well known examples of large social housing estates strongly affected by social deprivation, such as Corviale or Tor Bella Monaca; however the preponderance of a reality of illegal peripheral neighbourhoods (*borgate*) brought the LA to set the regeneration objectives focusing on physical aspects such as the realization of services and infrastructures. In the 1990s, thanks to the activation of Urban programme, the integrated approach to regeneration was introduced in Rome as well, but the experience was not particularly incisive, especially in terms of community participation. In most cases residents were just involved during the advanced stages of construction works.

Thanks to a long tradition of dialogue, particularly about environmental issues, between the public administration and the most active groups of citizens, in the late 1990s the left-wing local government decided to develop a project called Participated Periphery (Periferia Partecipata, PP). PP project considers communicating as a central practice for planning and struggles to enlarge its range to all citizens, both single and organized. Therefore the Department for Periphery, Local Development and Work Policies started up a series of projects and policies that brings community involvement at the centre, with the aim of integrating technical design, typical of traditional way of working on the periphery, with social development.

Among the Department initiatives there is the stabilization of the activity of the Special Office for Participation and Neighbourhood Workshops (Ufficio Speciale Partecipazione e Laboratori di Quartiere USPEL), which from 1996 to 2001 (during the same period of PSP) experimentally set a series of Municipal Neighbourhood Workshops and activated training courses on participatory planning for council employees. Since 2001 USPEL was absorbed into the Fourth Operative Unit (U.O. IV) "Sustainable and Participated Local Development" under the XIX department of the Council. The U.O. IV objectives are various, but first of all it is important to underline the attempt to overcome the resistance to the spread of a participatory culture throughout other council offices. Although not completely solved, this problem has been positively tackled thanks to the approval of the "Regulation for citizen participation to urban rehabilitation decisions" (resolution n. 57, 2006).

Moreover the U.O. IV proposes itself as a bridge between centralised and decentralised local administration structures, recognising wards (Municipi) as crucial arenas for participation, facing difficulties arising from different political majorities existing at the different administration levels. Finally it seems important the idea of building spaces for permanent dialogue with citizens on the territory, an

idea already proposed by USPEL through the neighbourhood workshops. These tools permit to build projects shared with the community: making up on one hand for the lack of time connected to the bidding rationale of current regeneration programmes (while participation need long time), on the other hand for scarce funds appointed for the “immaterial” parts of regeneration processes.

It seems then interesting the attempt of disseminating and sharing the experience through the circulation of information to other local administrations, and through the cooperation with other European cities inside the European programme URBACT – Participating.

Apulia Region, regional initiatives for urban regeneration

Apulia Region has followed an interesting path in the attempt to adapt the innovative characteristics for urban regeneration introduced at the national level through the Urban Programme and the experience of CdQ I to the regional context.

In the 2000s in Apulia it is possible to assist to two main action in this direction: first of all the second round of CdQ has been launched, that time managed at the regional level. Secondly there is the attempt of stabilizing the integrated and participated approach of Urban programme using the structural funds of the EU inside the “City” axis of the Regional Operative Programme 2000-2006.

However it seems that the innovation introduced through these experiences has been limited to the use of instruments, and did not leave a lot in terms of policies and practices. What rather emerged was a certain resistance to a change of governance and administration structures, both at local and regional level. Furthermore, lacking a comprehensive strategic framework, a difficulty of coordination between regeneration and traditional planning tools have been noticed, and between initiatives at the neighbourhood level and the urban scale as well (the last aspect is relevant considering that the South of Italy is characterised by deprived neighbourhoods inscribed in backward cities in need for social-economic development).

Recently it seems that the Territory Arrangement Department (Assessorato all'Assetto del Territorio) has tried to solve these problems giving a central and transversal role to urban regeneration into new regional land policy, through ordinary and extraordinary instruments. It's worthwhile to highlight that also in this case political contingencies played a relevant role (the left wing government elected in 2005 wanted to break with previous tradition) such as the presence of key actors among decision-makers (the Territory Arrangement councillor is an academician expert in urban and territorial policy).

The Region created new regeneration instruments with the launch in 2006 of Integrated Programmes for Periphery Rehabilitation (Programmi Integrati di Riqualificazione delle Periferie, Pirp) and gave centrality to regeneration in various planning programmes, such as: the Regional Document of General Organisation (Documento Regionale di Assetto Generale, Drag) – Directives, criteria, orientations for the creation of Council Urban Plans; the Program Document of the new Landscape Plan; the “City” priority axis of the structural funds 2007-2013. Finally the most relevant step for the construction of regeneration policies is the law project “Rules for urban regeneration” (DDL Norme per la rigenerazione urbana) presented in April 2008, which constitutes an original attempt to define a systematic legal framework for new approaches to regeneration that can be summarized with the three key words: integration, community participation and

environmental sustainability. Beyond the rhetoric of these buzzwords too much recently used, the DDL seems promising, because it promotes some intervention tools (Integrated Programmes of Urban Regeneration) that present themselves as ordinary planning tools. What is more, councils are given a new central role in defining which areas are marginalized and need regeneration in a “program document for urban regeneration”. All these elements seem to suggest a step forward in respect to fragmented, special, competitive logics characterising previous seasons.

To know something more...

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