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CHIARA TORNAGHI

Implementing the Urban Italia Regeneration Programme in Cinisello Balsamo (Milan)

Change and Continuity in the Pattern of Local Governance

1. Introduction

Within this Special Issue focusing on governance changes in a multi-scale perspective, this last essay will contribute with empirical observations on a multi-level and multi-sectoral territorial policy for neighbourhood regeneration: the Urban Italia programme in Cinisello Balsamo, Italy.

Within the debate on the contemporary shift from well structured government dynamics towards more indefinite and participatory governance practices, this article will contribute with observations taken at the lower level of the government hierarchy: the local administration. Its main goal is to question the adoption of the communitarian policy model, often advocating it as institutional learning, and to list a number of issues that, according to the local structure of opportunities and constraints during the implementation phase of the programme, enable or prevent the effectiveness and success of an integrated and participatory urban policy model.

The case-study analysis presented here, drawing from a vast amount of empirical material collected over ten months of full-time participatory observation, will be organised around three main sections. Firstly, we will start with the description of the structural elements and dynamics shaping the town context: the storytelling will be made explicit from the beginning historical processes, recent development trends and fields of conflict.

After this overview, a brief recognition of the theoretical debate related to the specific field of the urban policy under analysis – the construction of public space and its recognition as social need - will be presented. In this

second section of the paper the Urban Italia regeneration scheme will be contextualised within the post-Fordist development policies.

A third and final section of the paper will describe the structure-agency dynamics within the case-study during the implementation phase: it will shed light on the variables conditioning the social construction of a public space and will evaluate the role of citizens' participation in balancing market and pro-consuming public space transformation in contemporary urban contexts. Governance innovation and continuities will be highlighted here and concluding remarks on structural and conjunctural elements will be listed and discussed.

2. Cinisello Balsamo in the post-Fordist transition

Cinisello Balsamo is a town of eighty thousand inhabitants in the northern urban fringe of Milan. Until a few years ago this area has been nationally labelled (and stigmatized, in a way) as the “Italian Stalingrad”: the high concentration of heavy industries and blue collar workers in Cinisello Balsamo and its neighbouring towns - a sub-region home of the famous Breda, Pirelli, Magneti-Marelli and Falck heavy factories, to name but a few – corresponded to a strong contractual power of worker unions and co-operative housing builders, and to a tradition of radical left-wing government.

Within this sub-area the town has especially had the role of being a sort of “dormitory” for the thousand immigrants from the south looking for new employment opportunities, during the “glorious thirty” years of the Fordist era. Massive migration flows have seriously challenged the ability of the city to host the newcomers. Emergency situations saw whole families sleeping in building's cellars and attics, and the urgency for building new houses pushed towards new organisational answers. Between 1951 and 1971, through intense individual and especially co-operative self-building actions, Cinisello grew at a very fast rate without any city planning and disregard for the minimum standard level of green, services and public spaces fixed by the law. The results are visible in a skyline with an extraordinary mix of tower blocks, cheap single-family houses and industrial buildings, with a very poor environmental quality.

Since the dawn of the Fordist crisis the town has been experiencing a deep transformation in the economic and social spheres. The strategic location at the intersect of the main transport infrastructures and the strong working culture has favoured a clear conversion of the city's industrial vocation towards large-scale retail services and to the new technologies development sector. Contemporarily, the flows of population from the city of Milan, in search of cheaper housing estates, slowly diversified the traditional population, raised its average socio-economic status while increasing the gap between the highest and the lowest. As a consequence of its new economic role and social composition, the traditional stigma of dormitory-periphery was broadly perceived as inapt, while the existing landscape of unused industrial heritage were a constant reminder of "a Past" that older as well as new inhabitants wanted to forget. The recent turn to challenge the town's identity have been collectively sustained and perceived as a primary objective.

Notwithstanding a common agreement on the will of changing urban identity and promoting new economic activities, old inhabitants, newcomers, traditional economic actors and political leaders disagreed on the priority to be faced – for example, the improvement of the built environment, the enhancement of public services or the construction of cultural facilities. In a regime of a progressively shrinking State funding transfers, "the City" needed to behave as a collective actor in order to successfully apply for a financial bid. As we will see later on in this paper, the need for exogenous resources implied a postponement of the conflicts from the policy building to the implementation phase.

Since the middle of the 1990s, the local administration was looking for new strategies for building a new identity and finding a new role in changing mapping and hierarchy of cities in the metropolitan area. Before the financing of the Urban Italia project the town's local administration had been making considerable efforts on experimenting with almost all the innovative planning and financial tools known at the time, challenging the existing organisational models as well as the individuation of social problems and their treatments.

Together with four neighbouring towns Cinisello Balsamo established a public-public partnership development agency for the management of cross-boundaries renewal projects and services and started a new wave of re-

generation and development programmes. Contemporarily, and recognising the challenge of finding a new organisational setting, a “special” office for participatory regeneration planning (*Ufficio programmi partecipati di riqualificazione urbana*) has been created within the public administration.

With its two new operative branches, since 2000 the local administration has experimented with a number of new participatory planning tools: the North Milan *Strategic Plan* (the second in Italy, after Turin), the *Neighbourhood Contract* (a regeneration programme for public housing), the participatory planning for reshaping two main squares in the city, as well as new instruments for youth empowerment and participation in the public life (*Youth Forum*), are only a few examples.

Through the ability to mobilise different institutional and non-institutional agencies as well as activating citizens in the implementation of urban policies the town has been able, in a short time, to achieve a significant (planned) re-shape of the infrastructure system and to regenerate a number of under-used buildings for the creation of culture-led initiatives, such as the first Italian National Museum for Contemporary Photography and the Multimedia Centre for Historic Documentation. Within the academic debate and planning circles, the city’s administration has been recognised as one of the most innovative in the whole country.

3. Recognising neglected needs: innovation in the policy agenda

Within this fermenting ensemble, a further innovative element has been seen in the particular proposal for the Urban Italian regeneration programme. Being completely dedicated to improvements of public spaces, with special regards to youth population needs, Cinisello Balsamo has been absolutely countertrend.

Difficulties in sharing spaces, encountering diversity and preserving spaces for non-commodified practices are still posing problems, as already pointed out in the 1960s and 1970s by Henri Lefebvre (1974), Richard Sennett (1970) and Jane Jacobs (1961), who denounced planning policies aimed at shrinking urban collective places.

Fear of disappearing public spaces was deeply related to worries for the rising of the mass society and the disappearing of a public sphere, as shown in the work of Habermas and Arendt. But if in their view the retreat in the individual realm was perceived only as a part of a wide victory of consuming activities over a public life, other authors, especially Jane Jacobs in 1961, and Lefebvre, Sennett and Foucault in early 1970s, were highlighting the recursive model where fear of publicness was *shaping planning practices*, leading to public spaces structured in order to reduce encounters with diversity, socialisation and social mix, with clear consequences on human behaviours.

Recognising space for leisure time, recreational and creative practices represents a long-term neglected topic of urban policies. Basic socialisation needs find satisfaction very often in *liminal* and residual spaces of the cities, self-managed by communities of practices.

This is especially true in Italy, where social spaces such as the *centri territoriali sociali* (as they were named in Milan) instituted during the 1970s as a consequence of social movements (Bianchini 1993) have been progressively closed, and the most popular out-door meeting places – squares or parks – are going to be gated. Those for non-market practices are mostly places offered as a result of bottom-up initiatives, with different degrees of legality, that rarely constitute a social issue with the dignity to enter into the political agenda (Nuvolati/Tornaghi 2002).

Literature on the transformation of public space under the pressure of market, economic restructuring and recent cultural trends, especially those contributions focused on the American cities (see Sorkin 1992), tends to overlook the privatisation and commodification of public space and to underestimate countertrend practices from movements or social groups who claim and act alternative meanings for collective public spaces. Interesting correctives come from the writings of Henri Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1974), Andy Merrifield (1996), as well as examples of the first participatory experiments in the collaborative shaping of places (Hillier 1998; Staeheli/Thompson 1997). They help to shed light on the lack of voice and recognition of all those practices and clashing symbolic meanings that have been considered residual, arguing that it is only a matter of reaching the mainstream public sphere. According to Nancy Fraser (1992) and other authors, there is not a unique and broadly participated public sphere, realising the Habermasian ideal of rational communication where all the single components of

a society join the public discourse to negotiate common meanings, rules, values...and the shape of their cities and public spaces. According to the different contexts and times, reality shows the process of exclusion of minorities (for example not-land-owners, slaves and women, in the ancient Greek of the *agora*, migrants, gays, elder people – among others - in recent years) and self-exclusion by all those people perceiving themselves as belonging to counter-cultures.

Taking into account the existence of multiple public spheres is a first step toward the recognition of differences and needs, and toward an attempt to opening up a dialogue aimed at filling the communication gap, notwithstanding the conscience of a irreducible difference and the impossibility to achieve consensus on all the issues may be involved (for a debate on collaboration and consensus see Healey 1997; Innes/Booher 2003; Hillier 2002).

The case study of Cinisello Balsamo, with this participatory project focused on multiple public spaces and its participatory planning practice tradition seemed to be the ideal opportunity to analyse, in a sociological perspective, the process of *social construction of public spaces* – as produced and reproduced by the interplay between agency and structures – and to listen to the multiple voices of citizens arguing for shaping their collective places. Within a context of poor environmental quality and lack of public spaces for recreation, culture and creativity, the decision of treating an issue related to a social minority (the youth population and their needs), and of focusing on a usually neglected policy theme such as that of public space, has been seen as innovative, and it was expected that the programme would provide “a vibrant agonistic debate about the shape and the future of the common life” (Mouffe 2005: 109), a new public sphere where, at the same time, new forms of empowerment and participatory democracy could be experimented with.

After having faced the problem of social housing renewal in deprived neighbourhoods, coordinating economic actors around a strategic vision of the future, shaping two main squares with and along children’s needs and having reached the objective of settling two main cultural facilities, the local administration took the opportunity represented by the Urban Italia integrated regeneration scheme to confront a “hot” policy issue.

Notwithstanding the existence of a higher degree of innovation on this point, weakness and contradiction occurred while starting the phase of im-

plementation. Observation under the perspective of assessing governance innovation require the understanding of structural and political conjunctural elements which, combined with agency and power relations, can explain when and why even a strongly innovative environment can lead to a failing governance practice – in terms of achieving the goals according with the broadly participated policy building - and to the primacy of more traditional government within a certain policy field.

3.1 Cinisello Balsamo’s Urban Italia project: from policy agenda to the policy building

In 2001, the Italian government approved the financing of the first Urban Italia programme. Widely considered as an example of institutional learning, Urban Italia is a neighbourhood development and regeneration scheme built on European models, especially conceived as an extension of the Communitarian Initiative “Urban Programme” 2000-2006. The programme sought to support the first twenty Italian cities who lost out on the EU bid and so did not benefit from the European funding. With the purpose of acting against urban decay and social exclusion in highly deprived neighbourhoods, particularly those affected by de-industrialisation consequences (contaminated land, abandoned buildings, unemployment, low level of education, poor educational skills, etc.), the national government asked the local administrations to re-write a shorter project (due to a limited budget to be delivered), still following the European programme structure and requisites.

After submitting a new project, in 2002 Cinisello Balsamo was entitled to financing. The creation of several public places aimed at transforming the peripheral and former industrial context in a more convivial and sociable place was announced as the main feature of the programme. The whole project has been strongly built around this idea in all the axes and measures it was composed of. Education training, innovative services, regeneration actions, environment and infrastructural improvements have all been planned to put efforts on the environmental, structural and skills requirements for building innovative public spaces.

The project targeted three different areas in the city: a former bourgeois villa under decay (target area No1), a former industrial firm, with the surrounding streets and a square (target area No2), both in the city centre, and

a very large wild area that a century ago was an “egg factory”, containing also a couple of valuable ancient buildings (target area No3). In view of the potential of these three locations, both for their features and for their position, the three areas have been bought (from private land owners) by the City Council with the intention of regenerating them.

In a rough way, as a starting point, the local administration planning team had in mind to transform the first area into a university centre, integrating internal spaces for non-student citizens, of devoting the second one to creativity spaces (in the form of cultural production for-profit and not-for-profit creative and socialisation spaces) and to transform the third one into a multifunctional park (with green areas, vegetable gardens, self-managed areas and sport facilities). Activities, physical forms and organisational aspects of these three spaces would have been the outcome of a participatory planning phase to be agreed upon in the following months. Citizen contribution would have been decisive for the final identity of these public spaces.

The planning team was formed by two coordinators, one internal to the local administration (the Special office for participatory regeneration), and one external (the development agency), two groups of external planners and one group of consultants. As these kinds of policies were quite new in the city, when the “Special office” was institutionalised there was no proper sector of the administrative body, with a correspondent councillor as political representative, to lead it. The Office was “special” in a way that it was directly dependent on the Mayor, who was responsible to the local political assembly (*consiglio comunale*). As a consequence, all the planning team was directed by the Mayor.

During the first year – before the effective financing of the project – the team worked at the definition of the main objectives of the project. They interviewed associations or civil servants in charge of youth issues, looked at international studies for best practices, sought to involve groups and individual teenagers - often contacting them directly on the street or in the parks – in the organisation of “the event” in which the official presentation of the Urban programme to the city will take place.

In this year, for the first time, different sectors of the local administration (for instance, those responsible for education, youth policies and culture) tried to collaborate, together with the special office, in order to exchange

information and contacts analysing the youth conditions in the town. This, of course, occurred with a lot of tension among the teams. Together with the lack of collaborative culture and skills, problems depended also on the fact that the “special office” had some power and degree of freedom that the ordinary offices saw as unmotivated privileges. Therefore a certain tendency to avoid intersectoral co-operation occurred.

Despite the difficulties, a mapping of local youth realities, available places and European pilot projects had been collected in a document, and an event carrying on the socialisation *habitus* of the youth population had been prepared for a public presentation. This event, called “Cinisello Beach” – an expression taken from the local youth slang (originally in English) – was part of the official presentation of the Urban Italia programme to the whole city, on September 27th and 28th, 2003.

During these days all the three target areas were opened to the population, with different happenings and shows, as a promise of new public space being “given back” to citizens. In particular, the recently dismissed industrial building in the city centre, called *Fabbrica Cipro*, has been the site for the Cinisello Beach events, opened during day and night, with video installation, music dj-ing, graffiti facilities and elements reminiscent of streets and squares, both in the shape and in its culture. The *Fabbrica Cipro* building, in a way, has been transformed into a metaphor of an ideal public space, seen with the eyes of the youth, a space whose identity would have been built through practices, signs and meeting points.

It was during the official event launching the Urban programme that protests started being raised, and that the weakness of the new governance model started to appear. Protests have been either from citizens, councillors belonging to the opposition party (*consiglieri d'opposizione*) and even members of the executive body (*assessori* and *membri della giunta*).

All were claiming that none of them knew about the idea of maintaining the industrial building instead of demolishing it and of addressing the regeneration programme towards the realisation of a space for youth creativity. If this is quite understandable from part of the citizens, even though the city official web site were quite clear on that, it was surprising and startling the reaction from part of the executive body and politicians in general.

Taking apart reflections about the difficult treatment of the “youth issue” in terms of its culture and its needs, as well as the conflict about dif-

ferent priorities in regenerating the town, this opposing reaction indicates a lot about the internal dynamics after the reform of the Mayor's powers. The greater power of the Mayor in terms of her direct election as well as her right to lead directly a sector of the public administration, or to choose executive board members outside the council, tends to undermine and reduce the public assembly role and deliberative power (Magnier 2004). In terms of governance, this innovation, that is now quite old being introduced in Italy in 1993, matches in a peculiar way with the new governance instruments introduced with the EU policy models. The ability of Mayors to encourage greater citizen involvement in politics (at least in the electoral moment), that is one of the motives of the mayor's election reforms (Magnier 2004), and especially their higher visibility and collectors of citizens' demands, combined with the lack of a steering role assumption within the range of the plethora of non-hierarchical government bodies within this programme, leaves space to the creation of participatory schemes largely affected and manipulated by political opportunism. Magnier (2004: 181) remarks that these elements "may converge with these new modalities of public action, too quickly subsumed under the label of 'governance', to produce an increase in political inequalities".

As a multi-level governance tool, the Urban Italia programme used the steering structure of requisites of the European Urban programme, but without any formal participation of the EU. Depending on the perspectives, this can be seen as an evidence of the EU influence even being short of financial incentives, or rather as a prove of institutional learning. On this regards, we think, a position should be taken depending on the effectiveness in achieving the programme's goal. The leading and monitoring role was formally assumed by the Italian government, through its Ministry of Infrastructure. Nonetheless, as a matter of fact, the mixture of European competences and rules that have been taken as a guarantee in the starting phase, the principle of subsidiarity that leave large competences to local administrations and the vagueness left by the partial financing of the policy measures (requiring project financing or partnership for more than 50 percent of the actions), left a margin of uncertainty that augmented the difficulties in assessing the effectiveness of the programme in achieving its goals. Periodical meeting with the Ministry board, actually, has occurred in the form of a consultation rather than a controlling and assessing function.

Thus, in order to understand the extent to which this innovative model reinforces old dynamics, we need to focus more on the practices than on the formal institutions that have taken part in the process. We need to read the interplay between agencies and structures after the launch of the Urban Italia programme and the shape of formal and informal networks. Observation of discourses, power and lobbying dynamics within the different public spheres and among policy networks will shed light on the governance practices. Clearly drawing from a theoretical perspective that tries to overcome the traditional human agency-social structure divide in explaining the social change, we adopt the Bourdieu's structural theory of practice, and particularly the concepts of *habitus* – as embodiment of social norms and experiences that mediates between social structures and individual action – and *field* – the socially structured space of “games”, conflict and competition in which actors play out their engagement with each other to achieve their objectives (Hillier/Rooksby 2005). Structural elements and their connections with *habitus*, explaining change and continuity in local governance - will be therefore understood and described referring to the specific *field* of games that characterises the urban context of Cinisello Balsamo during the policy building and implementation phase.

4. Policy building and implementation: structure and agency in practice

4.1 Structural dynamics and *habitus* within the local *field*

The particular context of the three target areas, sited in one of the five neighbourhoods of the town, is characterised by some elements that can be treated as “structures”: social morphology - the highest density of elder population – and physical morphology - a particular deprivation of public spaces for creative and culture activities and opportunities for younger people to meet and socialise, a high availability of dismissed building, firms and villas, a good connection with neighbouring towns and Milan. This system of constraints and opportunities shaped the goals of the projects as well as the reaction of the long-term residents, who showed strong opposition to change and were uninterested in encounters with younger generations. Citizens complaining about plans to maintain the industrial building actually

were not only demanding a different environment but also worrying about youth socialisation practices. As young and elderly people have traditionally conflicting needs, these point of critique could have been expected and properly treated.

Another strong structural element, that we could define as “political culture”, already mentioned above, was the traditional strength of unions, left-wing political parties and co-operative housing builders. In Italy, since the beginning of the twentieth century, citizens were associating in order to buy land and build up cheap housing estates. In the city of Cinisello Balsamo, which had grown quickly during the period 1950s -1970s as a consequence of strong south-north migration flows, this phenomenon has been of major importance and still today co-operative housing builders have the control of the main processes of physical transformation of the town. The powerful position of lobbying actors in the *field* of the Urban Italia programme depends exactly on this system, regulating politics, housing and labour, and shaping alliances. The actor embeddedness in this political culture explains a lot of their resistance to pursue governance innovative practices.

Within the *field*, furthermore, we have to focus on all the specific resources in terms of knowledge and cultural capital of individuals explaining a large part of their behaviour (Bourdieu 2000). In the case study under analysis, an important *habitus* that shaped the action of citizens – particularly the movement that grew against an issue of the Urban Italia programme that embodied all the typical features of a NIMBY (Not-in-my-back-yard) group – depended on the cultural capital deriving from previous policies and participatory experiences, that gave them important skills to behave in the field of the programme. As a matter of fact, one of the two leaders of the NIMBY movement did her master thesis in planning on the “Neighbourhood contract programme”; an innovative regeneration participatory programme experimented in Cinisello Balsamo two years before. During her research she worked daily in the “Special office for participatory regeneration” for several months, acquiring a common language and skills in dealing with citizens and involving them in the planning actions. Others residents of the neighbourhood have been involved in previous participatory actions, so that they were particularly sensitive to participation and open to mobilization.

On the opposing end, an *habitus* contrary to mobilization was formed out of the frustrating experience of the Youth Forum, the participatory pro-

ject for youth empowerment, that was brutally ended when the group reached the consciousness of claiming precise spatial resources in order to continue to work autonomously.

A final, but not less important element we have to mention is the lack of tradition and skills in the inter-sectoral collaboration and coordination among sectors of the local administration. Although it is not a peculiar element of this context – being quite common in many local administrations in Italy – it has been important in this case study.

4.2 Actors, power, decision-making: lobbying and interests in the shadow

Actor-networks

As required by the model of the Urban Italia programme, the actors involved or self-involved in the programme were several denoting, at least formally, a multilevel governance. Actors, although entering into the programme at different moments, were structured in networks, partially overlapping, as shown in Figure 1. Here I will focus on five main networks resulting from the participatory observation. These networks have been relatively stable during the ten months showing a common internal interest in co-operation. Remarks on policy networks are intended here as a toolbox – rather than an alternative form of governance, in line with the German school (Börzel 1998) – for analysing formal and informal entities belonging to society and institutions, understanding their interdependency and interest intermediations, and explaining pressures, concertation and lobbying activities. Boxes represent actors involved in the programme. Overlapping boxes show multiple belonging, sometimes expected, some other startling (such as one of the two leaders of the NIMBY movement who is also a politician of the governing coalition).

Network 1 represents a network based on a limited issue, an entity that Rhodes (1997) would have called issue network (Börzel 1998; Hillier 2002). It was founded by a group of people acquiring a flat in a new building, at that time still under construction, very close to the former industrial site of Fabbrica Cipro, the second target area. The building was a cooperative house (all the owners, more or less 120 families, were associated

to the co-op housing group), therefore the NIMBY group involved also the president of the cooperative and, later on, of others cooperatives in the city. Open to a wide participation of local residents, the network had an unequal distribution of power and knowledge resources among its participants, with a leading role of two key people, as already mentioned above.

The powerful and informal network 2 involves personal and very close relations among the Mayor and the builders. As a political activist in the Left for thirty years (the city has never had a centrist or right-wing administration), and having taken an active role during the housing emergency in the city, the Mayor maintains close personal relationships with the co-op world and the builders in particular. Her closeness to them was very strong, as shown also with some personal calls she had during several meetings, or with her direct inexplicable participation in some coordination meetings.

Network 4 – essentially a professional network, according to the Rhodes taxonomy – represents the local administration planning office, formally responsible for the programme (but forced to share the coordination with the development agency) and two groups of external planners. Their relationship depends on previous collaboration and a strong commitment to shared values: they intended their roles as missionaries (Hillier 2002) and strongly believed in the innovative goals of the programme. The special statutory position of this sector in the local administration, being directly under the direction of the Mayor, was also at the origin of an inter-sectoral hostility, as mentioned above.

Network 3 represents the most controversial group, shadowed in the lobbying activities and alliances but clear in their basic values: they share the idea of progress as economic growth and improved their networking skills in the coordination of the strategic plan of the “North Milan” area. They shared coordination activities, competing and explicitly conflicting, with network 4. It is noticeable that they hired as consultants some planners belonging to the fourth network. Their role in the programme was also as partners, due to the fact that they transferred (in the form of person-hours) public financing received by the administration with other national programmes.

Finally, network 5 collected the three main political parties in the government coalition (in the Figure, 1 is the main left-wing party of *Democratici di Sinistra*, 2 is the left-centrist *Partito della Margherita* and 3 is the

radical left party *Rifondazione Comunista*). This network played a major role due to a particular conjuncture: the approaching electoral moment and the ineligibility of the Mayor. The *field* was strongly shaped by the power games and strategic calculation of the political leaders competing for the succession. At the same time, the Mayor was seeking new opportunities in a higher level of government - the province - and looking for alliances and support.

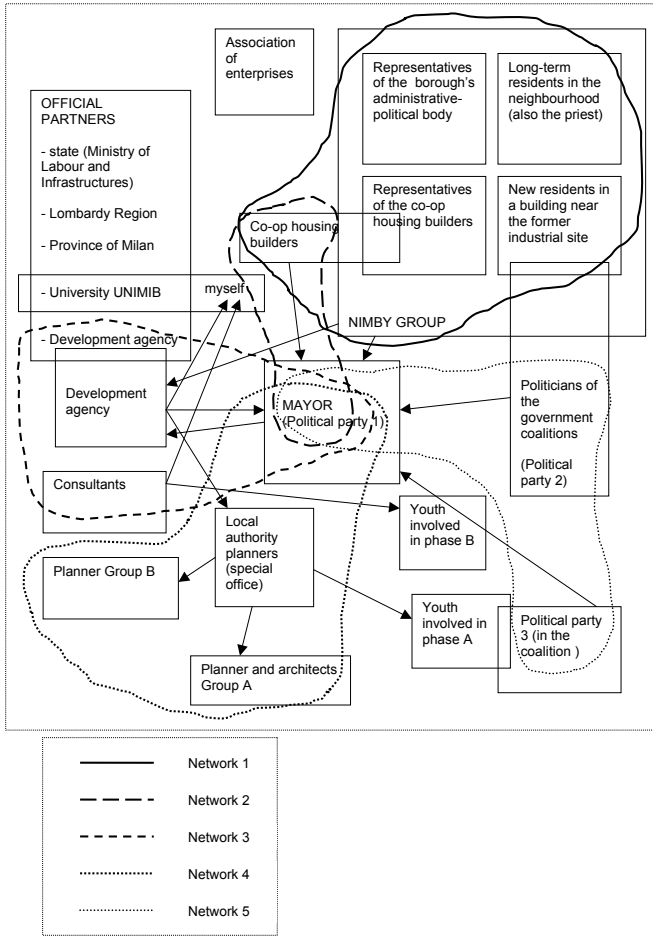


Figure 1: The map of actors (in boxes) and their networks (Source: own elaboration)

From this overview it appears clear that higher levels of the government hierarchy – neither the Ministry nor the Region or the Province – did not have a substantial role in the planning and early implementation phase of the urban programme. Their participation were merely formal, taking the form of financing or promoting communication and dissemination. The so called multi-level feature of the programme has only taken place at the level of statutory participation, taking the form of financial participation in the most positive case, but merely empty at the level of participating in deliberative assemblies.

Representations and public spheres

As expected, representations, *desiderata* and symbolic meaning of the public spaces to be realised were different, and sometimes conflicting. In an overall view we can compare them and their rationalities, through justification discourses that have been expressed in the public arenas. I would like to highlight here that different representations took place mainly in different public spheres so that they were not compared and discussed together between the same group: despite its announcement, a physical space functional to managing participation and debate during the implementation of the programme – a physical substrate for the public sphere as Sebastiani (1997) would call it – has never been settled. This meant that all the different visions and desiderata of public space (see further) must be found, once again, listening to what emerged in formal and informal meeting (what I call “public arenas”), belonging to public and counter-public spheres (Fraser 1992). Informal public arenas were purposely activating actors. Through the “tam-tam” in the street, with a sit-in outside the church, the collection of signatures and public assemblies the first network informed and invited people to join an alternative planning team. The formal ones, on the other hand, (public hearing, restricted meeting, coordination roundtable, “laboratories”) were often bounded, involving people under invitation, voluntarily excluding segments of the population or re-directing groups to less “hot” issues. The strategy was the parcellisation of the participation process in segments, treating separately the three target areas. This was functional to avoid a redefinition of the solution – the predestination of the three target areas to education-creativity-park activities – that would have challenged the interest of existing economic partners or bounded those of future ones. For example,

alternative location for the creative activities, advanced by the NIMBY movement, were not taken into account: the group proposed two different alternative locations – one inside the target area No2, one in the target area No3 – that were not considered because they would have limited the freedom of eventual entrepreneurial partners interested in developing the target area No3, as well as those already involved in the area No2. The alternative location in area No2 on the one hand, owned by a co-op housing builder, will be soon transformed in a residential area through a change in the city plan, as a sort of gift. On the other hand, the third area, waiting for a private partner in a regime of project financing, were never opened up to participation, giving priority to the wishes of the private interest.

Justification discourses can be grouped in two main families: technocratic rationality versus life-long-experience rationality – the power of knowledge versus the power of practical deprivation experience. Both referred to the need for a better, liveable and sustainable environment, freely accessible, containing the market pressure to build consuming-led spaces. None of them, actually, expressed the need for a “safe”, controlled, gated space. The clashing elements were, mainly, related to the scale to which the symbolic and practical meaning of public spaces should have referred to: the neighbourhood level (public space belong to close residents), the city level (public spaces are required for the youth living in the city) and the metropolitan level (better public spaces, cultural, educational and sporting activities will change the identity, the image and the attractiveness of the city at a metropolitan level).

Lobbying and power games

These meanings, themselves, of the different representations, in a way, were not so far from each other, and an agonistic diversity would have been treated in a political public sphere aimed at discussing and confronting the goals of creating public spaces for young generations. These did not occur in a field of games where the goals were merely treated as an opportunity to show contractual power among electoral forces.

Lobbying and negotiation occurred under the assumptions that everybody with a voice, and without taking in account young people, would have been happy and a consensus would have been reached.

Lobbying activities and cooptation permeated all the process, within networks and among networks. “Within” because of the multiple belonging of some actors, for instance the Mayor. Her concerns in assuring political continuity to the left coalition, receiving the electoral support (votes) from the co-operative housing builders and supporting the electoral campaign of the future president of the province (that would have called her as his deputy) were the only, real, important goals to reach. In her ‘weak’ position the forces with contractual power advanced their will and desire, exploiting the public opinion, even using local media.

Apart from electoral-led lobbying activities, other kinds of lobbying occurred. Two are remarkable and relate to the conflict between the two coordinators of the programme and the intersectoral collaborative work. The local administration planning office, that after a year was forced to stop the participatory activities and take only a role in ratifying the work of the second coordinator, tried to use the power of their information and control of official documents both to hinder the work of competitors and sending information to young people (without succeeding in waking up their mobilisation force). The second coordinators, on the other hand, tried to co-opt me in order to reach information they needed, using my neutrality as a witness of their supposedly “good operation” and proposing me to work as a substitute of the planners co-opted by the competitors (planning group B, in the figure).

Seen from the point of view of innovation in civil society empowerment, the primacy of lobbying activities over the participatory aims of the programme had a dramatic effect in emptying the arena for deliberation and participation, disempowering the young population and empowering those actors with other mobilising resources to be spent in occulted lobbying. Social exclusion, if possible, has been even more deep and unfair.

5. Assessing effectiveness of participatory tools and governance innovation: lights and shadows of decision-making

Before coming to a conclusion, some data and information on the outcomes of the first half of the programme are needed, in order to better focus on questions raised in this detailed overview. Decisions taken in this phase

of the programme have consequences “in the light” and “in the shadows”. As regards to the light, we can say that the *field* has been characterised by structural forces affecting the behaviour of the actors. From a procedural perspective, the communicative planning occurred without inclusion and the recognition of differences. Issues were treated with a continuous shift among timing and procedural need of the programme, on the one hand, and electoral and alliance opportunities on the other. Consensual agreement occurred at the expense of the main goals. Actually, apart from the target area No 1 – the university building where the ancient villa has been renewed in partnership with the University of Milano Bicocca – the remaining of 5 million Euros were spent to re-shape a square. For the target area No 2 one hypothesis under screening was that of letting it to the co-op builders for the realisation of “community” parking and garages at their expenses. Target area No 3 is still waiting for private investors today.

As regards to the shadows, we just have to remark on some self-explaining data. The Mayor has been elected in the province and designated as deputy of the president of province (*presidente della giunta*). The incoming mayor, belonging to the radical left-wing party (*Rifondazione Comunista*) has been one of the few mayors (on more than eight thousand municipalities) elected at the first turn – with the absolute majority of votes – in Italy. The president of the province is the former mayor of one of the five allied neighbouring towns, the same that founded the development agency. The latter, that we know also for being partner of the programme as well as second coordinator of the team, was strongly involved in the organisation of the electoral campaign of the president of the province.

Today it is clear that the goals of the programme were sacrificed in the name of alliances and agreements, in a climate where the compromise between left-centrist and leftist groups will lead towards a big major turnover in the political sphere – at the province level in 2004 and more recently at national level – but with the maintenance of the status quo at the local level.

The tradition of good practices and participatory skills that have been part of the cultural capitals of all the actors involved have been defeated by the exceptional centrality of political opportunities at a rate that did not leave any space for the pursuit of the programme’s goals.

Concluding, we can say that the Urban Italia programme, despite being a multi-level governance tool and integrated multi-sectoral policy, is at its

deep core a local experiment of organisational change without a steering leader. As such, it is a field where political opportunism, particularism in local protest and old corporatist arrangements play a major role in lobbying and shaping the decision-making process. Innovation in satisfying neglected needs, although emerging in the very beginning of the process, have been suffocated by the primacy of conjunctural political opportunities and in civil servants' lack of skills for collaborative and intersectoral work.

In order to positively redefine cognitive schemes both at the level of long-term administrative employees and in a consolidated way of policy building it is necessary to avoid financial uncertainty and the steering void that opened up the process to ungoverned discretionality.

The new governance configuration, allowing space for a wide range of actors participating in the policy implementation, it is actually a very shadowed field, where deliberative public arenas and partnership can be completely empty entities, very far from the discursive construct behind them. Effectiveness must be evaluated, therefore, taking into account a set of indicators such as: type of networks; their skills and mobilisation resources; position of the city builders/developers within the chessboard of interest touched by the policy implementation; time position in relation to the electoral turn and forecast of the political balance in term of continuity/change. These elements include agency and structure system of opportunities and constraint that, in the presented case study, have been recognised as affecting the degree of innovation in governance dynamics and democracy enhancement.

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Abstracts

The paper examines a multi-level and multi-sectoral territorial policy for neighbourhood regeneration: the *Urban Italia* programme in Cinisello Balsamo, Italy. Within the debate on the contemporary shift from well structured government dynamics towards more indefinite and participatory governance practices, the article contributes with observations taken at the level of the local administration, questioning the adoption of European policy models and advocating it as institutional learning. Analysing the social structure – human agency dynamics within a project aimed at creating new public spaces through a participatory programme, the paper sheds light on a number of structural and conjunctural elements intertwined with human *habitus* explaining innovation and continuities in urban governance.

Der Beitrag behandelt eine multi-sektorale Mehrebenen-Territorial-Politik für Nachbarschaftsregenerierung am Beispiel des Programms *Urban Italia* in Cinisello Balsamo, Italien. Innerhalb der Debatte um die aktuelle Verschiebung von durchstrukturierten Regierungsdynamiken hin zu weniger definierten und partizipativen *Governance*-Praktiken analysiert der Artikel mit Hilfe von Beobachtungen auf der lokalen Verwaltungsebene die Einführung europäischer Policy-Modelle und ihre Bedeutung für institutionelles Lernen. Anhand der Dynamik von sozialer Struktur und menschlichem Handeln innerhalb eines Projekts, das auf die Gestaltung neuer öffentlicher Räume durch ein partizipatives Programm abzielt, wird im Beitrag auf strukturelle und konjunkturelle Elemente, die mit Habitus verwoben sind, hingewiesen. Darauf aufbauend werden Innovationen und Kontinuitäten innerhalb der *Urban Governance* erklärt.

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