

Rethinking Urban Neighbourhoods: Territorial Outputs/Impacts and EU Lessons

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, a lot has been made and a lot has changed in urban neighbourhoods. This process is clearly testified by the broad and diversified international literature on “difficult neighbourhoods”, on the different meanings of outskirts (such as an area far from the city centre, a place without history, a multiethnic area, a space of high decay, a place of innovation, etc.), on the policies and instruments of implementation, but also on the study of the many practices carried out in the latest ten years (from EU to local experiences).

Undoubtedly, the renewed attention to cities and its difficult neighbourhoods carried out through pilot projects, community initiatives and European networks, has helped to leave aside the “old” idea of neighbourhood, considered fringe and decay area and has drawn attention to a more positive vision which is able to recognize potentialities and territorial resources, a planning laboratory par excellence. Nevertheless, despite the strong attention to the issue, phenomena of distress (we cannot forget the recent episodes of uprising in the French “banlieu”) and of economic, physical and social decay and exclusion are unchanged in some European neighbourhoods.

The aim of this paper is not to enter into the complex and multifaceted issue of neighbourhoods but to think and re-think about the experiences carried out, trying to outline a “territorial outcome” of praxis of intervention and neighbourhood renewal. It is not our aim to draw a frame of the current situation, neither to establish a list of the “best practices”. Our goal is to re-read the neighbourhood initiatives through the assessment practices, using it as an interpretation to re-consider cities, policy and practice interventions for cities.

What does “assess the practice of urban renewal mean today”? Can we speak of EU lesson also in this field? First of all, assessment is not only a research of coherence between objectives and results; it implies thinking the territory with a new viewpoint, through an assessment process that is focused on efficiency, efficaciousness, territorial outputs and impacts. Moreover, we should acknowledge that the experiences of evaluation proposed at European level for Structural Funds, but above all for the Community Initiative Urban (ex ante, on going, ex post) have originated and sparked off other “good practices” at national and local level. Without entering into specific experiences, this paper aims at pointing out some, seemingly, more

original processes and think about their implementation, both in the whole city and in other European urban areas.

Key Words: neighbourhoods, evaluation and good practices, territorial outputs and impacts, EU lessons