

Spreading EU Innovation into Mainstream Urban Regeneration Policy: a Neighbourhood Initiative in Southern Italy

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at highlighting changes in practice of neighbourhood initiatives in the Italian Mezzogiorno. It focuses on a specific neighbourhood initiative (Programma Integrato di Riqualificazione delle Periferie – Peripheral Neighbourhood Rehabilitation Integrated Programme – PIRP), targeting social housing neighbourhoods, promoted and funded by the Apulia region in 2006. The PIRP can be considered as an attempt to ‘translate’ the ‘innovation’ introduced (mainly) by EU within the urban policy initiatives in Italy during the 1990s in the local neighbourhood initiatives ‘language’.

Area-based urban policy initiatives promoted and/or funded by EU Structural Funds have been acknowledged to have played an important role within the evolution of urban policy initiatives in Italy, which has occurred since the early 1990s. The latter involved a shift from a top-down and sector-oriented approach mainly based on physical interventions towards bottom-up and integrated initiatives based on the involvement of public, private and voluntary sectors. However, assuming a bottom-up and local perspective it is possible to highlight that beyond the ‘formal’ changes in policy instruments, it is not clear what kind of changes have occurred within local level practices. In other words, it is not clear if the ‘formal’ changes in the urban policy instruments imply concrete changes in the modes of tackling the complex problems of deprived neighbourhoods. Moreover, many doubts can be raised concerning the ‘sustainability’ of these ‘new’ initiatives and their ability to influence local development paths.

In particular, in the Apulia region some experiences of neighbourhood initiative promoted and funded by EU were successful for some aspects. But this ‘success’ was limited to a few experiences (and the people involved in them), while the urban policy arenas were not opened to the ‘new’ bottom-up and integrated approach: most experiences of ‘mainstreaming’ failed both within programmes included in the mainstream of EU Structural Funds and within national programmes promoted and funded within social housing pilot projects.

In the Apulia region, these processes of ‘innovation’ have become particularly interesting to observe since 2005 when a new left regional government, willing to break strongly with the past right government policy approach, was elected. This coincided with a ‘season’ of deep innovations introduced also by the regional level in the neighbourhood initiatives. The latter aimed at grasping the specific problems of urban deprived areas in this region of the Italian Mezzogiorno, where neighbourhood regeneration is deeply linked to interventions in the social housing stock.

Introduction: (which) changes in neighbourhood regeneration initiatives in the Italian Mezzogiorno

Since the early 1990s several processes of change occurred in the urban policy field in Italy and, in particular, in the Italian Mezzogiorno¹. The more visible facet of the above described changes consists in the availability of new policy instruments for tackling urban problems². In particular, many area-based and integrated programmes targeting deprived urban neighbourhoods have been promoted and funded by the EU, the national government and some regional governments. These initiatives can be considered tracks of an evolution from a sector-oriented, top-down and physical approach towards an area-based, integrated and bottom-up approach to urban issues, including social, economic and environmental actions and based on the involvement of public, private, the associations and voluntary sectors (Padovani, 1999).

We will not give a comprehensive review of the new urban policy initiatives, which were launched in the Italian context during the 1990s. We will just consider, at large, two groups of them (both assuming deprived neighbourhoods as target areas), which are particularly relevant for our case-study: area-based social housing pilot projects funded by the national government (including, in particular, Urban Rehabilitation Programme-*Programmi di recupero urbano*, Neighbourhoods Pacts-*Contratti di quartiere* I, II, III rounds) and area-based initiatives promoted and/or funded by EU structural funds policy (including, in particular, Urban Pilot Projects, the Urban and Urban II programmes, the urban regeneration programmes funded by the structural funds Regional Operational Programmes-ROPs).

The EU area-based initiatives have been acknowledged to have played an important role within the evolution of urban policy in Italy (Balducci, 2000; Dematteis, Governa, Rossignolo, 1999; Cremaschi, 2003; Palermo, 2001). In particular, the Urban initiative played a significant role within the evolution towards area-based, integrated and bottom-up initiatives. What emerges when analysing the implementation of this initiative are hybridisation processes between the EU policy objectives and principles and the local ones (Padovani, 2002; Tedesco, 2005; 2006/b): the Urban programme was mainly interpreted within the physical approach to the problems of deprived urban areas developed within the Italian land use planning 'tradition'. But attempts to integrated physical actions with social and economic actions were experienced as well. Thus, the programme contributed somehow to look (differently) at urban problems, highlighting their multidimensional character and their concentration in specific areas. Notwithstanding that, many doubts can be raised concerning both the 'sustainability' of these 'new' initiatives beyond the opportunity offered by EU structural funds and their ability to influence local development paths.

A second group of 'new' instruments which became available in the Italian context for tackling the problems of deprived urban neighbourhoods in the early 1990s includes national integrated neighbourhood initiatives funded by social housing funds for pilot projects³. These pilot projects targeted deprived neighbourhoods including social housing to be rehabilitated or built. During the 1990s the articulation of actions and actors which were supposed to be included in these programmes evolved: the first initiatives introduced as main innovations the promotion of public-private agreements and the area-based approach; the latter initiatives included not only physical actions and private actors, but also social and economic actions and the associations and voluntary sectors actors and citizens. Notwithstanding that, areas were considered mainly as part of the urban fabric, while the social and economic dimensions were left in the background. In fact, although these initiatives were conceived as integrated, national funds derived from a single source (devoted to social housing and urban infrastructure). Local municipalities were required to integrate physical actions with social and economic ones

¹ As it is well known, a national urban policy as a national "policy explicitly directed to cities" (van den Berg, Braun, van der Meer, 1998, p. 7) does not exist in Italy. Notwithstanding that, some area-based and integrated programmes targeting deprived urban neighbourhoods were launched from the national level since the early 1990s.

² Laino e Padovani (2000) single out different groups of programmes, set up within employment policy and social policy, which influenced the setting up of the new urban policy initiatives.

³ In 1998 social housing was devolved from central to regional government but the setting up of 'national interest' social housing programmes (Minelli, 2004).

using other sources of funds as extra-funds. This seldom occurred in the Mezzogiorno, while some interesting experiences were carried out in some Northern Italy cities⁴.

As far as our case-study, the Apulia region, is concerned, in three out of the five main towns of the region (Bari, Foggia and Lecce) an Urban programme was carried out during the 1994-1999 structural funds programming phase. In all the three cases Urban was perceived as an innovative and successful experience¹. Furthermore, an UPP was carried out in one out of the five cities (Brindisi) and an URBAN II programme is still in progress in one out of the five main town (Taranto) and in a small town located in the Bari metropolitan area (Mola di Bari) within 2000-2006 programming phase. The perception of Urban as a 'success' is linked to some aspects of the programme such as the capacity of the local administration, in front of the innovative approach required by the programme, to deliver it following the strict rules, procedures and deadlines of EU structural funds and the capacity to coordinate different sectors within the local administration. But this 'success' was limited to a few experiences (and the people involved in them). Concerning national programmes, 17 Urban Rehabilitation programmes were funded (in the late 1990s), but at present it is not still clear how many of them will be concretely implemented; four Neighbourhood Pacts were funded within the programme first round (late 1990s) and 18 within the programme second round (early 2000). All these initiatives have been very slowly implemented and often perceived as failures. Delays were also due to the possibility to keep funding assigned even if deadlines were not strictly followed. In most cases integration was limited to actions concerning the housing stock and urban infrastructure.

Of course, although promoted and funded by different institutions (EU and the national government) and delivered at the national level from two different Departments of the same Ministry, these two groups of programmes could influence somehow each other both at national and local levels. But in most cases this did not occur in practice. Thus, for instance, in most cases in the same city the Urban experience did not have any influence on the Neighbourhood Pacts one.

Given the above described processes, our main research question is: what kind of evolution is occurring? A major difference between the research frameworks used to observe it affects the assumptions on the relationships between changes in urban policy (in terms of policy principles, objectives, instruments, procedures) and changes in 'urban practice' (referring practice to "what people do" according to Crosta, 2006, quoting Veyne). If one focuses on changes in urban policy, the above mentioned processes can be read as a major shift, according to the bulk of literature on regional policy in the Mezzogiorno in the 1990s (Bodo Viesti, 1997; Cersosimo, Donzelli, 2000). If one focuses, instead, on 'urban practice' on the one hand, it is possible to highlight that changes in 'urban practice' are also due to factors, processes and policy which are not intentionally developed in order to deal with 'urban issues'; on the other hand, even though focusing on practice which are more strictly linked to new urban policy instruments (such as those linked to participative processes) (Tedesco, 2005; 2006/b; 2007), one can wonder what kind of changes are occurring within local level practice beyond the 'formal' changes in policy instruments: do these changes involve new practice or are they just new 'labels' for old practice?

This paper is divided into three sections, beyond this introduction. In the first section, referring to the Apulia region, we will describe the attempts to mainstream within the 2000-2006 ROP for the delivering of EU structural funds the new approach introduced through the Urban programme and the modes of dealing with national pilot projects involving a stronger role for the regional level within the Neighbourhood Pacts II round. In the second section we will focus on the setting up and first phases of implementation of a specific neighbourhood initiative promoted and funded by the Apulia region in 2006, strongly based on the previous experiences carried out in the regional context within both EU and national initiatives. In the third and last section we will open some issues starting from our case-study.

⁴ This is the case of Turin, for instance, where a wider urban action programme targeting peripheral neighbourhoods and assuming an integrated and participative approach (*Progetto speciale periferie*) had been just set up when the Neighbourhood Pact programme was launched (Garelli, 1998; 1999).

1. Adapting the ‘new’ approach to the Apulia regional context

While during the early 1990s in the Apulian region the ‘new’ was linked to the availability of some innovative programmes launched by EU and the national government, during the late 1990s-early 2000 the regional administration was required to play a stronger role ‘adapting’ this new approach to the regional context: on the one hand, by designing a neighbourhood initiative within the mainstream of structural funds; on the other hand, by launching a regional call for proposal within social housing pilot projects. These attempts of adapting to the regional context the new initiatives, basing on ‘lessons’ learned within both EU structural funds urban policy initiatives and social housing national pilot projects can be considered as a fertile ground to explore the ‘tracks’ these initiatives left on the regional policy context and their capacity to open it to the ‘new’.

Concerning EU structural funds programmes, attempts to mainstream the ‘Urban approach’ were carried out within all the 2000-2006 Italian ROPs. Area-based and integrated initiatives were established assuming different kind of focuses, target areas (and names). They were funded by three different measures (concerning physical, social and economic actions) included in the ROPs, which were partly (or as a whole) assigned to these initiatives. Some Regions included among these area-based and integrated initiatives those assuming urban regeneration as a focus while other Regions designed otherwise “special” area-based and integrated initiatives for urban regeneration (Savino, 2006): in Apulia a specific “Cities” Priority measure (5.1) provided some brief and quite general indications for integrated urban regeneration programmes targeting urban areas in the Region five main towns and singled out a social measure (5.3) and an economic measure (4.17) to fund social and economic actions. Thus, cities interpreted the programme promoted by the Cities Priority as a ‘mainstreamed’ Urban (Tedesco, 2006/a).

As we underlined above, in four out of the five cities involved in the ROPs initiative an Urban programme either had already been carried out during the 1994-1999 EU structural funds programming phase or was in progress during the 2000-2006 programming phase. However, the opinion of the actors involved in both experiences is that the innovative character of Urban was lost due to several reasons, all independent from the local political situation in terms of continuity/discontinuity.

First, no support was given to cities from the regional level. It has to be said that the Apulia Region had not had any role within the Urban experience. In general, the penetration at the regional level of expertise concerning EU structural funds is limited to the regional Department directly responsible for programmes and/or initiatives funded by EU structural funds, namely the Budget and Programming Department (which is Managing Authority of the ROP) and concerns procedures much more than contents. Physical, social and economic measures included in the OP urban regeneration programmes have been delivered by three different regional Departments without any experience in EU funding and without any coordination. Second, there were not set up initiatives promoting exchange of experiences neither between the Apulian cities involved in the programme nor between the Apulian cities and other Mezzogiorno Regions cities involved in similar programmes funded by the structural funds ROPs. By contrast, within the Urban experience local urban programmes were part of the single national Urban initiative and were included in the same Monitoring Committee which became an occasion to exchange experiences (Tedesco, 2005, pp. 66-69). Within the ROPs initiatives, instead, as a consequence of the lack of exchanges, at the local level even the same actors had many difficulties in maintaining what they had learnt in the passage from a “special instrument” like Urban to the ROP initiatives. Furthermore, in the Regional Administration opinion, the lack of competition between cities, due to the choice to keep the funds available only for the Regional main towns, lowered the quality of the programmes and weakened the mobilisation of local actors.

At the regional level another significant experience was carried out during the second round of the Neighbourhood Pacts programme (Contratto di quartiere II). Among the pilot projects funded by national social housing funds, the Neighbourhood Pacts II round is the most articulated in terms of actors involved, the involvement of citizens in the definition of the programmes objectives being explicitly required in a national call

for proposals for the first time within this programme. The Neighbourhood Pacts II round was launched at the national level, but the call for proposals were required to be designed and launched at the regional level. Thus, each region interpreted in a peculiar way national indications.

In the case of the Apulia region, the presence in the local programmes of further resources beyond the public ones was assigned a large part of the evaluation points, but neither indications were given concerning the modes of (and the reasons for) involving the different actors nor a distinction was made between the involvement of private actors and the involvement of the voluntary sectors and citizens (Tedesco, 2004). Due to the lack of specific indications, during the phase of the programme documents design, participation was interpreted either as ‘information’ (a necessary phase to legitimate participation, but unidirectional and without feed-backs to citizens, following Arnstein, 1969⁵) or as ‘consultation’ (where citizens are heard, but there is not assurance that consultation outcomes would be considered, *ibidem*). On the other hand, as the mere financial contribution of the private sector was the main criterion for the programmes evaluation, in many programme approved the private actions and objectives were even not strictly linked to the public ones. Furthermore, a huge part of delays in the implementation phase were due to the lack the planning permissions, which, paradoxically, should have been delivered by a different Division of the same Department responsible for the programme.

To sum up, what emerges from our analysis is that although an evolution occurred from new area-based initiatives launched from the EU and the national government towards area-based initiatives involving a stronger role for the regional level, these were locally interpreted, on the one hand, as modes to open the urban arenas to the private sector in order to tackle the problems linked to the limited amount of public financial resources for urban regeneration; on the other hand, as opportunity to benefit from EU and national funds. This did not automatically open the urban policy arenas to new practices, but those linked to the presence of the private sector. By contrast, many practice of ‘resistance to change’ emerged both during the programmes design and implementation phases. Furthermore, at the regional level reflections concerning objectives and contents of area-based and integrated urban regeneration initiatives involving different Departments where not carried out: the latter were simply delivered by the Division responsible for the funds.

2. A neighbourhood integrated initiative promoted and funded by the regional government

In 2005 a new left regional government, willing to break strongly with the past right regional government policy approach, was elected. An academic expert in the field of urban policy and planning was appointed as planning, urban policy and social housing councillor. This started a ‘season’ of deep innovations introduced also by the regional level in the neighbourhood initiatives. Social housing problems became central in the political programme and new initiatives were promoted.

Among these, we will focus on the PIRP (Programma Integrato di Riqualificazione delle Periferie – Peripheral Neighbourhood Rehabilitation Integrated Programme) which is an area-based and integrated programme aiming at grasping the specific problems of urban deprived neighbourhoods including social housing to be rehabilitated or built. The term ‘peripheral’ is not referred to the ‘location’ of neighbourhoods within the urban fabric, but to a variety of situations having social, economic, environmental, and housing problems as major features: neighbourhoods in the outskirts of cities, historic centres etc. The strong stress on integration, sustainable building and the involvement of local people in the regeneration process can certainly be included among the main ‘innovations’ the programme introduced in the local context.

Analysing the process of the programme designing at the regional level let us to highlight many contrasts between attempts to innovate carried out by the new government and practices of ‘resistance to change’ developed , both intentionally and not, by the regional organisational structure. The programme has been set up

⁵ Empowerment issues are not the focus of this paper. We just refer to Arnstein’s ‘ladder of citizen participation’ in order to articulate the field of participatory practices.

by the regional government, and launched in June 2006. It is funded by social housing funds which had been devolved from the national to the regional level since many years, but had never been used. The staff of the Social Housing Division was pushed from the new regional government to check all the social housing funds devolved from the national to the regional level and still available. This allowed to design a regional Social Housing Action Programma (*Piano casa*), including the promotion of PIRP.

The design of the programme was made by the Social Housing Division staff and strongly supported by the councillor herself and by informal consultations with some tenants associations and sustainable building associations and with the regional section of the national municipalities association. It was based on the attempt to avoid simplification and misuse of the innovative aspects of the programme experienced within the previous policy processes concerning both national integrated rehabilitation programmes for social housing neighbourhoods and area-based and integrated programmes included in the 2000-2006 Structural Funds Regional Development Plan, both delivered at the regional level by two different Divisions of the same Department.

This attempt was pursued mainly through the definition of evaluation criteria assigning precise points for each aspect of the programme, stressing on those which were supposed to be innovative in the local contexts and trying to 'temperate' the risk to exclude the most deprived neighbourhoods located in the weakest municipalities by assigning a large amount of points (60/170) to specific deprivation indicators. As far as participation is concerned the total amount of points assigned (15/170) is not particularly significant, but it is very specific: points assigned for information given to inhabitants were distinguished from points assigned for the involvement of inhabitants in the programmes setting up; moreover specific points were assigned for documents attesting the modes of involving local people and the links between the participative process and the programme document. As far as integration is concerned, although the attempt to integrate different regional funds failed⁶, mainly due to the lack of experience in joint action between different regional sectors, municipalities were invited to integrate at the local level the programmes with funds for social and economic actions. This certainly limited the possibility to integrate social, economic and environmental actions to actions concerning housing and the urban infrastructure. Anyway, specific points (40/170) were assigned to the 'quality' of the programme and, in particular (5/170) to the 'idea' of regeneration which was required to link all the actions in order to produce coherence between them⁷.

This attempt to innovate was supported through the organisation of workshops aiming at diffusing concepts such as integration and participation, and the establishment of an on-line forum, supporting municipalities in the setting up of the programme documents. The supporting initiatives were carried out in cooperation with a new Department set up at the regional level, the 'Transparency and active citizenship' Department, responsible for setting up participatory processes within all the regional policy field. Furthermore, due to the pressures of the municipalities which had many difficulties in dealing with such a 'complex' programme, the deadline was delayed twice⁸.

The Pirp had success. Many municipalities participated to the competitive bidding process: 122 out of the 258 municipalities⁹ of the Apulia region presented 127 programmes (the Provinces main town could present 2 programmes), within a competitive bidding process. Why this success? It is worth mentioning that the funds available are not particularly consistent: each local programme could benefit from 4 Meuro (for cities with a population of at least 50000), or 3 Meuro (for cities with a population of at least 20000) or 2 Meuro in the other cases. Thus, other factors pushed municipalities to participate. One out of this is certainly the possibility to have their programmes approved (even if not funded) from the regional administration in a short term. But it is not the

⁶ A call was launched from the Planning and Social Housing Department to the Social Affairs, Employment, Cultural Activities and Environment Departments.

⁷ The availability of further public and private resources was assigned 40/170 points and the programme feasibility 15/170.

⁸ From December 2006 to April 2007, and from April to May 2007.

⁹ As far as city size is concerned, it has to be said that only two out of the 258 municipalities of the Apulia region have a population over 200,000 inhabitants.

only one. Although the policy process is still in progress, a first insight into it can help us to understand what is occurring.

At present (September 2007) the programmes are still being evaluated. The Evaluation Commission includes not only staff from different Divisions of the Planning and Social Housing Departments, but also from the Social Affairs Department and from the Environmental Department. This is not usual at all within the regional organisation. The evaluation process is very slow, also due to lack of experience in joint work between different regional Departments.

Both the supporting initiatives (workshops and on-line forum) seem to have contributed to diffuse fuller awareness of the new concepts underpinned by the programme among technicians and politicians¹⁰. As far as the local processes of the programme documents design are concerned and focusing, in particular on the relationships with partners and inhabitants: some innovative agreements were set up and many different modes of involving inhabitants were experienced, swinging from 'information' to 'partnership' in Arnstein's (1969) terms. In fact, in some cases not only citizens were informed, but forms of negotiation between citizens and traditional power-holders were experienced. Some examples can be useful for explaining what we refer to when talking of 'new' practices and of practices of 'resistance to change'.

In the five Provinces main towns, which had already carried out some experiences in the field of area-based and integrated urban initiatives, both within national and EU experiences, the latter do not seem to have left consistent tracks. In the case of Bari, the regional main town (about 310.000 inhabitants), the municipality set up two local programmes. One of them targeted a social housing neighbourhood very close to the Polytechnic. The parish asked the Architecture Department support for organising some workshops for involving the inhabitants, but, in a first phase, the outcomes of the participatory process were not taken into account by the municipality. In fact, a major requirement expressed by citizens was to avoid that their houses would be demolished and rebuilt. But when a call for proposal addressed to the private sector was launched by the municipality, developers could present proposals involving the demolition and rebuilding of part of the social housing stock. In a second phase, although also the municipality staff considered the developers projects as more effective in technical terms, the local government pushed developers to change their project, following citizens requirements¹¹. In the case of Foggia (about 150.000 inhabitants) a few days after the programme documents presentation deadline, a group of inhabitants protested, also using the on-line forum, because, in their opinion, the programme would cancel the neighbourhood green areas. They also contested to have been excluded from the policy process, the programme document having been presented to inhabitants only after its final approval by the municipality. In the case of Brindisi (about 91.000 inhabitants) the technical staff did even not set up the programme at all. However, the Pirp contributed to focus on the problems of a specific neighbourhood and the municipality obtained some funds for the social housing stock of the area.

Also in small towns the experiences in the field of area-based and integrated urban initiatives, both within national and EU experiences do not seem to have left consistent tracks. In particular, in the case of Mola di Bari (about 26.000 inhabitants), the only small town benefiting from an Urban programme in Apulia, the technical staff had to gain the trust of local associations which felt 'abandoned' from the municipality. Anyway, in some cases small towns experienced the more innovative participative processes: this is the case of Tricase (about 17.000 inhabitants) where participation was not only interpreted as relationship between the technical staff, traditional power-holders and the citizens, but also as opening the technical staff to 'new comers'. In fact, the

¹⁰ In the on-line forum, 120 opinions were given, mainly by technicians involved in the local programme design. In the period close to the deadline most of them concerned technical questions about the call for proposal requirements, but, in general, they include also a debate around the expertise of practitioners included in the programme documents design (many young people with specialised skills were involved in the programme documents design at the local level in order to answer to the precise and 'new' requirements of the call for proposal) and a wider debate on urban issues.

¹¹ This, it has to be said, in a context where economy is strongly dependent on the building sector, the latter being in most cases the only private actor which one can suppose to involve in urban rehabilitation/regeneration.

municipality staff did not set up the programme with the help of external consultants as usual, but organised four open workshops on four themes which were supposed to be crucial for the project¹². All the people which participated to the workshops became part of the group supporting the municipality technical staff in setting up the local programme. Another articulated participatory process was experienced in Veglie (about 14.000 inhabitants) where, on the one hand, the different Departments of the municipality started to meet each other; on the other hand, workshops with the inhabitants and the associations and voluntary sectors were organised. The inhabitants did welcome the possibility to dialogue with the municipality staff, as most of the houses are self-promoted and illegal. The technical staff took into great account what emerged from the participatory process. Notwithstanding that, due to conflicting interests and the lack of the time to carry out some procedures many ideas could not bring to concrete agreements in the final programme document: paradoxically, it is not clear if it would be more useful to spent part of the time spent in the participatory process in carrying out some necessary procedures. In other cases such as in Copertino (about 22.000 inhabitants) even though the association and voluntary sectors are very vital, they distrusted the regional administration due to the previous experience within the Neighbourhood Pacts II round, when their mobilisation did not assure the approval of the local programme; thus, just a few associations participated in the public workshops, in particular the tenants associations worked very close to the technical staff. Sometimes the local programmes did not receive the political approval: this is the case of Modugno (about 36.000 inhabitants), another municipality included in the Bari metropolitan area, where the agreement between the Municipality, the national Railway Company, a local Railway Company and the Department of Transport of the Apulia Region which would be very innovative due to the local 'tradition' of sector intervention was not approved last minute by the municipal Council merely for political reasons.

To sum up, in front of the attempts to innovate carried out by the regional administration through the PIRP call for proposal, new practices have been experienced within the local programmes setting up processes. At the same time many practices of 'resistance to change' emerge both at local and regional levels.

3. Some open issues

The main changes observed in the Apulian urban policy arenas concern the availability of new policy instruments. Summarising what we described above: in the 1990s these were promoted and funded by EU and the national government. In the early 2000 the regional government, on the one hand, attempted somehow to mainstream the EU approach to urban problems; on the other hand, was required to launch a regional competitive bidding process within national social housing pilot projects, in particular within the Neighbourhood Pacts programme second round. In the middle 2000 the regional government promoted and launched its own integrated regeneration programme.

Given this framework, we will try to answer the question concerning the nature of the evolution which is undoubtedly occurring in the Italian Mezzogiorno and, in particular, in the Apulia region, trying to read the above described processes in terms of 'sustainability' of the changes introduced. This, from different points of view.

First, if one focuses on urban policy one can wonder whether innovative neighbourhood initiatives can be effective when an urban policy does not exist at national, regional and local levels. From this point of view, the 'sustainability' of these initiatives is strongly linked not only to the capacity to 'mainstream' them but also to the capacity to insert them in wider urban strategies. At the regional level, significant steps were made towards the mainstreaming of neighbourhood initiatives. However, a regional framework concerning also urban

12 These were: sustainable building, urban planning, information and participation. The green building and urban planning workshops aimed at sharing ideas, while the communication and participation workshops aimed at organising the information and participation process.

rehabilitation issues is just in progress since a few months. What is more, it is at the local level that neighbourhood initiatives and wider urban strategies have to concretely integrate each other.

Second, in general “the neighbourhood has been seen as an essential building-block to achieve wider social cohesion and solidarity” at a European level (Kennett and Forrest, 2006), but it is easy to agree that objectives, approaches, procedures and, more generally meanings of neighbourhood regeneration depends largely on the local contexts. As far as the Italian Mezzogiorno is concerned, deprived neighbourhoods are located in ‘lagging’ towns and cities, located in an EU ‘lagging’ region. Hence, the activities of ‘breaking barriers’ and ‘building bridges’ between deprived neighbourhood and the wider city community, which is the ‘core’ of neighbourhood initiatives in the most prosperous EU regions, are not sufficient in order to tackle deprived neighbourhoods problems. These activities have to be paralleled by activities aiming at promoting socioeconomic development. As a consequence it is particularly difficult in such a context to decide whether focusing on the improvement of the attractiveness of cities as a whole or on the improvement of the most deprived neighbourhoods can be considered as a priority in order to start new development paths.

Third, some authors underline that innovative neighbourhood initiatives, when not strictly linked to social policy are weak in tackling social housing problems and all the more so in Italy where area-based and integrated neighbourhood initiatives have mostly been carried out stressing on the physical aspects of deprivation, within the Italian land use planning tradition (Tosi, 2006). On the other hand, in the most deprived neighbourhoods in the Italian Mezzogiorno regeneration is deeply linked to interventions in the social housing stock. Hence, even though social housing can not be reduced to interventions in the social housing stock within area-based and integrated initiatives, these interventions are certainly a priority for the Mezzogiorno cities.

Fourth, if one focuses on what we called ‘urban practice’ one can wonder whether, how and to what extent the new instruments opened urban arenas to new practices. Our case shows us that new practice (in particular, participation practices) were experienced. This can not be exclusively related to the requirements of the call for paper, assigning specific points to the participative process. It is worth highlighting, for instance, that the points assigned to participation processes are a little part of the total amount of points used to evaluate the programmes. These changes in ‘urban practice’, can rather be linked to the wider support initiatives involving a sort of ‘cultural’ shift and to the perception of a new ‘political environment’ pushing new actors, usually not included in urban arenas, to mobilise themselves and traditional power-holders (in particular, politicians) to take into account new issues.

Last, but not least, the ‘sustainability’ of the above described changes is linked to changes in administrative and governance structures. But, our case clearly highlights that changes in administrative and governance structures are largely slower than changes in policy instruments, as it emerges from what we defined practice of ‘resistance to change’, intentionally and not intentionally developed by the different actors involved in the programme, both at the regional and local levels. If we assume that “Innovation is mainly learning”, and that “the capacity to innovate is the capacity to learn” (Donolo, 1988, p. 238), our main question is who learned, what was learned and which were the outcomes of what was learned in terms of policy effectiveness. And this question is still open.

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