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Urban regeneration in the EU



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Urban regeneration in the EU

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Integrated urban development and culture-led regeneration in the EU

Antonio Acierno

Integrated Urban Development approach to Regeneration in the UE

The term “Regeneration” is usually used to describe urban transformation gained through the redesign, reconstruction and often re-allocation of urban land. Originally regeneration meant predominantly land reclamation or refurbishment of neighbourhoods in decline, but more recently it means a lot of various interventions in the city related to urban design and planning, social and economic renewal or cultural planning “regeneration”.

During the 1980s the term increased an overall usage, particularly within urban policy and social-economic initiatives, and a large part of regeneration’s actions concerned de-industrialised urban areas.

As a large part of the research on the topic in urban studies argues, the single term ‘regeneration’ generally indicates the more basic industrial land physical reconstruction and development, while “urban regeneration” refers to the larger field of social habitation involving communities and the social-cultural infrastructure (Vickery, 2007).

Anyway urban regeneration is responsible for the reconstruction of disused industrial lands, waterfronts, docklands, and new retail and culture developments in all over the world (Amin et. al., 2002).

Urban regeneration represents a topic on which there is a growing interest throughout the world and it is mainly driven by the causes and effects of globalization, climate change, the global economic crisis, and lifestyle changes.

Likewise, in a large part of Europe there is an insistent request to revitalize brownfields areas, inner-city sites, and large-housing estates. Urban regeneration strategies have addressed large-scale interventions together with micro-scale ones changing not only the physical structure of neighbourhoods but also the life of their citizens.

In recent years, a large number of cities have promoted public intervention programmes in areas of social, economic and urban decline. These urban regeneration initiatives have introduced multifunctional actions able to give response to different demands producing a new manner of tackling intervention in the urban space that in-

Fig. 1 - The URBACT LSG Toolkit cover
(source: <http://urbact.eu>)

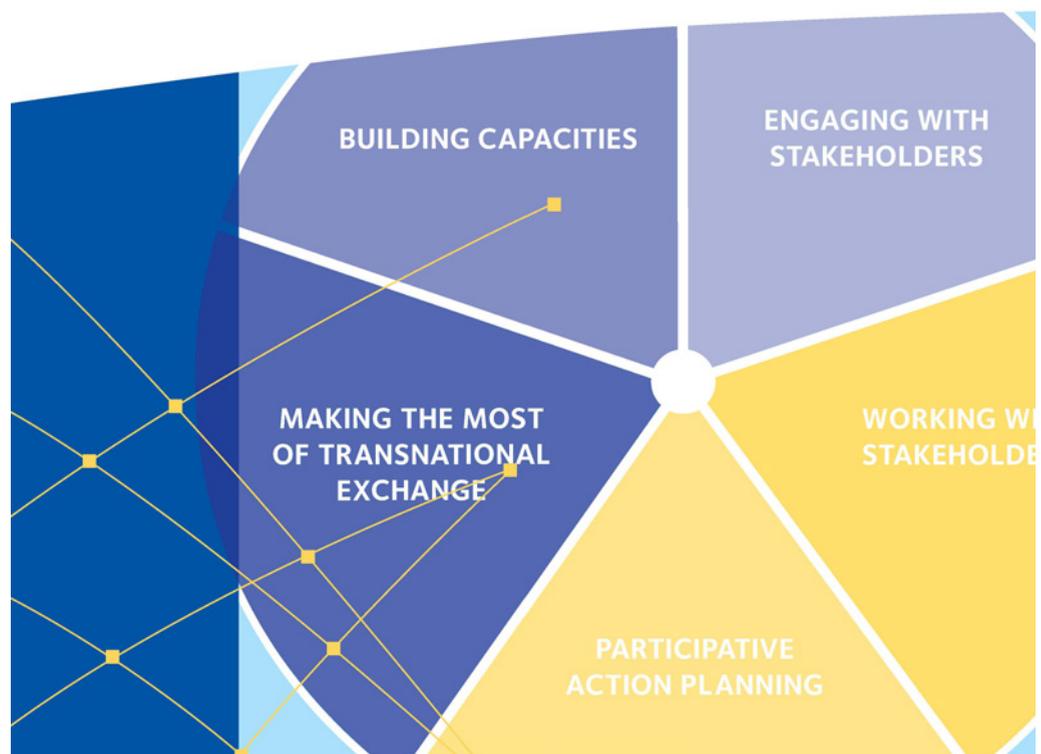
cludes social, economic and cultural dimensions.

This innovative way of approaching the problems faced by urban areas in decline is not limited to the transformation of physical space and social features, but also represents a focus of interest in urban planning literature the way such initiatives are accomplished, establishing networks of collaboration between government and other public agents and civil society. Recently, numerous initiatives have been launched at national and international level, some of these from the European Union, particularly in the policy field of regional development.

The main characteristic of these advanced urban regeneration strategies is represented by the “integrated approach” that concerns social, economic and environmental aspects, promoting sustainable urban development in accordance with strategic policy guidelines of EU. The *Integrated Urban Development Model* is the main significant approach to urban regeneration in the last two decades at international level and it is going to become a model for urban policy in Europe (Hadjri, Durosaiye, Oluremi, 2015).

An urban policy is composed of a series of measures directing to promote development of cities and it can carry out by all levels of government, from international to national and regional ones. At higher levels policies can interest not specifically cities but also more general issues, anyway the effects can be observed in quality of urban life. Hereafter, national and regional governments promote political, legislative and financial favourable contexts in which cities develop their own policies.

In Europe cities are influenced by national policies and, in the last two decades, mainly by international policies, though there is not a clear European urban policy (Atkinson,



2001) although it could be claimed that the urban dimension of EU policy exists and it has been increasing through multiple declarations, tools and actions (De Gregorio, 2015).

Strategies and tools in the EU's urban regeneration

The beginning of the European urban policy dates back on 1975 when the European Regional Development Fund was created to achieve the economic integration of the deprived regions, and it could be seen as the starting point, although in the 1970s there was not a clear awareness of a necessity of giving an urban dimension to the European policy. Afterwards, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the consciousness was arising that in cities are living a strong cycle of decline in which the main problems have been concentrating. In the early 1990s specific instruments began to be shaped to revitalize cities within the framework of Regional Policy: Urban Pilot Projects (UPPs) and the URBAN initiative, focusing on regeneration and urban cohesion actions.

At the beginning of the XXI century, after the approval of the 'Lisbon Agenda', EU's Policy paid more attention to cities, considered as drivers for regional growth, and consequently the budget allocated to Structural Funds increased. New urban instruments such as URBAN II and URBACT were created and supported by specific strategic guidelines. The period 2007–2013 fixed the emerging urban dimension of European policy as it is possible to see in many European documents of the Directorate General for Regional Policy¹. In these seven years many programmes and actions have been launched giving significant results, especially by means the URBAN initiative, and the Commission confirmed the integrated vision of urban regeneration.

Since the 1990s, the European Union has taken a key role in leading member states' urban policy and regeneration practice, through the implementation of specific tools. For instance, the Urban Pilot Projects, the URBAN Community Initiative and the URBACT network in the last 2007-2013 cycle have been fundamental elements in building the urban regeneration in EU's cities. After years of experimentation, the Urban Acquis is considered the integrated approach to urban regeneration commonly-approved in EU, based on physical, economic, social and environmental initiatives, able to integrate local residents into inclusive governance. This approach has had a deep impact in European countries and nowadays it is possible to recognize an ongoing process of "Europeanization" attesting the adoption of the EU's approach to integrated urban development planning (Ángeles et al., 2016).

The European urban areas have been considered the engines of the European economy throughout the Union, but they are also places where some significant problems (unemployment, segregation, poverty) are concentrated. Consequently the EU's Regional Policy focuses on urban development and adequate policies able to tackle them.

The 2014-2020 period has put the urban dimension at the center of Cohesion Policy: at least 50% of the ERDF resources for this period will be invested in urban areas. It's opportune to remind that Cohesion Policy provides the essential investment framework

and strategy to meet the agreed growth goals, first of all the Europe 2020 Strategy: by 2020 the EU is engaged to meet five essential objectives on employment, innovation, education, social inclusion, and climate/energy.

Cohesion Policy is delivered through three main funds: European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) aims to strengthen regional economic and social cohesion by investing in growth-enhancing sectors to improve competitiveness and create jobs; European Social Fund (ESF) focuses on people, particularly employment and education opportunities; Cohesion Fund participates in green growth and sustainable development. For 2014-2020 cycle there are some innovations²: attention on clearer and measurable targets for better accountability; adoption of one set of rules for five different Funds simplifying the processes; introduction of specific preconditions before funds can be directed; and, finally, a reinforced urban dimension through a minimum amount of ERDF dedicated to integrated projects in cities.

Cohesion Policy inspires EU's regions and cities to collaborate and learn from each other through the implementation of cooperative programmes, projects and networks with actual impacts on economic life, accessibility, business, employment, environment, etc.

The EU gave a methodology to the urban regeneration highlighting that the different dimensions of urban life are strictly intertwined and the success in urban development can only be realized through an integrated approach. Interventions regarding physical urban regeneration must be combined with actions promoting economic development, social inclusion and environmental protection. Moreover it's necessary the presence of strong partnerships between civil society, business and government at different levels.

Nowadays European cities are facing serious problems such as economic stagnation in terms of job creation and social progress, and the impact of climate change, consequently such an integrated approach is particularly vital for the future of cities. The EU has elaborated the Europe 2020 Strategy to give response to these challenges in order to achieve a smart, sustainable, inclusive society.

The Europe 2020 strategy³ aims to guarantee that the economic revitalization of the European Union (EU) is maintained by a series of actions and reforms in order to achieve social growth and job creation by 2020. Its purpose is the transformation of the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy with high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. It addresses the structural weaknesses of the EU's economy and also takes account of the longer-term challenges of globalisation.

According to the Europe 2020 strategy⁴, the EU should achieve a new growth that is:

- smart, through the development of knowledge and innovation;
- sustainable, based on a greener, more resource efficient and more competitive economy;
- inclusive, aimed at strengthening employment and social and territorial cohesion.

Moreover the EU has set five main targets to be achieved by 2020:

- increasing the employment rate of the population aged 20-64 to at least 75 %;
- investing 3 % of gross domestic product in research and development;

- reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20 %, increasing the share of renewable energies to 20 % and increasing energy efficiency by 20 %;
- reducing the school drop-out rate to less than 10 % and increasing the proportion of tertiary degrees to at least 40 %;
- reducing the number of people threatened by poverty or social exclusion by 20 million.

For achieving these objectives the European cities have a wide range of innovative tools: the UDN (Urban Development Network) gives support to share knowledge between cities involved in integrated sustainable urban development and in UIA (Urban Innovative Actions); Urban Innovative Actions stimulate cities to experiment new and unproven solutions to solve urban challenges; Cities are encouraged to use Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), a strong instrument for local stakeholders, businesses, the public sector and civil society to get more involved in urban neighbourhood regeneration; Integrated Territorial Investments allow to develop area-based strategies using funds coming from different fields; the URBACT III programme is a powerful tool to share experiences and learning throughout Europe for promoting sustainable urban development and gives European cities the opportunity to work together.

Integrated approach model, urban renaissance and culture-led regeneration

In 2010, the European Economic and Social Committee (ECO/273, 2010) expressed the opinion on “*The need for an integrated approach to urban regeneration*”, which states that ordinary urban measures in modern cities are inefficient and indicated that “the priority is given to an integrated urban regeneration model”. Particularly it states that:

<<In order to launch a “new urban renaissance” that prioritises an integrated urban regeneration model and that focuses attention on demographic change, social cohesion, the review of the urban economic base, the re-assessment of the natural heritage, dematerialisation, energyefficient cities and biodiversity, the EESC maintains that strong cooperation at all levels of government (Commission, national governments, regions and local authorities) is required, but through a more flexible, less rigid approach to the subsidiarity principle and not only through a hierarchical framework of powers. To this end, the EESC urges the promotion of thematic networks of cities to promote the implementation of sustainable urban regeneration.>>

The political debate about urban regeneration increased in the last decade and the EU paid much attention to urban issue through its presidencies. The Spanish Presidency has given particular attention on urban regeneration asking the EESC and the Com-

mittee of the Regions to express clearly its opinion on an emerging issue for European cities.

In the EESC document was described an interesting analysis concerning considerable problems to be resolved in cities through an urban integrated approach, to pursue the subsequent objectives:

- to improve the energy efficiency of European building stock by creating new jobs and encouraging innovation and technological development;
- to increase social cohesion through an integrated regeneration programme for deprived neighbourhoods;
- to contribute to environmental sustainability, also through the urban regeneration of rundown neighbourhoods avoiding the consumption of more green spaces.

The EESC documents states also that

<<...regeneration will therefore be the outcome of synergising and integrating three aspects of the city:

the Agora city: people-centric, with total harmony between urban settlements and spaces and between social cohesion and economic development,

the glocal city (global/local): resulting from a better balance between globalisation and the ability to make the most of local resources and different specificities and attitudes,

the sustainable city: should be able to resolve its problems internally, without passing them on to others or to future generations.

...The Committee is in favour of a “new urban renaissance” characterised by: greater social cohesion; cultural renewal; a review of the economy of the urban economic base to address the current deep recession; and enhancement of the natural heritage through dematerialisation and increased biodiversity. >>

The idea of a “urban renaissance”, developed in the first decade of XXI century, is also linked to the cultural renaissance of cities and to the notion of culture-led regeneration. The term has now become evidently known, but it came into use around two decades ago: it represents the opportunity for the regeneration of places through cultural activity, very relevant for cities that have lost their industrial base and have needed to reinvent themselves through cultural and art activity.

It was during the 1990s the “cultural” dimension of urban regeneration raised in practices and policies mainly visible in architecture design and public art. Bianchini and Parkinson’s Europe study *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration* constituted a important publication on the topic (Bianchini, Parkinson, 1993): it demonstrates the progressively strategic role of cultural policy for the European cities regarding economic development, city marketing and urban renewal. The research, analyzing the governance and management of inner cities, argues the social, cultural and economic issues were not distinct in the field of urban regeneration policy. Research in urban regeneration tends to move from a cultural scheme of analysis to one characterized by sociological categories and, the interconnection of the social and culture in urban regeneration

is progressively evident.

In the last two decades the notion of culture-led urban regeneration emerged in the different fields such as cultural geography, urban planning, urban design, architecture, and public policy administration, with different points of view (Verwijnen, Lehtovouri, 1999; Zardini, 2005).

In the publication *The Contribution of Culture to Regeneration in the UK: A Review of Evidence*, G. Evans and P. Shaw define three different interpretations about culture and urban regeneration: 'culture-led regeneration', 'cultural regeneration', and 'culture and regeneration' (Evans & Shaw, 2004). In this paper there is not space for analysing the subject but it is important to highlight how the use of urban masterplans, public art, the aesthetics of urban design, the cultural identity of individual cities, the economic impact of culture on a city, the management of stakeholders are progressively becoming fundamental elements in urban regeneration, particularly for the ancient European cities with valuable historical centres.

At the moment, we are observing a progressive absorption of an aesthetic and cultural dimension of European urban policies. Many current projects tend to integrate design, cultural activities into urban regeneration giving evidence to a new way of producing urban policy in Europe.

It is possible to state the recent EU characteristics of urban regeneration are economic and aesthetic: the economic is evident looking at the main financial source, represented by European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which contributes to the large part of physical developments; the cultural one is visible, not only in the form of the city especially in the refurbishment of inner city but also in the emphasis on the opportunities of the economic branches related to tourism, art, historical centres, etc. in many funded projects.

In conclusion, many initiatives, at legislative and political level, have been carried on in the last two decades and many pilot projects have been developed, giving the idea of the European urban policy but, as a major part of specific literature sustains, there is not a structured analysis on it yet. Moreover the next period 2014-2020 is developing new tools and experiences so the matter is on progress. The *new urban renaissance*, stated in many documents, the *integrated approach to urban regeneration* and the concept of *cultural-led regeneration* could become the essentials of the urban development in the future of European cities.

In this issue the TRIA journal has given the opportunity to discuss about the urban regeneration in Europe drawing new perspectives for the future in order to create an original point of view on urban regeneration in the EU. Finally, I would like to thank Sonia De Gregorio who has studied for long time the European urban policies and suggested the topic for this issue and collaborated intensively with the journal editorial board.

ENDNOTES

¹ For example 'Fostering the urban dimension: Analysis of the Operational Programmes co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (2007–2013)', from November 2008, 'The urban dimension in Community policies for the period 2007–2013' or the statement issued by the Committee of the Regions (2010) about the role of urban regeneration in the future of urban development in Europe, passed in 2010. Furthermore, various documents have emerged from informal meetings of ministers in relation to urban development, in particular the 'Lille Action Programme', 2000; 'Urban Acquis', 2004; the 'Bristol Accord', 2005; Leipzig, 2007; Marseille, 2008; Toledo, 2010; Athens, 2014; and the 'Territorial Agenda of the EU. Towards a more competitive and sustainable Europe of diverse regions'.

² In the 2014-2020 period, European cities will benefit all the more from the EU's Regional Policy and urban areas and this will be a great opportunity for sustainable urban mobility, regeneration of deprived communities and improved research and innovation capacity. In each EU Member State, a minimum 5 % of the ERDF is earmarked for integrated sustainable urban development.

³ Communication (COM(2010) 2020 final) – *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*

⁴ The Europe 2020 strategy targets are also supported by 7 flagship initiatives at European level and in EU countries: the Innovation Union; Youth on the move; the Digital Agenda for Europe; a Resource-efficient Europe; an industrial policy for the globalisation era; the agenda for new skills and jobs; and the European Platform against Poverty.

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