

# **Governments and modes of governance in the U.S. and European cities. The change in urban policies.**

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paper presented at the conference

**Area-based initiatives in contemporary urban policy**

Danish Building and Urban Research Association

Copenhagen, 17-19 May 2001

# Abstract

During the last ten or fifteen years a range of new urban regeneration policies was set up in the U.S. and in Europe, both at a national and at a Community level.

This paper provides a comparison of the E.U. Urban Programme under Community Initiative and the U.S. Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Community Programmes promoted by the Federal Government. These programmes can be considered as experiences of public and political participation leading toward different forms of urban citizenship in the framework of the European integration process and the changes in the American Federal system.

Moreover, although there are many differences between the above mentioned programmes, they present some interesting points of connection such as the area-based approach, the integrated form of action, and the central role for 'local people' and for partnerships and co-operation. These initiatives can be viewed as new modes of governance, which attempt to empower local self-governing capabilities, and aim to achieve the result of a broader decision making process in the growing complexity of the political arena. Exploring their points of connection can, on the one hand, meaningfully contribute in analysing some 'basic aspects' of the urban policies and, on the other hand, help us to some extent in the efforts for a better understanding, and in elaborating a new framework to look at the process of European integration, while relating it to the U.S. Federal System.

Hence, in the case of the U.S. ,both the existence of a Federal System and a common cultural matrix as the concrete condition to "being in the same boat" are crucial to understanding the way in which urban federal policies are implemented; in the European case, instead, there isn't a single political system, but, due to the ambivalence of the concept of Europe, ambiguity has a central role to play in order to keep differences together within the Community's urban initiatives.

In conclusion, this paper is much more an attempt to draw up a research track than a research result.

# 1. Introduction\*

Why can previous and present U.S. community development urban programmes and initiatives still constitute a relevant matter of debate for both the analysing and programming of new urban regeneration policies in European cities?

Among the several good reasons for believing in and recognising the relevance in comparing the U.S. and E.U. underlying matrix at a local scale, in referring to urban regeneration policies and actions for community development, there are three main aspects highlighted by our analysis. These aspects, to a certain extent, can be considered of some interest for future research.

The first consists in what could be considered the remarkable foresight and anticipation that the U.S. experimental methods of intervening in 'urban areas in crisis' produced during '50s and '60s, primarily with regards to some central matters characterising the urban regeneration and community development sector of policy-making. Particularly, in the last decade, the design, implementation and evaluation processes of European urban programmes under Community initiative, can be meaningfully considered in relation to the very contributions to urban policy-making that were developed in the U.S., wherein the activities of a wide range of subjects, private and public, and less or more institutionalised, have led to this field of policy. Among the urban actors who are involved, we find the relevant roles played by the federal government and by many federal agencies; the influence, innovation and guiding roles providing concrete aid, operated by famous national powerful foundations, such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation; the growing effectiveness of local and city governments; and the ever important contribution of organisations belonging to the voluntary sectors and many informal social networks; etc.

The second aspect refers to the reflection made by some famous American scholars who during the '60s and '70s focused their analysis on the results of the implementation of programmes. From that experience, they gathered most of the relevant points that then constituted the public policy agenda for future development on both an analytical and theoretical level. Moreover, this new understanding in many cases influenced people who had governmental responsibilities. For instance, quoting Pressman' study of the Oakland Project and the dynamics of the aid process in Oakland (1975), the very need for co-ordinating and co-operative efforts in the urban field clearly emerges. Particularly Pressman presented the problem of organising interagency and intergovernmental co-ordination, and "co-ordinating structures" at the local level. These were designed to cure the fragmentation of the federal organisational effort in cities, that as a by-product had led to the proliferation of actions, initiatives, and co-ordinators throughout the country (Pressman, 1975, 9). Another important question which emerges is the understanding of an ambitious role for planning, i.e., the need for a comprehensive strategic plan and integrated policies for an attack on poverty, rather than simply disposing sector policies of intervening for solving specific problems (see, for example, the long-range plans requested to applicant cities as a condition of utmost importance in the Model Cities Program of 1966). Comprehensive planning and co-ordination are presented as an antidote to fragmentation, and was also expressed in numerous

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\* Paragraphes 1,3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 were written by Francesca Gelli; paragraphes 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 4 were written by Carla Tedesco.

congressional and presidential policy directives (Pressman, 1975, p7). Another important task was to develop policies to increase the information available to all actors involved with the programmes, to overcome confusion and lack of information, above all on the part of intergovernmental actors, and to facilitate communication among them (Pressman, 1975, p.4). Moreover, the focus on the problem of building effective local arenas, as places of concrete participation and a site at which bargaining among the several actors and parties as well as the exchange of political resources can take place (Pressman, 1975, p14-15), was really anticipating the present European debate on urban modes of governance as a shift both in governing and in policy-analysis. The importance given to the specific role played by the administrative and political context for analysing the interpretation of the programme to be implemented, and of the social local structure as well, are indicative elements that can be understood following an area-based approach.

All these aspects clearly demonstrate the actuality of the U.S. pattern for European urban policy-making.

Nevertheless, there is a third aspect that is central to our study. It consists of the intrinsic peculiarity of the European dimension, and despite the declining of the principle of integration therein, the research gives important attention to its use in framing or outlining programmes.

To sum up, our question is concerned with the relationships between similarities and differences in different territorial contexts emerging in the European urban policies implementation by means of the analysis of both the “unity of differences” rethorics and the paradoxal elements we find starting from case studies .

In this paper the stress is on the modes in wich problems are conceptualized, on the meanings attributed to the programme by different actors, on the forms of knowledge, on expert and common knowledge, on analytical and interactive knowledge, on local practices and on local governance and action systems.

We are starting with the discussion of the European case and going on with the US one.

## 2.1 Rhetoric and paradox in European urban policies

In considering European urban policies, one must heed to certain reflections concerning the ambivalence of the concept of Europe.

They can be placed somewhere within the processes described by Rovatti (in referring to Derrida), where he emphasises that it is possible to recognize a major E.U. rhetoric in regard to the ambivalence of the “body” of Europe, that is universal and particular, global and local, identical and different. Hence, this ambiguity became a major rhetoric surrounding European action.

However, the necessity stressed by Derrida, to activate a paradoxical look, which should even become a sort of “cross-eyed view”, in order to see the idea of a Europe that is universally identical, and at the same time, to observe its implementation of local differences (Rovatti, 2000), was left in the background.

So, what happens if we try to analyze European urban policies while trying to gather and understand both its characteristics of unity and those of its differences? And in considering both the rhetoric and the “paradoxal look” point of view, how can we read and interpret this phenomenon?

Our field of research focuses particularly on European urban policy, and specifically the Urban Programme under Community Initiative within two national contexts, that of Italy and the U.K..

Like other programmes under Community Initiative, Urban seems to be a significant and promising field for investigation and research and for observing interactions that occur at a European level, and at national and local levels. The problem (“urban areas in crisis”) is constructed at the European level together with a form for the action (the “integrated” action) based on the involvement of “local communities”). At the local level these initiatives are interpreted or, better yet, given new meaning, by means of the programme’s setting up and implementation, if the programmes win the competitive bidding process to be funded.

So, the Urban Programme can be seen as an interpretative process involving different levels of actors. On the one hand it is based on shared assumptions at a European level (in Europe most of people live in cities, in cities there are different areas, some of them are ‘in crisis’, they are “social exclusion areas”, their problems are multidimensional, and it is necessary to have an integrated approach and to build local partnerships involving local communities); on the other hand it has been interpreted differently in different local contexts (Laino, 1999; Choriantopoulos, 2000), depending on the forms of local knowledge, practices, and modes of governance, and of course the outcomes have always been different.

Moreover, it can be seen as a sensemaking process: at the European level in territorial description and in the problems surrounding certain territorial issues it is possible to draw close an interpretative and a constructive dimension, one that can contribute to the construction of the European territory. At the local level, the ideas from Bruxelles are not solely interpreted, but rather, they are given certain significances and meaningfulness. It is this method of (re)interpretation and (re)meaning that perhaps may contribute, in some way or another, to the building of a meaning for Europe.

In coming back to an exploration of the “unity of differences”, in Urban’s case, this concept is seen as the rhetoric that is found in certain documents

that present success stories and in local documents and actions aiming to promote their programme. And this occurs at the European, national and local level. Nevertheless, in analysing case-studies<sup>1</sup>, it is possible to avoid the ambiguity as a rhetoric and to attentively investigate the emergence of paradoxes helping to observe similarities and differences between and among the various territorial contexts.

So, ambiguity is playing a crucial role in the programme's implementation process. But ambiguity, both as a paradox and as a rethoric, become a frame for the action.

## 2.2 The Urban Programme under Community Initiative

The Urban Programme under Community Initiative is one among the new forms of European action, in the framework of the increasing role of the urban dimension in European Union policy of the '90s.

During the '90s a range of new urban initiatives emerged both within some of the member-states and at an EU level. The emergence of these new initiatives can be related to the development of social exclusion as a concept and to its employment in informing urban policy<sup>2</sup> (Atkinson, 2000). Furthermore, at an EU level, the city was recognised as playing an important role<sup>3</sup> in responding to the global economic pressure within the framework of an increasing inter-urban competition, and as offering the scope for local democratic decision making and citizens participation (Stewart, 1994). Urban problems were recognized as aggravated by the financial difficulties of many urban local authorities. But the E.U. Treaties, including the Maastricht Treaty on the E.U. do not include any specific reference to cities, nor do they give the Community a specific remit for urban policy. Nevertheless, cities and their organisations exerted pressure for greater Community concern in urban issues (CEC, 1994/b).

A significant element within this framework was the launch in 1994 by the European Commission of the Urban Programme, as one of the attempts to draw attention to the growth in urban problems and to the presence of urban social exclusion. The programme aimed to promote urban regeneration in deprived areas; it is addressed to "urban areas in crisis", areas where some social and economic indicators<sup>4</sup> is below the town or region average. The programme aims at tackling economic, social and environmental problems in a local sustainable development perspective, by means of an "integrated" approach and the involvement of "local communities". Integration, community involvement, partnership, innovation, sustainable local development,

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<sup>1</sup> This paper mainly focuses on the London Urban Programme case studies ("Hearth of the East End" and "Park Royal") which I researched for my PhD research programme, having spent a two month period in London from October to December 2000. It also examines the Urban "Borgo antico" of Bari case study, which I researched in the period of May-July 1999 for a study project funded by Foromez (coordinator Marco Cremaschi), and the research carried forth with Angela Barbanente (coordinator Pier Carlo Palermo), starting in February 2000, which was funded by Ministry of Public Works.

During the next months I will be studying other case studies in order to carry out my research project within my PhD programme. Hence, my reflections on the Urban programme are on the one hand an initial result of my research, and on the other, a first attempt to discuss these topics in order to go forth with the research.

<sup>2</sup> At EU level, the concept of social exclusion combined elements of the French approach, focusing on social and cultural exclusion, with the Anglo-Saxon approach, focusing on income inequality and material exclusion (Atkinson, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> A strong urban dimension to many of the Community's actions was recognized in the early 90s (CEC, 1994/b). These ideas were developed in two European Commission Communications in the late '90s (CEC, 1997; CEC 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Some indicators are: unemployment rate, education level, crime index, poor housing conditions, percentage of people assisted by welfare state, ethnic and social composition, environmental damage, poor service in public transportation system, lack of social amenities.

exchange of experiences are the key-words of the programme (CEC, 1994/a).

The programme fund is of 891 million of ECU over the period 1994-1999. There are 118 programmes funded in the framework of the Urban Programme under Community Initiative in the fifteen Member States. In Italy there are sixteen Urban Programmes<sup>5</sup>; twelve of them are located in the southern part of the Country (CEC, Ministero LLPP, 1999). In the UK there are eighteen Urban programmes<sup>6</sup>.

The Urban Programme implementation and outcomes have depended upon the previous national and local experience in urban policy in many ways. Currently, the national policies to tackle urban problems vary greatly across Europe. In some countries there has not yet been development of an urban policy, in some other countries there has been development in recent years. That is the case in Italy, where, until the '90s, there has not been an explicit urban policy (Bramezza, 1998). So, while in other European countries, some experiences of urban programs already existed before the launching of Urban, in Italy for most municipalities this was the first experience in the field.

However, during the '90s the Ministry of Public Works experimented some national urban programme: Programmi integrati di intervento, Programmi di riqualificazione urbana, Programmi di recupero urbano, Contratti di quartiere. These urban and territorial programmes have some important points of connection with other E.U funded programmes (such as the Urban Pilot Projects and the Urban Programme under Community Initiative) due to the overlapping period of realization and to the progressive reception in the Italian programmes of the main characteristics and goals emerging in the European programmes (Dematteis, Governa, Rossignolo, 1999). It is difficult to say how much these points of connection depend upon a direct influence of the Urban Programme. Because even during the first implementation phase, Urban wasn't managed at national level by the same department that managed national programmes. The same occurred in local contexts. Furthermore, the points of connection were concerned with the circulation of ideas and concepts that were often already considered and put into effect in other national contexts and not just at an EU level.

The above mentioned issues highlight some of the reasons why, in Italy, the Urban Program has been assuming great relevance.

Britain had an explicitly defined urban policy since the late 60s (Atkinson, 1994; Parkinson, 1998); nevertheless successive governments gave different answers to urban problems by means of different policy instruments<sup>7</sup>. However, in the early 90s there was a renewed concern with social exclusion leading to begin to devote some funding to community-oriented projects based on competitive bidding process: in these years there were launched the City Challenge, Rural Challenge and Single Regeneration Budget, integrated programmes based upon partnerships between public, private and community sector.

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5 The Italian programmes are located in: Bari, Cagliari, Catania, Catanzaro, Cosenza, Foggia, Genova, Lecce, Napoli, Palermo, Reggio Calabria, Roma, Salerno, Siracusa, Trieste, Venezia.

6 The U.K. Urban programmes are located in: Belfast, Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Coventry, Glasgow, Huyton (Merseyside), Leasow (Merseyside), Leeds, Liverpool (Merseyside), London Hackney & Tower Hamlets, London Park Royal, Manchester, Netherton (Merseyside), Nottingham, Paisley, Sheffield, Swansea.

<sup>7</sup> Parkinson (1998) identifies five main periods of British urban policy: i) with the introduction of the Urban Programme in 1968 policy focused upon community involvement ii) after the enhancement of the Urban Programme in 1978, the focus of policy was increased to include economic and infrastructure needs iii) from the 80s the emphasis upon economic and infrastructure was increased, partnerships were created as new agencies such as Urban Development Corporations and many new policy instruments were created in order to lever private sector investments in urban areas iv) in the late 80s issues of coordination became a big issue in urban policy v) in the 90s attention was focused upon area-based intervention, based on competitive bidding processes and integrating regeneration programmes of different government departments

So, it is possible to argue that when the Urban Programme was launched there was a shift in British urban policy towards community involvement. This trend was reinforced by the increasing importance of community economic development within some structural fund such as Urban. (Foley, Martin, 2000). It is not possible to say how much Urban was influenced by this trend and how much it influenced it, but what's sure is that its lines were in the community involvement direction.

The relevance of the Urban Programme in national contexts can be related to the amount of the funding or to the lines established therein. So, it is possible to argue that in Italy public investments for urban regeneration are fewer than in other European countries. In the UK's case, one can observe that, at national level, Urban was considered as "another pot of funds to complement what the national authorities are doing anyway" while, at the EU level, it was considered to be an innovative step (Tofarides, 2000 p. 102). So, in the UK the Urban Programme has not added significantly to UK resources nor has it contributed to the approach established within UK initiatives such as the SRB; but the importance of the programme lies in the symbolic importance of a European urban perspective in terms of "the political articulation of the local interests and of the strengthening of local voices" in the continent. Therefore, it is "on the one hand an important antidote to centralism, and on the other hand a vehicle for legitimising discussion about the new terms of urban policy both across Europe, and also within individual member states" (Stewart, 1994 p. 273-274).

In Italy Urban was partially used to fund some projects already defined in local contexts, and its strategy was completely innovative in the national and local contexts as well. In this case, the passage of the "Urban model" in the managing of other urban actions has been considered as an important issue in terms of the programme's 'sustainability'. However, even, in the Park Royal case Urban was the starting point for other regeneration actions and its integration with them was a crucial element to insure their sustainability.

In this paper's perspective, the existence of national urban policies is observed without overly emphasising the different competencies – European, national, local – nor does it focus exclusively on the relevance of the Urban Programme in terms of funding and the possibility to match funding. The national level is presumed as a context where certain problems are conceived of and diffused as an "activator of knowledge and practices". In this way, relationships between local, national and European forms of action in terms of innovation and tradition can become more meaningful.

Moreover, Atkinson (2000, p. 1045) stresses his view that: "The Commission has an important role to play by launching initiatives which will help to disseminate examples of best practice, to stimulate innovation, and, in some instances, to raise awareness of problems which have previously not figured on the political and policy agenda or in the public consciousness".

### **2.3. Some reflections starting from case studies**

As we highlighted above, the "degree of understanding" at the local level of the programme, in the way it was defined in Bruxelles, depends deeply upon knowledge and practices diffused in national and local contexts.

And in considering certain aspects of the programme we can highlight how ambiguity has played a crucial role.

In order to explore how ambiguity has been playing a crucial role we assume as a research topic one of the key-concepts of the Urban programme itself, that being the "community involvement" concept. We also consider some issues regarding the "area-based" approach and the integrated forms of action.

At a European level, a description of “urban areas in crisis” based on the social exclusion concept was given. At national and local levels this description blended with other concepts and perceptions that pertained to areas such as the “historic centres” (Centri storici) in Italy and the “inner city areas” in the UK. These perceptions were however differently oriented towards the social aspects in the UK and to physical aspects in Italy.

So, in some cases the choice of the target area depended upon a problem already defined at the local level in the same way the Urban programme does. This problem found its solution in a European programme. However, it is often a typical example of solutions seeking problems according to a “garbage can model”. Furthermore, in this process, the European Programme contributes, to some extent, to viewing the problem in a different way.

In regard to the integrated form of the action, the idea and use of policy sector integration for tackling social, economic and physical problems, is central in the Urban Programme. The programme also focuses on the vertical and horizontal levels of relationships.

The integrated form of the action characterized some UK regeneration programmes such as the S.R.B where twenty separate regeneration programmes from five Government Departments were merged; integrated Government Offices for the Regions (GORs) were set up to combine the former regional offices of the Departments of the Environment, Employment, Trade and Industry and Transport in order to coordinate regeneration activities. The GORs act as the intermediate level between the cities and the European Commission, but the local Urban programmes are independent of each other.

In Italy the local Urban programmes is part of a single national programme. At a national level the programme is administered by DICOTER (Ministero dei LLPP), with “technical assistance”<sup>8</sup>. The Ministry of Labour is concerned with vocational training measures, and the Ministry of Treasury with financial matters.

Another idea that is central to the Urban Programme is that of drawing up programmes in their local contexts and of involving local people in the design and implementation of specific projects (CE, 1994/a). Nevertheless, the methods used to involve citizens are intended to be developed according to modes that are appropriate to each member state.

Hence, there has been an ample space to give a specific meaning to “involvement” in the different local contexts during all of the policy process. In the meanwhile, at the EU level, the concept of “community involvement” in urban regeneration was developed, and it became more explicit. In particular, a study was carried out by the Community Development Foundation with support from the Commission of the European Communities (Directorate General XVI) in 1994-1995<sup>9</sup>. In this study “community involvement” is defined as “the active involvement of local inhabitants in schemes to regenerate disadvantaged or declining areas” (p. 19). It is recognized as taking a number of different forms and having several different levels of “intensity” (p. 10).

The opening to local actors of the decisional process and the involvement of citizens are repeatedly stressed in the following years in two Commission notices concerning urban policy (CEC, 1997; CEC 1998). Moreover, the assessment of the Urban part of its success is linked to the engagement in citizens participation in order to set up and implement programmes, as a

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<sup>8</sup> The “technical assistance” is a partnership including Ecosfera s.p.a., Fondazione Censis, Reconta Ernst & Young s.p.a., Università L. Bocconi-CERTeT

<sup>9</sup> The study was based on twelve case studies from each of the (then) member states plus an extra case from former East Germany. The results of the study were published in 1997 (CE, 1997).

condition to build up an atmosphere of confidence and consensus (U.E.,2000).

In this framework, “community involvement” could be intended in an unproblematic way as a recurrent rhetoric. But trying to explore what it has meant in specific local experiences can help us to investigate this concept and to raise some issues.

Furthermore, the way that meaning and importance is given to “community involvement” in different local contexts has been deeply linked to the establishment of local partnerships within the Urban programme.

The E.C. made explicit mention in the launching of the programme to the possibility of establishing partnerships. But the way that these partnerships were built in the concrete local experiences has been deeply different.

The accent can once more be stressed on the main role played by ambiguity as a significant factor in these processes.

During the 90s, in some national contexts such as in the U.K., a wide range of schemes attempted to tackle urban social exclusion by establishing partnerships involving local people in area-based regeneration schemes.

Partnerships established within these policies (and within the Urban case) in the UK involve public and private actors, the voluntary sector and representatives of local communities.

In Italy URBAN was managed in most cases by local democracy institutions without establishing partnerships. However, in many cases, the “technical assistance” role assigned, for instance, to research centres has been of utmost importance. This is in fact the case of Bari, where a non-profit social and economic research centre has been playing a very important role during the programme setting up and implementation, contributing its expert knowledge in Community policies (Tedesco, 2000). Moreover, in Italy, even if a few formal partnerships were established, the informal relationships with the voluntary sector and even with citizens remained crucial in allowing for local knowledge to circulate in the programme, and in setting up for implementation. Therefore reflections concerning the opposition between formal partnerships, at risk of opportunism, and the informal relations, which risk short life spans, have become crucial nonetheless.

In summary, it is possible to argue that, the establishment of formal partnerships can overlook what Healey (1997) defines as “soft infrastructure”, that is informal relationships, but informal relations may need some formalisation to gain strength and legitimacy.

And if the community involvement concept is in itself ambiguous, then the different experiences and meanings given to it in different European contexts can help to highlight and give meaning to this ambiguity. For instance, it is interesting to note that in the London “Hearth of the East End” programme, the community involvement was intended as community empowerment. A local regeneration manager pointed out some barriers to community empowerment within the programme. Between them “The Match Funding Requirement”: European structural funds require 45/50% match funding but this rule is contradictory to the strategic aims of Urban, which is instead meant to fund groups that were previously excluded from regeneration; groups which, by definition, would not otherwise have such funding!; “Complex Application Forms”; “Existing Organisational Culture”: “local authorities need to make a major shift in steering away from controlling regeneration to enable and support community involvement; and the community and voluntary sectors need to change from being excluded, or just consulted on, to being in the driving seat of a major programme, as well as individual projects, for the first time” (Adams, 1998). The Park Royal Urban managers, during the interviews stressed on time limits in order to set up the programme with the local community: community empowerment requires a great deal of time, while there was the necessity to set up the programme in a short period.

The need for long time and ingent resources is highlited by Atkinson (2000) and it is at the basis of new urban regeneration policies promoted by the Blair government such as the New Deal for Communities.

Hence, there is an increasing attention given to these topics in the UK's context, not just from academics, but also at a government level. It should recognize the necessity to intend community involvment as capacity building, and to view it as a process where an essential part is "the construction of community-based organisations to run local regeneration schemes and to link into more extensive regeneration strategies covering the wider urban area and region" (Atkinson, 2000).

## 2.4. The role of ambiguity

The above mentioned issues clearly let the role played by ambiguity emerge throughout the process of the programme setting up and implementation. In attributing the most neutral of meanings to the term "ambiguity", we can attempt to consider this ambiguity in a way that can help us to raise somme issues concerning the relationships between the Urban programme policy process and the functioning of the EU system in the light of the European integration process.

In particular, the interactions between different institutional levels can be considered in the light of the multi-level governance theory (MLG). This approach can be seen as "a response to the inability of the state-centric approach to recognize or explain the independent influence of supranational institutions and the mobilization of domestic actors directly in the European arena" (Marks, Nielsen, Ray, Salk, 1996 p.41). This MLG approach implies the existence of overlapping competencies among multiple levels of governments and the interaction of political actors across those levels.

Reffering to this issue, Le Galès (1998) highlights the fact that we do not know if European integration process strenghtens the member states, has no effect or weakens them. But a clear consequence of this integration process is the increasing complexity of the European public space. Moreover, having accepted the idea of a polycentric governance, we are still left with other issues to consider, such as, how power relations should be reorganized, how conflicts should be structured, what the differencies between sectors or countries are; and from another perspective we can consider that: "In any given small town, city, region or country, actors have been organized or not, mobilized or not, and have or have not interacted in complex cooperation/competition relations with other levels of government, with central actors or with private-sectors actors" (p. 487). Furthermore, the local context's mobilisation in wider networks is made easier if the cities and the regions already have resources, finances and collective action at their disposal.

With this framework in mind, it is possible to come back to the concrete experience of local actors mobilization emerged within the Urban programme policy process. As we highlighted above, ambiguity had an important role throughout this process to keep differences together. So, it is possible to argue that it can be considered, to some extents, as a resource for the local contexts mobilization within the European policy practices in the light of the European integration process.

### 3.1. The federal metaphor underlying the community-building approach

The federalist paradigm underlying the community-building approach can be regarded as a metaphor of integration used in the political discourse to influence action. In a way, it can be observed a political dimension of community development actions in urban areas, against the commonplace-thinking of community development exclusively as a range of specific policies of intervening for solving some specific problems. The use of the very notions of participation, empowerment, 'social capital', and some others, assume such a metaphoric value, in that metaphors can function in the political discourse as 'frames for action'<sup>10</sup>. This dimension also refer to the strategic character of discourse.

Images and metaphors have a concrete influence on the choices of policies and strategies of invention that raise the issue of producing action toward social change.

The federalist paradigm can be understood with regards to two concepts that take on a central role in the debate, that of integrity (which means the whole in its entirety and at the same time the autonomy of the parts themselves); that of autonomy (as the capacity for self-government and at the same time the ability to work with the other levels that make up the system). They both explain the relationships that exist between the part and the whole, and their specific construction in the form of a system, which is always intended as a tension toward 'making system', toward 'federalising'. The last aspect recalls, more generally, a particular declination of the concept of participation and the concrete definition of processes and participatory forms. In the federalist model this consists in regulating and foreseeing forms of participation between the different levels of government and government institutions; between citizens and governmental institutions; and among citizens themselves. But the very concept of participation itself is always defined in a rather ambiguous way. Whereas current institutional practices and procedures tend to relegate it to information and consulting, the federalist model tends to see the possibility for a wide range of subjects and actors to participate in decision-making or in the drafting and implementation of policy. The pre-supposition is that of constructing a pact between the parts, which is not intended to be static but rather as a continual process of re-negotiation in relationship to the changes and the new needs of the society itself. A metaphor that is central to this debate is that of integration; that is, of a particular way of composing differences, which often appear to be explained by relying on a few pregnant images of political communication.

The federalist perspective strictly connects the principles of self-rule and shared rules. In fact the re-definition of the political and social compact and the shared rules established therein<sup>11</sup>, intended as a continuous activity, as

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<sup>10</sup> I developed more in details on the use and invention of "metaphors as a frame for action" in an essay written with G. Gangemi, and titled: "Metaphors and cyclical life of concepts and practices" (2001), manuscript to be published

<sup>11</sup> "*Foedus*, the Latin root of the word 'federal', means covenant or compact (...) The covenant idea, which the Puritans took from the Bible, demands a different kind of political relationship (...) from that emphasized by theories of mass democracy that have attracted many adherents since French Revolution. It emphasizes partnership between individuals, groups, and governments in the pursuit of justice, cooperative relationships that make the partnership real, and the basis for civil society represents a secularized version of the covenant principle. The Lockean understanding of the political

well as the citizens participation in the formulations of the public decisions, are both essential to a democratic regulation. The definition of a *social compact* is related to the 'true character' of the American federalist matrix: it's based on the idea of *foedus*, i.e., an agreement or pact, between parts that *willingly* come together, thus creating a formation that constitutes an alliance (such as the idea of a 'federal commonwealth as a partnership': D.Elazar, 1987). Participation is viewed as a fundamental aspect of this formation, especially in its more widespread and ample manifestations, which have in fact led to what is known as a 'community-defining federalism'. (D.Elazar, 1987) Over and beyond this 'culture of participation', the federalist model as an institutionalised governmental practice is also based on 'non-centralisation', as a continuous negotiation for the distribution of powers, or what is better known as a 'contractual democracy'. At a governmental level, this practice is expressed and recognised for its correspondence and coexistence not only with the different levels of political representation, those being local, state and national, but also with the public and private realms in its 'multi-faceted partnerships'. In this same way, it defines itself as a territorially based democratic system. (D.Elazar, 1987)

From one viewpoint, the federalist system can be understood as an institutional devise that functions effectively and is structured according to different levels of subsidiarity (referred to above) And in this manner, it makes the effort to maintain the plurality of the existing regulations, and to keep that plurality tied together (in the complex setting of local societies, these regulations are categorised as social, political, and economic). On the other hand however, at the base of the concrete functioning of the federalist system, there is an underlying matrix that is specifically cultural, which deepens its roots within the very character traits of local communities. In other words, it has historic roots and it pertains to a kind of social regulation, based on a culture and the traditions of co-operation, reciprocity, solidarity, and mutual learning, in which the idea of constructing a shared and participated ensemble is seen pragmatically as the concrete condition of 'being in the same boat'. In this sense, it is important to note that federalism is also developed with the institutionalisation of social practices in their various forms, and above all through the processes of political and social interactions.

## 3.2 The Community Building Approach at the basis of Empowerment Zone Programs

*Community Building* can be defined as a new understanding and a new methodology for approaches in intervening within impoverished urban areas. It is about an ensemble of practices that add a new heuristic value to the more traditional forms of Community Development Initiatives, or the various modes of citizens' involvement that represent a field in which, historically, experimentation and theoretic research necessarily went hand in hand with local action processes. This is to say, that in the first place, the innovative content should be seen in relation to a change in paradigm (or to a "*paradigm shift*"). This mainly concerns the strategic role that is assumed within a local dimension in the elaboration of urban policies, and the general reinterpretation of actions taken on and in the city. The turning point is in thinking of the interventions as "with the city" or "within the local communities", that is, to define the policies not so much *for* the local, but *of* the local. This in turn strengthens its significance and the intrinsic value of the *partnership*, by constructing a dimension of real interaction and learning efforts among the different constituents involved. One idea is to regard these

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compact as the basis for civil society represents a secularized version of the covenant principle. It is the synthesis of the two forms that undergirds the original American political vision" (D.Elazar, 1986)

initiatives as meaningful experiences of participation and co-operation, in light of a federalist structuring of the territory. Federalism, in this case, can be seen not only as an institutional devise, but also as the construction of a cultural context, and an aggregate of modes of practice, functions and instruments of a system which needs to continuously activate processes of re-institutionalisation, sharing and renewal of the values and principles which inform that system. Hence, the recognition of the importance of participation in its various forms, leads to the perfect occasion for interaction and mutual learning among different levels of government, between citizens and institutions, and among citizens themselves. This particularly regards the elaboration of policies and choices of general interest, like the consideration of the central role of the constitution and realisation of forms of partnership between public and private subjects, both institutional and non, and the development of an individual and collective sense of responsibility. This has meant the renouncement or limiting of a certain philanthropic, sometimes authoritative and elitist, conception that in certain respects has characterised local community action in the United States in the past.<sup>12</sup>

In American cities, community-building initiatives have spread increasingly over the past 15 years, finding their legitimacy in the collateral definitive failure of the programmatic approach to poverty that had been supported particularly by the federal government, even if in a discontinuous manner. As a matter of fact, the federal expenditure, in being concentrated mainly on military expansion and on the reclaiming of the public national debt, has left inadequate financial resources available to welfare policies in regard to the widespread local demand of federal intervention for improving the social condition of deprived neighbourhoods, urban areas in crisis, etc. Waves of huge amounts of federal funds in connection with ambitious programs have been at disposal for supporting urban policies in anti-poverty efforts. This was a rather occasional circumstance, which often occurred in junction with electoral national campaigns that exploited serious social problems (such as the high number of unemployed people, the increase of homelessness with the problem of lacking public stock houses, the abandonment of schools, etc...) with the goals of obtaining a greater popular consensus. In 1996, the national welfare reform, transpiring within a climate of disillusion regarding the true effectiveness of the government's poverty programs, dramatically abolished the 60-year federal entitlement to aid poor families (J.Walsh, 1997, p V). However, this cut is not to be intended as the ending of the federal commitment in efforts for community development; it instead meant that there would be a shift from a *government's solution* to a *governance approach*. In other words, rather than the direct action of governments in devising strategies of intervention and conducting decision-making processes, there would instead be a more serious consideration of the increasing and meaningful forms of complexity and pluralisation in the local political arenas. Furthermore, there would be an increase in the levels of interaction among a multitude of private and public sectors, less or more institutionalised subjects and actors becoming more involved in the local decision-making processes, above all for solving the problems affecting their community or the places in which they live.

A concrete experience and a range of current practices, from which the federal government could learn, for arranging a new urban policy and strategic initiatives that are appropriate for poor neighbourhoods under the

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<sup>12</sup> A mix of pragmatist and reformist trends is that blend which went into creating actions for a betterment of conditions within local communities, and above all those that were most disadvantaged, in the context of American democracy. We can find traces of a "moralistic political culture", where the research of public interest and the notion of a "common good" are considered at the very basis of the democratic government and the society itself; a "traditionalistic political culture" instead aims at satisfying economic interests and takes on a paternalistic and elitist notion of what is the "common good"; and then there is the "individualistic political culture", in which democracy is fundamentally seen as the space for regulating and disputing different interests.

current condition of urban governance is that which is known as “community building”.

Hence, community-building initiatives are diverse according to the particular characteristics of the local context in which they are developed. And this relationship can be viewed on three different planes, in contributing to the emergence of innovative factors that can be attributed to this new approach.

The first specifically consists in the view of how community building initiatives can “catalyse personal relationships and social networks to improve community” (J.Walsh, 1997, p V). Despite the characteristic of a growing concentration of factors of social and physical degrade in a geographic area, the centrality of the re-producing or enforcement of the “social capital” emerges as an important value to be considered. This means, in one respect, to assert the importance of the existence of collaborative relationships with people and institutions, that represent strategic points of reference, in providing the opportunities for disadvantaged people to be introduced and included in the mainstream. From this perspective, anti-poverty work in a target area consists in singling out and encouraging the potential networks and existing informal relationships which constitute resources of social cohesion, channels of communication, and access to information for such disadvantaged communities. In other words, to activate the local capacities and community assets accordingly and in line with the principle of empowerment for local communities. In order to preserve the notion of social capital from a rhetoric use, which seems to reoccur frequently when one speaks of initiatives of local community development, let us start with a definition that makes reference to certain examples of practices applied in local contexts. Instead of facing the problem of what social capital is, let us instead reflect upon the processes of its formation and re-production. For example, we can cite the approach that was used by a group of researchers (belonging to the University of Oakland metropolitan Forum), whose formation is fundamentally based on the “new planners” that work in certain parts of Oakland, one of the four Enhanced Enterprise Communities.<sup>13</sup> These researchers hold that it is possible to determine a turning point in the recuperation and re-qualification of certain impoverished urban areas of Oakland, starting with the consideration of the many assets that can be used, and activated for a concrete amelioration of the quality of life standards for its inhabitants. For this reason, they put together a map of the places and neighbourhoods according to the positive qualities that emerged and according to the response of the inhabitants that were involved, and who interacted with one another, as a commune would. This process enabled those inhabitants to develop a true process of identification and recognition of a community. Oftentimes, this activity regards the value given to certain relations of an informal nature, such as those interpersonal relations with institutions, both public and private, from the church to the administrative offices, to schools, neighbourhood associations to hobby and recreational groups, etc. These are indicated as an important resource for the activation of a construction or implementation

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<sup>13</sup> Quoting Victor Rubin (1998) Oakland has a series of characteristics that make it a particularly interesting case for its initiatives of community building: what contributes to the construction of this appeal, from one side is the historic correspondence to very serious social and economic problems (such as unemployment, crime, poverty, lack of health care, and inefficient services especially in education.) with a strong contradicting shift of development within the last few years; on the other side there is the population density and size which allows for the local activists and the institutions which are involved within the city to actually have an influence on the general transformations of the organization of political schemes therein. There is also the incredible dynamic and vivacity of numerous associations, civic groups, and single individuals that are involved in actions and projects to ameliorate local conditions and the quality of life for inhabitants, made up of a diversified composition of populations, different social classes, ethnic and racial groups. The efforts of those involved, despite many difficulties, have led to the consolidation of a significant common ground, for which this experiment of cohabitation seems to be a discreet success.

of intervention policies in the building of working services, and in the programs for occupation and employment etc. This is what is meant by “the empowering of the local communities”. What is important is that this process of rediscovery of values and common goods be shared, and that it is not solely the result of a project that is planned at a table by researchers. It should lead to the emergence of a local knowledge and experience that is ordinary and interactive, rather than that of the experts, who should instead act only to facilitate such a process. On the other side, there is the second aspect of local character and the relationships with the context that we can highlight as important in these programmes. It is found in the community building initiatives suggesting a *comprehensive approach* to analysing urban poverty in a given neighbourhood; one that is capable of tackling, in a rather integrated manner, the intricate *web* of all the problematic aspects that are recognised as those which constitute the urban poverty itself, such as the unemployment, the deficits in education, the inadequacy of health care and services, the prevailing of very low-incomes, etc. The attention given to *places and people* is strategically comprised into one single body. The planning approach required for such strategies is one of comprehensive planning, and in this sense, we can introduce the contribution and the use of a more technical expert knowledge and skill that aims at constructing a framework for a collective urban action program. Moreover, and this regards the third aspect of redefining e re-launching the role of the “local”, this new approach also allows for the necessary development of a shared sense of responsibility and understanding through the public debate of these social problems. This can consequently help construct a sense of reciprocity and solidarity among wealthier social classes, living in the same local society, as well as engage the various government systems, at the different levels, in a common effort to seeking effective solutions. Hence, a common result of these initiatives is that of generating local arenas. Parallel to electoral ones, they can function as a place for a wider participation wherein an ensemble of subjects and local actors, both public and private, can exchange information, resources, and where mutual learning can take place with more effectiveness. This produces the significant effect of city (modes of local urban governance). And in these arenas, a special type of knowledge and experience is acquired, one that is interactive and political in a *different*: they are places that contribute to redefining the terms and the functions of a local democracy.

Judging from these three aspects, one can easily understand how these initiatives, even while having a common basis of presuppositions and principles, are reinterpreted and indicated differently according to local urban context to which they are applied and according to the local trends for politics and policies, and the character of the local political social and economic regulations. In the meanwhile, and in consideration of these terms, let us try to rethink the area-based approach.

Community building principles, in addition to developing an integrated analytic approach to urban poverty, have also represented the overcoming of the separation between the two basic and opposite existing interpretations of the causes for the economic and social demeaning that characterises certain urban zones: the liberal and the conservative, opposing views which have historically influenced the federal strategies of local intervention. The liberals tended to attribute the rising and sharpening of poverty conditions in target areas and the growing isolation of unlucky individuals and groups to *structural* factors, such as the existence of racial and class discrimination. This generated problems of social justice, the lack of jobs as a consequence of de-industrialisation, crime, and the fragmentation of the social fabric. In such a context it is very difficult to produce social change and to operate successful reform efforts by acting from within the system. In fact, if the definition of system, suggested by the structural metaphor, represents all relationships of society and interactions amongst them as part of the

structure, they form a whole in which all the relationships are perceived as predetermined. Hence it is not possible to conceive of strategies for local intervention without involving the whole system of interdependencies in which the local is linked. On the opposing side, the conservatives' underlying belief was that a big obstacle for poor people in trying to overcome their situation of poverty consisted in their substantial incapability, or reluctance to understand and use the existing available resources, one of which being their very relationships. This consideration in fact led to the new practices of community-based assets development strategies in target areas. A pre-assumption was the claiming of autonomy, at a government level, of the local decision-making processes regarding important local issues and the concrete capacity of self-governing of local communities. Therefore, on the basis of local autonomy, action toward reform or change can be launched by the individual parts and not necessarily by national policies of intervention. In this, a tight relation to a federalist system can be noted.

Moreover, the community building approach integrates the so called 'people' strategies, which are focused on education programs, the improvement of health-care services, family support, etc., and the so called 'place' strategies, which are usually concentrated on housing, retail development and neighbourhood physical renewal. Both aspects are discovered to be necessarily interwoven in nature, as well as intentionally held together for effective anti-poverty policies and in order to engage government systems.

### 3.3. The Empowerment Zone Programs <sup>14</sup>

If one observes the recent central role of the development of intergovernmental relationships related to the federal policies of aid to deprived urban areas, one can recognise the importance of focusing on the vertical level of subsidiarity within the political federal system. Within this context, this was changed significantly in order to promote broader dynamics relating to the new emerging forms of social participation and interaction in processes of policy-making and implementation. This highlights the meaning of the horizontal levels of subsidiarity in conceiving of the functioning of the American federal system, and it is hence relevant to the relations between citizens and institutions, and among the citizens themselves.

These brief initial considerations should be examined to better understand, and introduce the Clinton administration's Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community initiative, which agrees in part with the principles for community-building in its improving of federal policy for public housing and economic development in distressed urban neighbourhoods and rural communities.

More precisely, it is in 1993 that the Federal Government once again becomes involved in focusing on long-term planning and funding community development actions with 10-year plans. The federal requests for applications were followed by a process of local planning, and the federal evaluation: 105 sites were selected and designated in one of the following four types that were foreseen to fit the classification for: 'Empowerment Zones' (six urban Ezs and three rural Ezs)<sup>15</sup>, 'Enterprise Communities' (60

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<sup>14</sup> I analysed these programmes within a research-project on the "Community-University Partnerships" in USA and spending in Berkeley a period during the last year.

<sup>15</sup> The six urban Ezs (Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia/Camden) each received "\$100 million in federal grant money, in addition two tax credit, consideration to waive federal laws that constrained comprehensive community development, and greater flexibility of the use of funds (...) only EZs are eligible to receive particular tax exemptions for employers and business properties" (R.J.Chaskin & C.M.Peters, p 1, 1998)

cities and 30 rural communities)<sup>16</sup>, Enhanced Enterprise Communities' (four in number)<sup>17</sup>, and Supplemental Empowerment Zones (two in number)<sup>18</sup>. The program cost the government \$3,5 billion (\$ 2,5 billion in tax breaks and \$1 billion in new financing for a very flexible social services grant called Title XX; N.Lemann, '94, p. 27)<sup>19</sup>.

This policy is intended to provide not only forms of direct aide, but also the mix of possible waives from federal tax, and the offering of technical assistance for the building of the necessary capacity and organisation skills required to execute such programs at local level. As a matter of fact, the policy requires the community to plan services like day care and job training as a condition of being selected as an E.Z., and to fit its requirements.

In making this effort, the federal government was trying to re-establish a direct line for relationships between the municipal and federal sectors, which had been interrupted in the mid 70's. This interruption first occurred with Nixon's Administration, that reorganised the distribution of federal grants to directly fund the State and local government, and avoided federal agencies which were involved in producing serious fragmentation. This continued both under the Carter and Reagan administrations; the later of which re-proposed the role of the State Governments as central in defining urban policies, enforcing the state competencies and their responsibilities in matters of local health, welfare and public safety.

Even if the Ezs program was announced as a completely different solution than those that had been previously designed by both parties (the Democratic and the Conservatives) in the last three decades by the federal government, something quite similar was proposed by the Bush Administration after the Los Angeles riots of 1992. The program was passed by Congress only to later fail at becoming a law, because Bush decided to veto it during the Presidential campaign, when he felt vulnerable to charges of being a tax-and-spender" (N. Lemann, '94, p. 27).

A sure precedent of this example can be found in the 1980's, in a new idea brought forth by the federal government that was emerging for anti-poverty actions, wherein the term "Enterprise Zones" was used to indicate deprived and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, which would be given special tax breaks to encourage businesses.

The EZ federal initiative was received with perplexity and pessimism by many, including some of those who actually worked directly as the program's architects within the federal government. The EZ program looked like an inadequate policy if thought of as urban policy at the wide national scale and there were modest expectations about its possibility of being successful in revitalising distressed areas. That which discouraged people from considering the real novelty and potential of this program was perhaps the wide spread opinion that every preceding effort and policy regarding the War on Poverty in inner-cities ghetto made in past years by the federal government was a total failure. Consequently, this was the cause for a deep frustration among participants and operators. "The old cliché about ghetto life is that it's 'a cycle of despair'. Actually it's ghetto policy making that's a cycle of despair" (N. Lemann, '94, p. 28). Among the various criticisms, this policy is accused of ignoring the current trends in today's lifestyles, that is, that people are no longer interested in living in the same place where they work. And most of all, poor people tend to search for the concrete possibilities of moving away from the neighbourhoods in crisis where they live, to find a better life elsewhere. Seen from this point of view, this policy seems to re-echo the "place strategies" rather than the "people strategy"

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16 Enterprise Communities received grant aid of \$3 million each.

17 The four EEC (Boston, Houston, Kansas City, and Oakland) each received \$25 (\$3 million in grant aid, \$22 million in Federal Development Initiative (EDI) monies)

18 The two Supplemental Ezs (Cleveland and Los Angeles) received \$90 and \$125 million respectively in Federal Development Initiative (EDI) loan assistance monies.

19 Special thanks to Alexander Sera for bringing my attention to this interesting article

approach. EZ efforts are basically oriented towards outreaching resources and opportunities in housing, services and jobs in the designated target areas: in other words, these programs are directly involved in the economic development of neighbourhoods that are characterised by big problems of safety, and show both physical and social damage.

Nevertheless, with the EZ program some typical problems, which are often encountered in federal community development policies, and that in past years, caused big conflicts and dissent, seem to find a possible concrete solution. The EZ program in fact will not be unpopular in regards to the amount of financial federal resources destined for welfare policies in poor neighbourhoods, because it is primarily based on tax cuts, so that it does not allow for any form of new-spending legislation. Besides, a strategy of the program is to prescribe that applications submitted by each local community must be agreed upon, not only by community groups, but also by local government. By doing so, past political conflicts, generated by the obstructions often faced by politicians who wished to participate in governing or in supervising community development initiatives, have been avoided. And especially because of the fact that many "enterprise communities" were created, a considerable number of votes of their representatives were guaranteed. This is a lesson learned from precedent experience: quoting Lemann, the Johnson's Administration Model Cities Program, was expanded to 150 sites, even if this probably was not useful to the policy itself, because this could give the program the certain support of 150 votes in the House. Besides, among politicians there was a large consent on the belief that because they were representing geographical areas, it was obvious that to think of the welfare of the people meant to think in terms of the welfare of places. And for this same reason politicians were very interested in community development initiatives and anti-poverty programs, above all if they brought the opportunity of managing and benefiting from the advantages of considerable federal funds.

In following Lemann's reasoning concerning the reasons that inner-city revitalisation still maintains an attraction for policy-makers and on why it can represent an issue that is conveniently held by other social parts, it can be found that an important role in American history of welfare and anti-poverty policies and above all for community development initiatives was played by Philanthropic Foundations, at a national scale, i.e., see the Ford Foundation's or the Rockefeller Foundation's efforts in supporting the Community Building initiatives in many cities. To participate as well as to play a leading role in such important social policy, and to possibly do this without the wielding of the government authority, mattered quite a bit in terms of powers, public image, and consent.

That is to say that more than once, it was the very private foundations that started programs and initiatives of community action, oftentimes in conflict with the established routines for intervention. Only later on did these experimentations, having obtained a certain level of success, become recognised and considered by the federal government, to then be systematically at a wider national scale.

This leads us to consider the contributions between private actors and subjects in the construction and implementation of public policies and in the redefinition of collective interests in the context of local societies.

On the other hand, one must not forget the interest in and the role-played by local business groups that participate in these initiatives of the revitalisation of poor neighbourhoods. These are mentioned to highlight the importance of small businesses in a local context, and to emphasise their own practical resources of networks and relationships, which provide an alternative to the big Government approach. In the same way, it is also important to consider the multitude of local organisations, that came up from the bottom: they often are grass-roots inner city community groups which, if successful in obtaining federal or foundations funding, also obtain a great

sense of recognition that puts them at the centre of attention. They are then seen in the residents' eyes as significant local actors or protagonists, and are hence facilitated by those who have to implement policies in such areas.

However, these programs come to definitively recognise a principle that was just affirmed in the 60's, and that is, that the key to the success of community development initiatives is strictly linked to the evaluation of the central role that poor people themselves should play in the improvement of the neighbourhoods that are classified as target areas. The shift is in the affirming of policies for empowerment that enable residents to build a capacity from the inside to self-govern their own community, to autonomously make those decisions that concern the well-being of the places in which they live, and to take responsibility for the decisions that they put into effect.

## 4. Some open issues

Although many differences can be highlighted between European and US programmes, which we considered in this paper, there are some points of connection which can help us to raise some issues.

The first range of issues is concerned with the governance concept. Both EU and US urban policies assume a governance perspective, while recognizing meaningful forms of complexity and pluralisation in the local political arenas. The governance perspective is to some extent intrinsic to the concrete functioning of the American federal system. And governance is one of the key-concepts in understanding the complexity of the public and political arenas in the light of the European integration process.

In the E.U. case, we highlighted that cities exerted pressure for greater Community concern in urban policy, even if the E.U. Treaties do not include any specific reference to cities, nor do they give the Community a specific remit for this policy sector. In the U.S. there was a widespread local demand of federal intervention for improving the social condition of deprived neighbourhoods, urban areas in crisis etc.

Moreover, both in the EU and in the US, cities are emerging as strategic places in order to implement local policies as experiences of participation and co-operation in wider political arenas.

The second range of issues is concerned with the activation of contexts where it is possible to act. In both cases the problems and the form of action are conceived of at a central level, and are interpreted differently in different local contexts. Therefore, the process of policy can be considered as a collective sensemaking process where, on the one hand, a crucial role is played by local knowledge, practices and informal relationships; while on the other hand, programmes become the frame for action even by the use of some metaphors which give to discourse a political dimension.

With this framework in mind meaningful differences can be observed when comparing the US and EU cases, starting, for instance, with the role that local communities are intended to play.

As a matter of fact, the community building concept at the basis of US programmes is a specific reconceptualization of the role that local communities are intended to play. It is deeply linked to the principle of empowerment of local societies within the federal system. In the EU case the Urban programmes assign a central role to the communities, however community involvement is intended to be developed according to modes that are appropriate to each member state. In this way, there is a wider space to give it significance in local contexts. This example shows a way of intending the European integration as a process based on common principles that must acquire a sense of meaning in different local contexts.

Therefore, it is possible to argue that the U.S. plurality 'making system' is held together both by the federal system, as an institutional device and by the processes of institutionalisation of social practices and underlying principles. The institution of practices instead becomes fragmentation in Europe, where, as we highlighted above, there isn't a single political system and ambiguity plays an important role to keep differences together. In summary, ambiguity can be considered a crucial resource which allows for differences to coexist in the framework of the European integration process

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