

The Urban Pilot Projects Experience. A Top-Down Integrated Approach Answering to Local Innovative Strategies

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Introduction

This paper will analyse the relations existing between some European innovative instruments of urban policy, which adopt an integrated approach, and the capacity of local territorial systems to use these experiences to produce local development.

To this aim the experience of the Urban Pilot Projects (UPP), co-financed by the European Commission thanks to the art.10 of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF; 1994-1999) will be analysed. UPPs represent a classic top-down approach (EU/local systems). However, they needed, for their approval and, above all, for their implementation, an effort by the local systems to think about alternative methods and integrated approaches to the solution of urban areas problems.

Local level is analysed as a territorial local system in which local actors can act as a collective actor in specific circumstances, and, living in particular places, these actors interact in a characteristic way with a specific *milieu*. The local development dynamics, which will be analysed, will be studied as responding to the criteria of self-sustainable local development and of territorial added value production (in opposition to projects that produce simple valorisation).

Two main positive aspects will be underlined:

- integrated projects can be used as useful tools to promote actions producing territorial added value and to imply active participation of the local society that, in some cases, substantially modifies the way in which the territory is governed;
- UPPs showed that local actors to implement development strategies created at a local level could use a typical top-down approach.

These experiences showed, anyway, that some problems could occur in the relation between supra-local and local actors in the urban planning policies:

- strategies promoted by the EU are made to improve the competitiveness of territorial local systems, but, in spite of the recognized importance of the cooperation among systems, the tendency is to privilege a policy of exchange of best practices rather than to strengthen the existing urban cooperation networks or to encourage the creation of new networks;
- the need for democratic participation of local actors to the projects often became a very good promotional campaign on the undertaken actions rather than a much more complex action of thickening of the existing social, economic, cultural and political networks or the support to the creation of new local networks;
- the problem of how to “govern the change” has often been tackled as a delegation to specific development agencies, thinking to the UPP as one more intervention on the territory, without any real and lasting change in the local government from an administrative idea of governing urban services towards the idea of *governing the local development* (i.e. introducing elements of a governance system).

1. EU territorial policy and the urban question

Can we talk about a EU territorial policy? Yes, if we consider two main trends and a leading principle. The subsidiarity principle is strictly linked to

the first trend¹: EU does not act directly in territorial transformation, since this is a member countries' task. It is needed, however, coordination at Community level of infrastructural policies and of actions that tend to harmonize the development of the European territory (*White Paper. Growth, Competitiveness, Employment*, 1993; *Agenda 2000. Strengthening the Union and Preparing Enlargement*, 1997; *Europe 2000+. Cooperation for European Territory Development*, 1994b).

In this framework there isn't a specific attention to urban areas. It can be said that there is an admission of the prevailing urban dimension in the European territorial asset. In 1997 DGXVI (now Regional Policy Directorate General) published "*Europe's Cities. Community Measures in Urban Areas*", in which there is a summary of the main trends in urban development and of the programmes set by the European Commission (EC). This document and the "*A Framework for Action on Urban Sustainable Development in the European Union*" (1999) were mainly produced to come to a conclusion on the experiences led during the 1994-'99 period of the Structural Funds. The new programming period (2000-'06) was laid on a reduction of the Community intervention in urban areas and a progressive shift towards east European countries financing for their accession to EU². Even in the funds programming the prevailing principle is that of regionalizing Community actions to improve the performances of an infra-national level of territorial planning and government (ESDP, 1999).

In 1999, as a result of a joint work with the ministries responsible for planning policies of the member countries, the EC launched the "*European Spatial Development Perspective*" (ESDP). This is a common framework for the asset of the European territory in which two trends/visions prevail, partially justifying the apparent indifference towards urban areas. To achieve a "balanced competitiveness" among the different parts of the European territory and with the acknowledgement of the potentials offered by its diversity (more than by its homogeneity), the ESDP stress the importance of a *polycentric development* of the EU, based on the strengthening of the existing networks of small, medium and big cities (ESDP, 1999. p. 20), and of a *close relation between urban and rural areas* (ibidem, p. 25).

In this framework, European cities and towns compete as rivals more than cooperate to solve urban problems (DGXVI, 1997). It can be said that more often cities compete and cooperate in the same time, simply changing attitude as conditions and fields of action change. They compete, for instance, when they have to attract firms or businesses, offering the best conditions (skilled workers, efficient infrastructures, available inner city areas to develop) or when they have to provide best living conditions for their citizens (e.g. promoting economic partnerships with private actors). They can cooperate, for instance, implementing European funded research projects that can help to find out how to become more effective competitors.

Cooperation is not, of course, limited to find out the best way to compete. It is also a way of sharing various know-hows, putting together peculiar capacities developed in different cities to improve global performances through synergic operations³.

¹ According to the subsidiarity principle every decision must be taken at the lowest competent level of government.

² As an example of the reduction of local based initiatives funded by EU, it can be useful to remember that the successful URBAN Community Initiative had to come to an end in 1999 and the same destiny was prepared for the Urban Pilot Projects. It is only thanks to the opposition of the European Parliament and of bottom-up initiatives that the EC allowed the URBAN initiative to continue with a second phase on the 2000-'06 Structural Funds programming period (see EP, 1998 and COR, 1997 among other documents on this question). See EC, 1999 and

<www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/wbdoc/docoffic/sf20002006/regul_en.htm> on the 2000-'06 Structural Funds.

³ To play a role in the well-known European cooperation networks (e.g. *Eurocities* and *Quartiers en Crise*) is a stimulus for the city to increase its chances to have a sustainable development in a medium-

One of the most successful strategies applied by European towns and cities to improve their chances to compete at a global level, has been to promote local initiatives and actions that had to attract EU financings to start urban regeneration integrated programmes. While running these programmes, towns and cities are trying to “re-organise” their government capacities and methodologies to implement shared, economically and environmentally sustainable and long-term development strategies. It can be said that urban regeneration projects that were based on an integrated approach has been some of the best chance for European urban areas to put their development strategies and processes to the test. In the following parts it will be described what is an integrated approach, how was it applied on the UPPs experience and what main results can be drawn from this unique experience. It will also be specified how has the analysis been conducted and how the local development theory can help to examine local systems' development processes.

2. The integrated approach

In the last decade the European Commission has launched initiatives to promote urban regeneration policies. These initiatives tend to mix physical regeneration and urban projects, economic development and employment, development of human and cultural resources, experimenting new procedures and using local resources to begin development strategies. The most successful examples of this kind are: the RECITE Cooperation Network⁴, the URBAN Community Initiative and the Urban Pilot Projects (UPP).

These programmes are based on an *integrated approach* that is a multi-sectorial approach where the action of different actors is coordinated and their knowledge and competences interact. Problems are tackled not only as contingent issues, but also in their complexity within a comprehensive strategy.

Integrated projects are based on few important concepts. We can list these concepts following the results of the experience made through the past years by the *Quartier en Crise* network (a network of cities working together on neighbourhood's problems in the framework of the RECITE Initiative⁵):

- integrated projects should have a global approach towards the complexity of change processes in urban areas and towards the differences that these processes show in different contexts;
- integrated projects should develop *synergies* that can give better results than those obtainable by carrying out single projects;
- synergies are to be found in: *transversality* through the actions programmed and the areas of intervention; strategic *partnership* formation, based on actors working on the same project, in the same time, and above all made up of actors that were not working together before, ignoring themselves even if committed on the same matters and in the same territory;

long term. Besides, it will be interesting to understand if European towns and cities cooperate to compete or compete while cooperating (see: Rossignolo, 1998; Berg (van den) and Klink (van), 1992; Borja, 1992).

⁴ Towns and cities networks creation was encouraged by the EC since 1989, thanks to the art. 10 of the ERDF. In the first period these networks were almost completely formed as pilot projects. They were later formalized as the RECITE (Regions and Cities of Europe) Initiative, a network of networks consisting of almost 40 projects (among the others *Eurocities*, *Polis*, *Quartiers en Crise*) (see EC-DGXVI, 1992).

⁵ To know more see: Jacquier, 1995 and 2000.

- residents are always the most involved partners in urban regeneration programmes, even if it is hard to give them an explicit role; they are considered *stakeholders*, i.e. persons having concrete interests in the project but without effective competences or decision-making powers. These actors can't be ignored (besides, the more a project has an integrated approach, the more it will have external effects, the more the number of stakeholders will grow) (Bobbio, 1996);
- the *territorialization* of the approaches. A territorially defined framework of the interventions is important to ensure synergies among partners and synergies among them, the programmed actions and the local system in which they act; territorialization does not mean to act in a strictly defined place, but to start from problems, necessities and local resources to formulate policies and projects that will develop inside the local system (horizontal relations), in connection with enterprises networks and/or research networks (transversal relations), in contact with different institutional levels (urban, regional, national, EU level; vertical relations);
- the projects should be *concrete* and *realistic*; abstraction, weak coordination among partners, scarce attention to starting and implementation times and to the different procedures of institutional, economic and social partners can seriously damage the projects; negative effects can arise from a programming excessively focused on single actions or from residents de-responsabilisation;
- integrated projects should be based on a *contract* among promoting institutions and managing, financing and implementing authorities;
- integrated projects are made with the aim of creating *innovative methodologies and solutions* for the solving of common, already known, problems;
- *cooperation* is important; its aim is to share *best practices* among different urban areas with similar problems.

Integrated projects are not substitutes for more traditional approaches to urban regeneration. They should instead give a comprehensive framework in which different actions could be implemented more efficiently. «It is not a question of doing more but of doing differently by supporting a transformation and a modernisation of the systems and the means of intervention in the towns. In short, the challenge is to rethink, even to contribute to the reconstruction of new systems of urban government» (Jacquier, 1995).

3. Urban Pilot Projects

UPPs aim to find out and experiment new ideas for a better management of urban issues at local level. Therefore they should develop new instruments of an integrated approach to urban problems. Projects should be conceived as elements of a global strategy of urban development and they should have the following characteristics:

- the capacity to face up common problems in different cities;
- innovative and demonstrative character of the proposed solutions;
- public-private partnership as an essential condition for the carrying out of the actions and as a presupposition for their financing at medium term.

Some of the UPPs objectives are:

- the correction of effects of an unbalanced urban growth and the promotion of an improved planning in semi-peripheral zones, especially in big and medium sized cities;

- the regeneration of urban areas with the introduction of new activities linked with the regeneration process and with the environment protection;
- promotion and valorisation strategies for cultural, historic and geographic features.

One of the main features that distinguish UPPs from every other Community initiative or project is that a direct relation was established between the European Commission and the local authority or body running the project. Funds were directly attributed by the EC to the city; reports and results were directly transmitted by the city to the EC.

Urban Pilot Projects (UPP)				
Only 1% of the funds allocated for the activities programmed in the Structural Funds and for the Community Initiatives programmes are assigned to innovative actions. The article 10 of the ERDF finances pilot projects or studies on regional development at Community level. The art. 10 allowed the European Commission to co-finance pilot innovative projects in urban areas: 33 urban pilot projects in 11 member countries in the period 1989-'93. In the second programming period, 1997-'99, there were 26 projects approved in 14 member states.				
PROGRAMMING PERIOD	OBJECTIVES	ADMISSIBLE AREAS	FUNDS	NUMBER OF PROJECTS
1989-'93	Four main themes	The whole territory of the EU	ERDF (art. 10); 101 mecu (50% of total expense)	33
1997-'99	Ten main themes	Cities with at least 100.000 inhabitants, in the whole territory of the EU	ERDF (art. 10); 63 mecu (39% of total expense)	26
2000-'06	The UPPs experience will not continue.			

Source: European Commission, 1997 and 1999

4. How the UPPs experience has been analysed: territorial local systems and local development strategies

Urban regeneration processes has been analysed through the local development theory that allows us to:

- understand which processes can produce an integrated approach;
- understand what these processes owe to the global system (in this case EU) and what to the specific characteristics of the local system;
- see which of the process variables are regulated from the global system.

It is important to acknowledge the role of the complexity of the local system as a presupposition. The local system is not definable *a priori*, because very often it is not possible to describe a local system as an administratively defined area or a territorial local system formerly known. Referring to local systems description as networks' knots, we can distinguish between «a

global level in which networks connect knots that are local systems and a local level in which we found these knots to be networks whose single actors constitute their knots» (Dematteis, 1994, p. 19). It should even be taken into consideration that in local systems there are knots made up by “intermediate entities” constituted by group of actors sharing common interests and that these knots could be transversal between global and local systems, apart from, but within, these systems. So, complex is the proper adjective to define the interaction among systems.

A *local system* is defined as an «aggregation of actors that in specific circumstances can act as a collective actor, even if not formally recognized [...], it is a set with an identity that allows to distinguish it from the environment and from other systems. Actors that are part of it are conscious of this identity and able to have autonomous collective actions. It is a system that interacts with the exterior with rules of its own, mostly informal and yet adequate to assure its reproduction through time» (Dematteis, 1994, p. 14).

A local system is not necessarily a territorial local system. Its rules and genetic code have surely something to do with a sedimented heritage made of experiences and competences that have in part a territorial origin. But this origin does not explain everything, even because transversal components of the system have to be considered (e.g. enterprises networks).

Integrated projects are instead clearly linked to a specific territory. UPPs refer to *territorial local systems* that are systems living and acting in a specific territory and with a common reference to a specific *milieu*. This territorial characterisation can't be given as a fact and can change, involving the whole system in unpredictable changes.

The concept of *milieu* helps to consider the specific identity and the self-organising capacity of the territorial system. The *milieu* is at the same time an equipment of the local system (the “heritage”) and a resource (the “project”, an expressed or expressible potentiality). It has to be defined and determined locally through the analysis of the processes that produced the present equipment and through the interactions of actors creating and using this equipment (Governa, 1997).

To understand the local system's identity and how the system works it is necessary to start to analyse the interactions between local network and *milieu*⁶. Attention must be paid to the role that these “parts” have in the process, supposing that the “project”, i.e. chances linked to available resources, is what links local network and *milieu* together.

Theory and practices: schemes of interaction between a global level and a local system

Can stimuli to implement an urban regeneration successful programme be selected at global level?

Can integrated projects be considered as an experience where local self-descriptions and global descriptions as part of a local development process coincide?

What can be surely said is that the integrated approach that came out from years of concrete experience throughout Europe, first with the UPPs and then with the URBAN Community Initiative, has become a common practice in the EU. The EU level (the global level) selects stimuli to be transferred to local level (towns and cities). Both the global and the local levels can be defined as operatively closed and with specific cognitive domain. They are structurally connected⁷ and it is a *learning by doing*

⁶ Local network and milieu are elements of the analysis that can be supposed at the beginning of the analysis, and can be later confirmed or more precisely defined.

⁷ The concepts of operatively closed systems, of cognitive domain and of structural connection come from the autopoietic systems theory to which it is very useful to refer to when analysing complex

process between these two systems that allows programming good success actions adaptable to different systems (the *best practices*). But it must be said that in practice very few projects can be considered “success stories”. The shift from the widespread theory to the small number of successes shows that there are some problems.

The territorial added value

There is another important concept to consider: the territorial dimension of the UPPs allows evaluating a *territorial added value* throughout the implementation of the project. The territorial added value can measure to what extent the project has increased in space, in time, in number of actors involved the relations established during the implementation. It is not easy to give an exact measure of the territorial added value, but it can be used as a territorialization indicator. It can have two meanings: «the first, more in general, stands for the value that the development project add *to* the territory, on the assumption that development should enrich and not reduce the local natural and cultural equipment» (Dematteis, 2000). The second meaning considers the value produced by the project as constituted of two components. The first is a non-territorial component: «a project can create value even without the use of the local territory *milieu* resources, using technological innovation for instance [...]. In this case the territory is a simple support for virtuous actions. There should be territorial added value in the second meaning if local actors mobilise potential “immovable resources” [*milieu* resources] that are available, transforming these resources in “exportable” value, an economic but also cultural and social value» (Dematteis, *ibidem*).

To consider towns, cities and urban areas in general as territorial local systems and to use the concept of territorial added value allows analysing a dynamic process of interactions (among actors) and interconnections (among networks at different level) that can also consider the *territorial sustainability* of the processes examined. This sustainability is intended as a reproduction and enrichment through time of the natural and cultural equipment of a territory (see Magnaghi, 2000).

5. How the UPPs experience has been analysed: methodological approach to the analysis and evaluation criteria

To describe the ongoing regeneration processes in European cities that adopted the UPP instrument, an analysis that runs through again the project implementation phases has been adopted to understand the project and to evaluate its effects. For the purpose the constitutive elements of the *milieu* have been analysed, trying to understand which relations, and how intense, exist among the different parts of the local system and among the latter and the supra-local system defined as “global”. This analysis allowed thinking about the interaction mechanisms that were created thanks to the development process and about the results of such interactions. It is useful to understand which elements of the local system are active and which are dragged or hostile if the system answers to global stimuli that incite to the programming of development strategies⁸.

systems. See Maturana and Varela, 1980 and 1984. To know more about the use of these concepts in local system theory, see Dematteis, 1995.

⁸ This kind of analysis has been studied and adopted by F. Governa (1997), with special attention to the different elements of the local system and their relations. C. Rossignolo (1998) mainly directed her attention on the use of this analysis to examine European networks of cities.

The analysis of some UPPs (both first and second phase projects) allows drawing a synthesis of this European experience of integrated approach⁹. This experience can be summarized examining the main criteria used to evaluate an integrated pilot project:

- *integration of actions*; horizontal integration of the different and often numerous actions that have effects at local and supra-local levels. This characteristic can be a signal of an enterprise capacity but can create some coordination problems. These problems can be described as: weak integration of the time schedules of the different actions, of the actors involved and of the project as a whole; weak integration of funds, considering with an added value those projects that attracted funds from different sources and from sources that were not traditionally involved in urban regeneration programmes;
- *integration of actors*; vertical and horizontal integration. This is a fundamental characteristic for an integrated project and is strictly connected with the local development theory. The attention is mainly focused on the relation actors/*milieu*, on conflicts between public and private interests, on those conflicts that rise inside the public administration and on the strength of local actors and networks;
- *strategic integration*; i.e.: the evaluation of the capacity of the project to interact with existing development strategies; the choice to use the UPP to promote a comprehensive development strategy for the whole urban area; the lack of interaction of the UPP with other projects or policies of the urban area;
- *integration between objectives and actual results*; i.e. the capacity to determine achievable objectives so to obtain foreseeable results. This characteristic is useful to evaluate the attention to the local specificity, to the *milieu*;
- *integration between obtained results and the milieu*; wherever is possible to evaluate which effects the project has on the milieu. Expected results can contrast the image that the milieu has of itself (the common and shared vision of a local system);
- *integration between the project and the local development*. The result of an UPP must be recognized in the “good relations” among the action, the actors involved (their mobilization) and the milieu with which and in which the UPP is implemented. There is an evaluation of the relation's actors/*milieu*, actions/actors, how many other actions the project produced (and of which kind). The weak integration between the project and the local development dynamics can be attributed to the scarce interaction/integration between the local system and the answer that the same system gave to global stimuli.

6. Key concepts of the evaluation: UPPs as development tools and as a working method

UPPs have been analysed as ongoing processes. Whether they were first phase projects (1989-'93) or second phase ones (1997-'99), they have been examined as projects still having influences on their territories (the lack of any kind of influence or consequence to be considered as a sign of failure).

Since the second phase is in certain cases still going (in Turin, for example), it has been chosen to put forward some hypothesis on the conditions set by the project to promote a local development process. These conditions refer to the project capacity to be answer and expression of a

⁹ The complete analysis of 27 UPPs was conducted in 1999 for a degree thesis by the author. The main results were published in 2000 (see: Santangelo, 2000).

relation among local networks and the milieu. These should get organized to adapt to the changing global and local development options. A “good project” represents the local system capacity to use the UPP to create sustainable development, not simple valorisation, that is to say the system capacity to self-feed after the end of the project and the reaching of the expected results.

Innovation

Pilot projects have been opportunities of real urban regeneration as long as they have been innovative projects. To be innovative, in this case, doesn't simply mean to use new instruments or to implement new kind of projects, but to act and get organized in a different way than in past experiences. New methodologies of intervention in the territory have been experimented and these methodologies could be used as stimulus for the implementation of similar projects in other urban areas¹⁰.

Territorialization

If something has been understood of the *integrated project*, through learning by doing process, is that this *is a territorialized project*. From the local point of view, the learning process has been targeted to recognize or discover the system's potential and to the promotion of self-organizing processes that can't be stimulated by the EU. These processes must come out from the local system's transformation demands.

In many of the UPPs a typical contradiction can be noted when it is clear that there is a *top-down approach* for the implementation of the project, while a pilot project should be based on *bottom-up approaches*. It is necessary, therefore, to consider that UPPs have been targeted for specific areas with fragmented local networks (if there were), weak consciousness of the area potential, etc. Infra-local level of this kind aren't usually able to autonomously start local development strategies answering to global stimuli.

In UPPs processes it is possible to distinguish at least three territorial levels involved: the global level (EU), the municipal level (able to answer to global stimuli), the local level (infra-local, where the project is implemented and where should begin the development process that comes out from active relations among local networks and the *milieu*).

Partnership

Partnership has been considered fundamental for the project, mainly public/private partnership. In almost all the UPPs it is more correct to talk about *institutional partnerships*, since it has almost always been the case of partnerships among institutions, both at local and global levels. In many cases there have been public/public partnerships and where private actors were involved, they often were “institutional” private partners (e.g. banks, foundations, enterprises). The idea of a transversal partnership has been proved to be ingenuous, since it changed in institutional partnerships promoting and managing actions in cooperation with local actors and networks.

Best practices

Best practices should be considered as a result of the good relations among involved actors and as answers to specific problems. What can be drawn from the UPPs experience is that a best practice is not a good solution, but is a good understanding of the problems to tackle. Solutions are contextual;

¹⁰ The transversal, multilevel dimension of the UPPs is another important innovative result. UPPs not only allowed cities to interact directly with the EU level, but they were occasion to implement actions in cooperation with national and infra-national level (regions or ministries) and with transversal networks (enterprises, research and development networks).

they can't be imposed, suggested or transferred. The subsidiarity principle should be seen from the local point of view, not as an instrument to make the lowest competent level aware of his responsibilities, but as an indispensable tool for local development.

7. Conclusion: governance as a multilevel notion

The UPPs experience has proved once more that the territorial development model proposed by the EU goes towards a further growth of networking dynamics. This implies a private intervention in transformation and regeneration projects, while cities are carrying out policies that improve inter-institutional cooperation and are adopting strategic planning instruments that allow an unceasing and thoroughly investigated plan processing. Cities act as economic, political and social actors, with their own autonomy and strategies (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 1997).

It is possible to see, in Europe, the growth of unstable intergovernmental relations (cooperation/competition relations) that strengthen intermediate levels of government. Inside cities, seen as local systems, some actors try to promote networks able to play a role at a global level, while transversal networks jump from a place to another following the best conditions and offers to stop (Sassen, 1997 and 1998). Some other cities and regions, whose main target is to maintain social cohesion through State aids, lag behind (Le Galès, 1998). This situation doesn't mean that there is a convergence in governing these phenomena in different countries, or that there is a common intention to face them up. It is possible to talk of "polycentric governance", using this concept to describe the connection on the territory of different kind of political and social regulation (Le Galès, 1998).

At local level, there is a definition of urban governance as «the capacity to integrate, to shape local interests, organizations and social groups, and as the capacity to represent them to the outside, to develop more or less unified development strategies in relations with the market, the State, other cities and other levels of government» (Le Galès, *ibidem*; see also Cavallier, 1998).

UPPs has showed how much a local system is involved in such processes. How much a local system depends from the global level and how much it is able to play an active role interacting with systems at various levels. These projects, as integrated and complex projects, are *governance processes*. Traditional planning and regeneration methodologies clearly showed their inefficiency to face global changes while local development processes stress the importance of multilevel strategies to tackle urban areas problems. Integrated projects show how important networking is. Networking should be considered as a multilevel, transversal and active concept, whose elements (knots/actors/networks) are active components of different networks at the same time. Besides, the shift from an administrative idea of governing urban services towards the idea of governing the local development allows to exploit the existing potential of the local territorial system.

A problem emerges when these capacities are used to be adapted to the main trends of economic globalisation and of the consequences implied (Sassen, 1997). At a local scale, UPPs have demonstrated that derangements, resistances and conflicts, that come out during the implementation, represent the real potential to be exploited for a sustainable development strategy (Dematteis, 2000). Strategies of territorial local development should benefit from complexity to be successful. No pain, no gain.

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