



Urban Requalification Policies and Periphery: Notes on the Italian Case

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Abstract

The impoverishment and vulnerability that characterize the European urban periphery in the transition from the Fordist production to the flexible accumulation regimes has started a new season of programs of urban renewal through intervention related to the revitalization of specific part of the city. The European Union strongly supports these new policies and forecast a complex program with the intersection of physical, economic and social types of interventions. This article considers specifically the case of Italy, retracing the steps of planning changes that led to the creation of these new tools, and highlighting some limitations of this type of intervention.

Keywords: urban periphery, marginality, urban requalification, participation,

1. Introduction

The transition from the fordist production to flexible accumulation regimes has profoundly changed the socio-spatial structure of cities, making emerge a new issue of the urban periphery. In particular, the peripheral areas of European cities, born in era of expansion of Fordism, have become progressively areas where people tend to focus on the social decline, no longer functional to the new economic system.

At the same time, the economic and institutional universalistic forms of welfare state crisis has created a series of targeted interventions on the deprived urban areas of the cities.

In fact, the inability to act on all the structural causes that generate and reproduce the impoverishment and vulnerability conditions has prefigured oriented actions within the specific neighborhoods in which to promote actions of social and urban requalification. The French example of *Contrats de ville*, the Italian Neighborhoods Contracts, the regeneration project active in Great Britain, since the Thatcher government, the *Programm Soziale Stadt* in Germany or the *Planes de Desarrollo Económico Comunitario* in Spain consolidate the idea of interventions based on territorial strategies elaborated at the local level (Atkinson 2000, Andersen and R. van Kempen 2001).

These new urban policies emphasize the stakeholder society and promote the concept of partnership. The qualifying point is the aim of integration between the distinct intervention level and the direct participation of citizens in the answering definitions for the inclusion and for the urban requalification (Le Galès 2011).

The results of these programs have sometimes been disappointing in accordance to the expectations (Atkinson, Cope, 1997). The reasons are several and involve different aspects that move from the side of the interventions feasibility criteria (access to funding, the number of institutional subjects, and the non-involved), next to the difficulty of creating effective participation between the residents. This essay considers specifically the case of Italy, retracing the steps of

planning changes that led to the creation of these new tools, and highlighting the limitations of this type of intervention.

2. Methodology

The article is primarily based on the analysis of the most important theoretical and research contributions on European urban requalification policies in the context of post Fordist era. The Italian case is framed on the debate on the crisis of traditional urban planning. Data are obtained by an exploration of literature and official documents on complex programs and neighborhood contracts.

The article is also based on a qualitative research. About this, site visits and direct observations, interviews with experts and citizens have been conducted.

3. The Urban Periphery in Era of Globalization

The cities since the eighties have undergone profound variation caused by changes that have occurred in the economic/production and in the political/institutional, in particular the progressive contraction of public intervention and the representation crisis of the traditional mass parties.

Several authors consider globalization as the explicatory paradigm of a dualization process of the social and spatial structure of big cities, in which there would be a sort of opposition between rich and poor, between beneficiaries and victims of the financial explosion and of the growth of advanced tertiary (Sassen 2007, Friedman 1995, Mollenkopf and Castells, 1991). According to these analyses, in the cities of the globalization era there would be a tendency to social and spatial polarization. The new dynamics of the business localization in fact have had direct and indirect impacts on urban economies (creation or elimination of jobs, changes in demand of the labor market, increasing precariousness). In the city on one side the knowledge sector has been consolidated, which requires high levels of education and on the other side the precarious and low-profile labor supply has grown (Mollenkopf and Castells 1991).

The trend towards dualization would be further evidenced by the enormous development of the urban informal economy, that temporarily reintegrate subjects excluded from the logic of the new production system offering occasional work circuits with little chance of social mobility (Sassen 2004).

According to some authors, the model of social polarization is not immediately applicable to European cities, in which there is a total estate of the middle classes (Hamnett 1995, Préteceille 1995). However, this does not mean that in Europe there will not be a marginal growth on a spatial base (Kazepov 2005), which tends to be concentrated in peripheral areas.

The observation of an increase in inequality on a spatial base has encouraged in recent years a classic debate of the urban studies towards the ghetto. Very interesting in this sense is the theory of the *underclass* as it was developed by William Julius Wilson starting from the study case of the ghetto of Chicago. In his analysis, the new *urban underclass* is composed of individuals who are in a condition of unemployment and chronic underemployment and in spatially isolated contexts.

Isolation and difficulties of entering the stable labor market become reproduction factors of the exclusion caused by inability to exit the cycle of poverty (Wilson 1996).

Equally important is the attempt of Loic Wacquant to launch a comparative sociology of urban marginality, able to account, despite the considerable differences also by the contact points between marginal situations that arise in the different experiences of the city (Wacquant 2008).

In this first effort to compare the common denominator is represented by the adjective that Wacquant chooses to highlight the strong link between globalization and new forms of poverty, he uses the term *advanced urban marginality*.

The forms of social and spatial marginalization that develop in the post-Fordist cities are in fact a result of the transformation of the most advanced sectors of the global economy. Moreover, the problem of marginality that will keep growing will be *devant nous* if policies of reintegration of the subjects will not be arranged.

Wacquant also identifies a number of distinctive properties that characterize the advanced

marginality. Among these, we remind a change in size of wage labor as a vector of social instability and insecurity. During the Fordist era, a series of warranties descended from work, while new mechanisms of the labor market imply fragmentation and precariousness, especially for those people who are less qualified. We assist to a de-socialization of the wage report, which can no longer be an integration factor.

Another specified feature by Wacquant is the so-called functional disconnection at a macro-economic level: urban economies are increasingly independent on the trends and fluctuations in the global economy and this reduces the margins and the possibility of local level intervention.

Advanced marginality are also developed in a context of class decomposition and of territorial stigmatization, from all this descends fragmentation and therefore a lower political profile and less claim possibility.

In addition, Bauman, regaining Wacquant's considerations on the transformations of American ghettos from industrial labor reservoirs to dump for non-functional subjects for the new economic order (Wacquant 2002), wonders if these same functions of dumps will be acquitted by the districts of the European cities in which immigrants are stored.

According to Bauman this transformation has not yet been accomplished in Europe, because the pure ghettos are very rare and because the immigrants who live in segregated areas of European cities are not garbage produced locally but imported, and this means that there is a remaining hope for recycling. The European urban ghettos would be halfway inns, even if it is exactly the provisional and undefined character that makes them tension and conflict places (Bauman, 2004).

The issue of degradation of the urban periphery is not new; already in the eighties were emerging constitutive deficit from the experience of the Fordist urban periphery. If after the Second World War, the experience of periphery has resulted in a response to the housing emergency providing functional areas with basic services guaranteed by minimum standards compliance, with little attention to community services. This has encouraged retreating processes based on the individual dimension, generated by a hypertrophy of the residence and from an atrophy of public spaces accentuated by a weak bond with the connective tissue that forms the fabric of the city. To the deficits that constitute the basis of the peripheral experience, as it has been realized in most European cities, have been added ethnicization and impoverishment processes (Castel, 2006), because of the precarious forms of employment, the flux of unemployment, the polarization of urban economies (Sassen 2007, 2004; Mollenkopf, Castells., 1991), the contraction of social welfare. The periphery has gradually become synonymous of unease and social problems, neighborhood in crisis, in difficulty, as well as *banlieues* or *inner cities* become the negative toponym that legitimize social policies localized by social and urban requalification.

4. The Complex Programs as New Tool of Urban Requalification

To the socio-spatial structure changes of the cities have also accompanied major transformations in urban planning. The development of new tools for territorial action represent a stage in the season of renewal of the instruments of intervention on the territory that was opened in Italy in the early nineties, on the basis of the debate on the inadequacy of traditional planning systems in responding to the social-spatial transformations of urban space. The critics addressed to the traditional planning have been centered on the lacks in the way of public intervention in the city, based on the aptitude of a general development plan. The traditional urban planning, through which the planner is able to establish a repertoire of standard solutions for every type of problem, is an expression of a particular urban plan for which the design of urban space is exhausted in a serial repetition of the same living units.

The tools of traditional planning, which had set the stage for expansion of the city through a decision-making control exercised by the techno public facilities and thanks to Keynesian policies (welfare, services, rigid zoning), appear inadequate (Gibelli 2005). The traditional planning is considered hierarchical and above all insufficient to handle the complexity that characterizes urban dynamics, in a scenario of great transformation, of a strong urban competition, and of role redefinition of different levels of government in the territory. Operations on the territory are no

longer geared to manage the growth of the city, but to control new phenomena such as urban sprawl and in order to predict political rehabilitation of former industrial sites and regeneration of the deprived neighborhoods. The recognition of the difficulties of governing the transformation of the city and answer the real needs of people through the structure planning has led to entirely reschedule the planning. The guidelines through which the limitations of traditional planning can be overcome are summarized in the concept of strategic urban planning that, according to the scheme developed by Martinelli (Martinelli 2005), presents the following characteristics:

- a) the *negotiated* character and, possibly, *part* of the plan, achieved through the construction of a "vision" of the future *shared* by the largest possible number of local actors;
- b) the *operational* character – that is oriented to the introduction of actions and projects – in order to overcome the binding aspects typical of the plan (planning and non simple sale of licenses);
- c) the *flexible* character – subject to adjustments and revisions;
- d) *integrated* approach (economics, society, environment, culture), through which attempt to overcome the sectoral vision of planning, putting in relation a plurality of actors;
- e) the provision of long-term strategic *framework* that can give coherence to individual projects;
- f) the *public-private partnership* in the promotion (and funding) of interventions;
- g) the territorial dimension of a *vast area*, to overcome "the excesses of localism", raising the plan between different levels of government;
- h) the constant reference to the principles of *sustainable development*, and therefore the introduction of a qualitative valuation (quality of life, human development, conservation of non-renewable resources, etc.).

The idea of strategic urban planning outlines the guidelines of the new planning process at a macro level, but the critics to the traditional planning tools have also opened the way to the types of intervention at the micro level, targeted to the area. These new forms of planning are committed to resolve faults in terms of physical, social and environmental decay produced from the cycles of urban expansion, surpassing the segmentation, the lacks but also the character of the old emerging planning. The need for change is also based on an ineffective realization of the representation of needs that has characterized the traditional models of intervention in the territory. The scheme under which the production of public services is based on an institutional definition enables to codify the relationship between needs and services to be discussed; according to this approach, every situation needs to be resolved in a self-referential manner, making use of a service taken from an index provided by the administrations (Tosi 1994).

Taking advantage of the experience already made in other European cities and in Italy, since the nineties there is an emerging a rich period of experimentation through the creation of new planning urban instruments denominated Complex Programs. The philosophy behind this new type of action is to overcome the partial forms of intervention in the area, implementing strategies which are not limited to the an urban-building character operations, but that fit into an overall design that aims to alleviate the economic and social unease of the areas on which you operate. To overcome the segmentation, a multidimensional optics is promoted both for interventions, which may be economic, social, building and connected to other concerns of the involved actors (public and private) and institutional levels. In addition, Complex Programs have the following characteristics:

1. do not provide for the expropriation for the acquisition of the area;
2. have already urbanized as their reference areas;
3. have specific forms of financing, in fact they are not introduced as a result of a legislative measure extremely urban, but thanks to economic laws;
4. provide a planning in the various phases of the project between public and private operators and usually also variations on the general planning.

The first type of intervention promoted in the logic of integration is the Urban Rehabilitation Program (PRU), which provides a range of measures in public housing and areas adjacent to them. Urban regeneration can be achieved through works of primary and secondary urbanization (by increasing the allocation of services), through the creation of new constructions, the rehabilitation and maintenance of existing facilities by providing new types of suburban furniture. The projects are

promoted by the municipalities and selected at a regional level using the ex Gescal funds for former public housing.

The Urban Renewal Program (Priu), however, aims to rehabilitate not only residential suburban areas, but also old industrial sites. Again, the achievements can be works of urbanization and construction and the access to funding is thanks to a selection made by the Ministry of Public Works.

5. The Neighborhood Contracts: A Critical Perspective

Among the complex programs, the Neighborhood Contracts represent the instrument in which the concept of integration and multi-functionality finds its true place. The area of intervention is reduced to specific districts of the city those "marked by widespread destruction of buildings and the urban environment and lack of services in a context of low social cohesion and considerable housing problems." The integration is achieved through different types of interventions, those of urban orientation and those of social orientation. According to this logic, the resources can then be routed to both the building recovery and the production of new services and infrastructures, both at measures designed to support at risk social groups.

This joint mode of intervention in the territory is based on trying to mend the fractures that are created within the city's central privileged areas and urban areas, and to intervene directly on the processes of social marginalization. The Neighborhood Contracts are essentially targeted to areas in which the presence of popular housing economics prevailing, areas in which lacks in the design and the dynamics of exclusion are particularly evident. In fact, the areas under 167/1962 Law for economic and popular housing are born with the aim of promoting a kind of social city: facilitating a type of urban growth that limits the revenue process. The 865/1971 Law established that the areas of economic and popular construction would have been object of a integral project, but often the areas were made in pieces varying continuously the plan, sometimes destroying it. In reality, the urban growth has been so fast that the 167 areas have come to support the urbanization of the surrounding ranges, which took benefits from the economic and popular housing. Moreover, the neighborhoods of economic housing were often designed as residential units closed in themselves rather than as parts of the city.

To mitigate the social and physical degradation of these areas, the Neighborhood Contracts provide for the renovation of buildings and the increase of functionality, therefore they are aimed to increase the endowment of the district services, of the green public areas and of the infrastructure operas. Concerning more specifically the residential aspect, the purposes are those of improving the quality and settlement of housing through the pursuit of higher standards for environment. The intervention proposals must have an experimental character both for the physical intervention (both the operas of redevelopment and those of the new construction should be finalized towards morphological quality objectives, ecosystem quality, benefit quality, process quality) than for what concerns the social aspect (promotion of accompaniment programs of the most at risk social groups and to do this we need to involve the operators in the area).

A first critical aspect of this program is the ambiguity of private interventions in the context of scarce public resources. The risk is that the interest of privates in the design of the city prevail and that the interventions materialize in commodification of the space. In this way, public responsibility on urban space comes less, with all that this means in terms of rights to the city.

This is evident, for example, in the outcomes of the Neighborhood Contract in the city of Livorno. Livorno is an Italian city located in Tuscany, whit 160,000 inhabitants is the third largest city of the region. The Neighborhood Contract is included in a large revitalization program of northern neighborhood of the city and regard specifically the so-called neighborhood Corea.

The neighborhood Corea is located in an area of the city characterized by high building density and lack of services and infrastructure.

Born in the post-war period to host the displaced people of the bombardment and the floods of Polesine, the district expanded in 1960 and 1984 with the introduction of 15 tower buildings built by the IACP (Public Housing Authority), in addition to the existing apartments. Currently it has 477 apartments, of which 400 are public. The Revitalization Program started on april 2000 whit the

approval of Contratto di Quartiere I. Different actor provided the resources for the project: the Ministry of Public Works, the Tuscany Region, the Municipality of Livorno. In the project, private partners are involved: a large business company of the large-scale distribution sector has the possibility to build a shopping mall in the neighbourhood (the business company would pay charges, which were used by the local government to finance part of the project). The aims of this program were demolition of 84 old houses and construction of 100 new ones; external renovation of other buildings; roads and sewers maintenance; construction of six houses for disabled people, realization of a civic centre. In the 2004, the local government has approved the second step of the program (Contratto di quartiere II). Also this time the funding was provided by Ministry for Infrastructures and Transports, Local Government and Casalp Spa a public company completely owned by the municipalities of the Province of Livorno and in charge of the management of public housing. The second step of the project included the construction of 200 new house and the demolition as many, the creation of green areas and park lots. A public-private partnership was also signed for the construction of low-rent houses for people who could nonetheless not afford the fees for their own private homes. The public-private mechanism establish that the private partner would build flats without paying charges and, in return, these flats would be managed and rented at low rates by the public offices. In this second phase, a bank opened a branch in the neighbourhood, in line with one of the aim of the project to attract private businesses to come and establish their activities¹. Today, the district has certainly improved as regards the condition of housing, but remains lacking in public spaces and collective services. The new centrality is the shopping mall and this represents a commodification of space and a production of private public space.

Also, in the Neighborhood Contracts the multi-dimensionality is expressed in the request of participation of local actors in the project. The idea of participation is placed with a view to overcome an attitude of self-government of the administrations that do not use interactive and communicative strategies and ignore the attention of listening of the addressees of the projects (Balducci 1995, Ciaffi and Mela 2011).

Moreover, the involvement of the people has become a feature of some social and urban politics. Enabling participatory processes is a sign of growing attention towards the community. In addition, this is directly linked to the crisis of welfare state. The new emphasis on community development has been linked to the wider neo-liberal objective of creating active citizens to promote self-reliance, local initiative and reduced 'dependence' on the welfare state (Kearns 1992, Cochrane 2007). In fact, policies like those of the Neighborhood Contracts introduce a principle of selectivity, since the attention is focused on particular degraded realities and forecasts on interventions to meet needs and to solve problems. At the universal beginning of a service offered to the disadvantaged areas, the idea of intervening in a situation is replaced. Instead, the involvement of the population is considered a central element of the intervention. However, as already demonstrated by the English and French experience, the forms of participation do not always guarantee the effectiveness of the policy (Imrie, Raco 2007, Le Galés and Mawson 1994). Often the problematic aspects implicit in the participatory models are not considered. First, not all people possess the same resources to participate, often the weakest are those that most struggle to access the intervention buildings, substantially the groups with greatest interest are in risk to be excluded. This can have negative repercussions in the sense of further strengthening of differences as well as the risk of an ineffective policy with regard to the objective of social cohesion.

In addition, the theme of activation calls into question the responsibility element. It is assumed that some forms of degradation of the districts are due to a low sense of belonging of the inhabitants of the community (Imrie, Raco 2007). All this opens the street to a dangerous drift: the consideration of excluded subjects as incapable to solve problems, despite attempts of empowerment. The concept of participation is taken uncritically without a valid reflection on the power mechanisms of groups within the neighborhood. The difficulty of reaching the goal of strengthening the social cohesion means that the Neighborhood Contracts materialize in mere

¹ *Revitalizing Livorno's Northern Suburbs 2013* www.partecipedia.net.

building and urban character operations, ignoring the special circumstances of the population as a social issue.

Furthermore, the concept of integration at the basis of the Contract neighborhood is likely to become an ideology that simplifies the complexity of urban dynamics. First, a knotty problem is to consider within the integration context of the different actor roles, including public, private and third sector. The concept of integration requires equality in terms of power which is not obvious. We must try to predict the outcome of the interaction keeping in mind the weakness of the third sector in Italian housing policy.

Finally, the overemphasis on the participation and responsibility of the community risks losing sight of the structural causes that produce impoverishment and stigmatization and, as mentioned above, depend on the ambiguities and contradictions of the development of cities in the global era.

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