

EU URBAN TOOLS AND URBAN REGENERATION

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Under the expression of ‘Urban Regeneration’ it is possible to find many and different kinds of strategies, policies and programmes. Since the end of the 1960s policies of urban regeneration have been designed and implemented on the European continent. These urban policies, at least the first examples, are an attempt to manage urban transformations especially of highly industrialised Western European cities. After the end of post war growth, in the 70s and in the 80s, traditional industrial structure changed rapidly all over Western Europe (Couch, Fraser, Percy, 2003).

THE MANY FLAVOURS OF URBAN REGENERATION

> *Urban renewal, Urban revitalisation, Urban redevelopment, Urban requalification, Stadterneuerung, Stadtsanierung, Rénovation urbaine, Réhabilitation urbaine, Renouveau urbain, Assainissement urbain, Byfornyels, Bysanering, Rinnovamento urbano, Recupero urbano, Riqualificazione urbana* are a set of different ways to identify the main urban regeneration and urban renewal policies across Europe in the last 40 years. This set can be easily widened with many other terms. All these expressions represent roughly policies and models for the neighbourhood scale (ABIs, Area Based Initiatives). They are based on partnership building principles, promoting participatory planning, with little relevant financial public investment, and limited in time (Elisei, 2004).

NOT JUST SMALL

> These urban policies are different in their design and ways of implementation. They depend mainly on the planning cultures, political choices and operated financial investments of EU member states, but they all focus on a set of specific EU-wide common problems: phenomena of social exclusion in peripheral or deprived neighbourhoods (mainly post-war social housing settlements), social polarisation at the urban scale (concentration

of pockets of poverty in specific urban areas), gentrification (especially in cities having regenerated historic centres), unemployment (particularly in cities having a mono-functional economy connected to large industries). Common urban questions for European cities are solved in different ways. 40 years of intervention in the city have mainly operated through soft, complex and integrated approaches. Massive investments, such as London Docklands, Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, Barcelona’s waterfront, Bilbao’s industrial areas, Paris Rive Gauche, etc. were less frequent. All of them have only partially solved the above listed set of problems. The nature and number of urban questions is continuously increasing in terms of policy target groups (not just unemployment, but im/in-migrations problems, economic and financial crisis, climate change and other environmental stresses). Yet, at the same time, there has been an evolution in the form and content of urban regeneration initiatives: from the bricks and mortar approach of the 70s and early 80s (densely impregnated by the technical bias of architects and engineers) to those taking care of socio-cultural, economic aspects and opening a dialogue with local communities (multidisciplinary, integrated and participatory approaches). There is no perfect form for these kinds of policies: questions and solutions are in continuous evolution and match each other with alternate success. These kinds of policies reflect the dominant way of thinking in political currents and dominant societal trends. The following table comprehensively shows the distinguishing kernel of these policies (Oatley, 1998):

NOT JUST BIG

This evolution of urban regeneration policies is apparent all over Europe, especially in those nations with advanced and significant economies (France, Germany, Italy, UK). They had to face issues connected to the de-industrialisation and the arrival of new economies more or less at the same time which they tackled with different but not

I. Historic background of urban regeneration policies
based on Oatley, 1998

KEYNESIAN		POST-KEYNESIAN	
1945-1969	1969-1979	1979-1991	1991-1997
Post-war reconstruction	Inner city problems ↓ area based social welfare projects	Entrepreneurialism	Competitive policies

widely divergent approaches. Moreover, significant contributions to urban regeneration experiences came from Holland, Denmark, Sweden, nations historically founded on principles of universalistic welfare systems and having well performing economies. Examples are the *Kvarterloeft* initiative in Copenhagen, the local scale instruments of Swedish joint land development, or the urban scale instruments of the Dutch land readjustment *stedelijke herverkavelin*. An interesting new European stage for urban regeneration policies is going to be provided by nations in Eastern Europe having joined the EU during the two EU Enlargements in 2004 and 2007. These new EU member states have a different background in terms of economic systems (real socialism, strong centralistic governance systems). However, they are facing common questions connected to de-industrialisation problems, as post war competition in the last century has been based on strong industrialisation and urbanisation in both socialist and free market countries. The first signs of industrial crisis appeared in the Western European countries at the beginning of the 70s while in Eastern Europe the problems started after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, with the closure of main productive settlements, as they were no longer viable in the new market economy and within EU-wide environmental rules. Indeed, with the exception of some investments in Germany, Italy (Regione Campania) and Portugal, the major investments (all those over 200 million Euros) in the current programming period (2007-2013) of the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) are mainly launching urban regeneration initiatives in Eastern Europe, as shown by the following chart:

MAINSTREAMING

- > At present, the question is ‘what kind of urban regeneration is the ERDF promoting and paying for in the current programming period?’ This question could be further contextualised by ‘what urban regeneration is resulting from mainstreaming the previous Community Initiatives (URBAN I, URBAN II) in the hotchpotch of the structural funds?’

Serious issues and risks are connected to mainstreaming urban policies into the Regional/ National Operational Programmes. It simply means to put the destinies of European cities in the hand of central/centralised powers, to move decision making about cities to distant contexts from the places where urban questions occur: the local dimensions, the municipalities, the neighbourhoods. These risks exist both in the EU/15 area and in Eastern Europe. The ambiguity of the role of the EU in the management and design of urban policy continues to be a central topic in town planning.

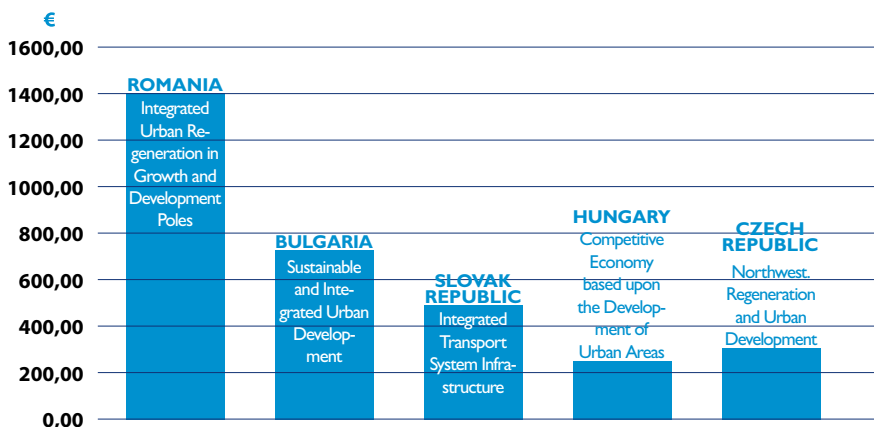
EUROPEANISATION OF URBAN POLICIES

There exists a paradox. The EU has never obtained proper responsibility for urban policies, and cities are never directly taken into account in EU Treaties which deal with concepts such as social cohesion, balancing regional development and ‘new entry’ territorial cohesion. However, over the last 20 years in Europe the most interesting experiences of urban regeneration policies are the URBAN I & II experiences. They have indeed been a very unifying moment in the design and implementation of urban regeneration policies all over Europe. Many experts started to reflect upon the Europeanisation of urban policies. Unfortunately, these very promising experiences have been completely abandoned, concentrating entirely on the structural funds in 2007-2013, which meant returning the management of urban questions to the national states.

Many consider this nonsensical, as for many town planning researchers the role of the EU in promoting urban policies has brought fresh thoughts and innovation into planning practice. Nevertheless, it is extremely difficult to harmonise urban policies at national and supra national (EU) governance levels. Finally, the Europeanisation of regional and urban policy resulted in a double-edged sword. Most urban analysts share the vision that there is a mismatch or misfit between national policies and EU institutions (Boerzel &

2. ERDF allocation for ‘urban’ Priority Axes as percentage of total OP budgets 2007-2013 in several Eastern European Countries

source: Commission of the European Union, 2008



Risse, 2000; Cowles, Caporaso & Heritier, 2001 in: Tedesco, 2005).

- > Ultimately, the **PROCESS OF EUROPEANISATION OF URBAN AND REGIONAL POLICIES** could be summarised as follows:

EUROPEANISATION ENRICHES AND TRANSFORMS INSTITUTIONS (AT ALL ADMINISTRATIVE LEVELS) AND RENDERS THEIR GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORKS MORE COMPLEX.

EUROPEANISATION CHANGES POLITICS, POLICIES AND BEHAVIOURS OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS IN SINGLE MEMBER STATES.

- > In both cases it is possible to recognise a bi-directional influence of Europeanisation on the dynamics promoted by the integration between the EU and its member states in that member states are kicking back and influencing the selection and design of EU policy. Structural funds are an opportunity to change old governance mechanisms and promote new and innovative forms of local governance. However, the inertias embedded in their management and implementation should not be undervalued.
- > This generative and one to one promising mechanism has been constantly interrupted during the decision making process of mainstreaming urban policies. Nevertheless, the URBAN I and URBAN II initiatives have been triggering specific planning processes and have brought a wave of innovation to urban regeneration practices in many member states and moreover in many cities.

MONEY BUT NOT METHODS

- > The relevant added value of the URBAN Initiatives has been to promote innovative methodologies and approaches to urban questions in deprived neighbourhoods. URBAN I and II provided first of all new instruments for the planner's toolbox, but they even inspired new instruments and models of planning at nation state level. While the flow of

structural funds in mainstreaming urban questions was making a major amount of resources available to cities, it failed to promote institutional capacity building for the management and design of integrated and complex urban policies. It has to be remembered that not all member states have a rich pool of instruments for urban regeneration. When the commissioner for Urban Policies states *'What I would like to insist on are integrated urban development plans for cohesion policy interventions in our cities. I believe that they need to be an integral element of all mainstream cohesion policy programmes. I consider them as vital for achieving greater synergies between different policy areas'* (Hahn, 2010), he is putting forward a sort of postulate. Practice is not confirming such synergy. Moreover, existing synergies are not contributing to the design and the implementation of effective and efficient instruments for urban regeneration. Mainstreaming delicate issues, such as urban policies influences the quality of life of millions of citizens, and especially of those living in deprived neighbourhoods. In this instance, mainstreaming policies means to put EU money in the hands of the managing authorities at national or regional level. These entities have to accomplish many initiatives in different fields simultaneously. Even if priorities are created to address urban issues, those in management positions are not town planners or experts in spatial development, but technicians or civil servants who usually have no proper knowledge to address the complexity of urban environments.

MISUSING STRUCTURAL FUNDS: SUDOKU TOWN PLANNING

A good solution for EU urban issues is not a question of determining and increasing an amount of money for cities, but to provide ways of structuring effective and efficient processes for urban regeneration practices as well. Mainstreaming funds for cities could be a good solution for those nations which have relevant heritage tools and experiences to deal with urban



regeneration policies, but not for those with few and often obsolete instruments of town planning. Continuing to mainstream the topic of integrated planning and urban regeneration could cause serious differences leading to relevant unbalances in Europe. Advanced nations with organisation and capacities in managing the urban policies agenda can take advantage of getting access to such mainstreamed funds. This is not the same for less advanced EU countries (especially those from recent enlargements) which depend on less than perfect working governance mechanisms. Usually they operate with extemporised urban agendas based mainly on infrastructures projects and the creation of ambiguous business environments for theoretical spatial competitiveness.

- > In these cases the risk is to create a sort of 'Sudoku town planning' (Elisei, 2009). In order to play a game of Sudoku Town Planning it is not important to know if there are a proper plan, programme and policy in an urban intervention area, if the set of objectives is suitable for the local context, if they are shared by inhabitants or groups of interests, or if they are coherent with environmental or landscape requirements and plans. In Sudoku Town Planning it is simply important to preserve invented objectives and to hold on to the received redistributive share from the structural funds. What matters for individual projects is to fill in bureaucratic tables, regardless of the quality or completeness of feasibility studies. Neither urban spaces, nor cities, and least of all citizens and the possibility of improving their quality of life are relevant. What matters is a formally correct bureaucratic procedure to allocate EU money, not an adequate planning process. This situation results in a paradox: a need for an urgent intervention in the urban areas, numerous structure funds available for cities, but no capability to link the opportunities to the needs.
- > Why does the EU continue to play this game with and within structural funds? Surely, it is very hazardous to let such a large amount of money flow into urban transformation without having

any assurance of proper urban tools and advanced vertical and horizontal governance systems. The expression of 'Sudoku Town Planning' is used as a provocation to express a major claim, namely that it is time to stop such irresponsible spatial initiatives, they do not assist cities, nor do they re-launch economies. It is like preparing a cake by using the ingredients in the wrong proportions. A cake will result but without proper benefit to anyone. The passage to integrated planning is not completely painless in many old as well as new EU member states and it requires knowledge acquired through practices and innovative tools... possibly EU designed and driven.

The Europeanisation of urban policies is one of the most delicate tasks of the EU spatial agenda. This Europeanisation happens mainly under the flag of the EU spatial cohesion policy (Faludi *et al.*, 2009). The question is that, currently, it seems that the EU spatial agenda is very weak and easily shaped by the behaviour of member states. When the EU promoted the URBAN Initiatives at the end of the 1990's, it played a relevant role and its action changed local mentalities and old ineffective practices in town planning. In the 2007-2013 programming period the conceptual visibility and the incisiveness of EU intervention in urban areas, especially in the mainstreamed action, seems to be ineffective in terms of outputs, and very weak in terms of conceptual innovations. The soft EU approach is not so helpful when it becomes too weak. It may be interesting to design more precise strategies at EU level and take a step back to reappraise the many added values connected to the previous URBAN Initiatives.