



Opening image: Rua de Pelames, Bairro da Sé do Porto, 2019 (photo by the author).

Understanding the EU Urban Agenda from the margins of Europe: the case of Porto

Sezione III – Tesi

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This research focuses on the EU regional policy and presents a critical analysis of its influence on the urban regeneration process in the Portuguese city of Porto. A particular attention was drawn to the city's historic centre has been facing a diverse range of challenges and been the stage of different urban policies. Among the actions that have been implemented are two area-based interventions linked to the EU Cohesion Policy. The study allowed to put forward a series of considerations regarding the influence of EU initiatives in this southwestern European city and hopefully the insights resulting from it will not only help to understand local effects of EU instruments at the level of implementation.

Keywords: EU urban agenda, Urban policy, Urban regeneration, Historic centre, Porto

Interest and scope of the research

In the face of a constantly changing and adapting Europe, while drafting the initial research project, the following broad question was asked: what kind of challenges have European cities been facing? The earlier stages of the work sought to address this issue and highlighted the complexity and heterogeneity within the European system. Indeed, Europe has witnessed (and is still witnessing) different transition periods with consequences for its urban areas, underpinned by factors such as economic restructuring, patterns of urbanisation, or demographic trends [Parkinson et al., 1992]. Further on, we expanded our research focus to study the mechanisms, or ways, through which the EU seeks to manage and tackle urban challenges.

Although urban policy is not a field where the EU has explicit competences, the EC has been building an “aconstitutional” involvement in urban policy matters [Tofarides, 2003], and after an initial exploratory phase, «its recommendations and activities have become more and more concrete» [Atkinson, 2015, 21]. Considerable

attention has been given to this subject by the academic community and policy makers, that since the 1990s have been studying and debating it from various points of view¹.

Almost thirty years have passed and this topic remains relevant to urban scholars, thus our research took a decisive step forward to focus on European cities from the so-called “less-developed” regions. At the same time, the study of regional disparities across the EU and the interplay between urban and regional development² led us to take a look at the territorial distribution of these regions. The Portuguese North and Alentejo regions, as other regions from the margins of Europe – such as Campania or Sicily in Italy, Extremadura in Spain, and Epirus or Thessaly in Greece – have never been able to change their “lagging behind” status.

Given what has been said, the main objective of this research was to give an overview of the EU urban agenda and understand how it unfolded in the context of a member state located at the margins of Europe. By focusing on the influence of the urban dimension of the EU regional policy in the urban regeneration processes in

Porto, it was possible to make a reflection on the Europeanisation of local urban policy which several authors³ have stressed as a key process in explaining some of the changes that have occurred in Portugal. Since this Portuguese city has been very active in the field of urban policy and a platform for experimentation for many EU instruments – for example Poverty II and III programmes, UPP, URBAN I and II, JESSICA or URBACT –, it turns up to be particularly interesting when building an understanding of the EU influence at the margins of Europe in terms of urban policy. At the same time, to face the decline of its historic centre, Porto has been carrying out a long process of urban regeneration that started more than 50 years ago.

This case becomes even more relevant considering that both national and EU resources have been influencing local urban development trajectories, including governance and planning practices. Similarly to other European countries, Portugal has shown to be keen to the processes of Europeanisation and there seems to be an understanding that the EU has influenced domestic changes in various directions. Indeed, in addition to financial opportunities that enabled the development of projects that otherwise would have not been achieved, European funding acted as a source of institutional change [Oliveira et al., 2019; Oliveira et al., 2011, 2012], and stimulated the introduction and consolidation of urban policies and spatial planning tools [Allegra et al., 2020; Cavaco et al., 2020; Magone, 2006; Medeiros, 2014a].

In this context, the relevance of this process in Porto has led, and is the result of, a continuous tension towards the opportunities made available by the EU. There are many studies that analyse the innovations associated with these experiences⁴, leading to different forms of policy transfer and related to both innovation in planning instruments and approach to governance. However, an in-depth analysis of the sequence of policy instruments and institutional configurations that characterise the case of Porto is key to understand:

- how that policy transfer process has happened over time,
- what models of intervention have been used;
- if these experiences have given place to events of urban development.

Aiming at shedding light on this process, and since the EU influence on national and local levels

happens in different ways and is prompted by a myriad of factors, we decided to analyse the EU urban policy influence in the particularly interesting domain of urban regeneration⁵.

As will be explained further ahead, urban related aspects of public policy have been in close contact to great societal changes, that in turn, are linked to major economic, cultural and environmental changes. Consequently, urban regeneration emerged as key element of the new era of urban policies, being a source of new models of governance, innovative forms of planning and transformations within local development. As argued by Carpenter [2013, 138], «since the 1990s, the European Union has played an increasingly important role in influencing member states' urban policy and regeneration practice» and «it is likely that the EU approach to urban regeneration will continue to gain dominance within European cities in years to come» [Ivi, 146]. Our research sought to build knowledge on this topic by examining the urban regeneration process in the historic neighbourhood Bairro da Sé do Porto, which is an unfinished, under development process.

In particular, three fields of analysis guided the in-depth investigation of the case of Porto, corresponding to the following three research questions to which we provide answers towards the end of this document:

- what is the potential influence of EU initiatives in local governance, in terms of institutional arrangements and mechanisms of public participation?
- what is the potential influence of EU initiatives in planning innovation, in terms of comprehensiveness of the programmes, intervention methods and connection to other resources?
- what is the potential influence of EU initiatives in urban regeneration, in terms of physical transformations and economic revitalisation?

Methodology and structure of the research

In order to build and understanding between the relationships that exist between EU and local contexts, we focused on the city of Porto in Northern Portugal as it's a representative example of a context that has significantly built on the urban dimension of EU regional policy to regenerate its historic centre.

The analysis of such process, and the influence on urban regeneration initiatives in particular, is complex given the interaction between different socio-economic, cultural and political aspects that are specific to each context. For such reason, when studying the possible influence of continuous interventions, it is relevant to carry a careful and detailed analysis of the local settings. To capitalise on the city's experience, the research carried out a case study methodology strategy, involving a careful observation of selected events. As argued by Johansson [2012, 57], «in practice-oriented fields of research, such as architecture and planning, the case study has a special importance», and while it focuses on one particular case, «simultaneously takes the societal context into account and so encompasses many variables and qualities» [Ivi, 53].

At the same time, the essentially qualitative approach used in this research is directly related to its purpose which is not to compile a comprehensive set of indicators to assess and evaluate the efficiency or efficacy of area-based, urban regeneration interventions. Rather, the aim is to shed light on the complex relationships at work between EU, national and local levels, emphasise the importance of economic, social, cultural and physical local contexts, and hopefully help to anticipate how future challenges and urban policy responses might come about. In practical terms, the methodology adopted in this research incorporated three stages.

Firstly, a literature review that summarised the emergence of the urban agenda within the EU framework, traced its genealogy and development, and finally its implementation at the level of “less-developed” geographies. Moreover, insights were gathered on the specific urban transformations in Porto through the vast body of research knowledge that is available.

Secondly, the collection of data, including official documents, public reports, newspaper articles, websites and direct field observations. Occasionally, some statistical information was collected to help addressing specific issues.

Thirdly, the case study characterisation and analysis according to three dimensions that match the research questions – local governance, planning innovation and urban regeneration.

Overall, we find the qualitative analysis based on a case study an adequate option to approach the influence of the EU on local development. However, we also recognise some limitations of

this study, as for instance the fact that interviews were not undertaken.

The manuscript is outlined in five chapters that reflect the different research stages and is in line with the adopted methodology.

In the Introduction, first we explore the research motivation and objectives, and give a brief contextualisation of the EU urban agenda and then, we focus on the selection of Porto as case study and the potentialities it offers for analysing the influence of the European Union in local contexts.

In Chapter 2 – The urban dimension in the EU regional policy –, we set out the framework through which the urban dimension of EU urban policy has been developed. Here a historical review is made based in academic literature and official documentation that have been actively seeking to hold a grip on the relationship between the European Union and local contexts. By taking a closer look on the EU urban initiatives between 1990 and 2006 it is possible to have an overall idea of the practical influence of specific EU programmes directed to cities. A particular attention is given to EU area-based programmes such as the Urban Pilot Project, URBAN I and URBAN II due to their links with local urban regeneration processes. The chapter ends with a brief look into the concept of Europeanisation, thus exploring how, and where, the influence between the European Union and domestic level can occur.

Chapter 3 – Urban transformation of Porto and the development of democratic Portugal – introduces the case of Porto by contextualising in a first moment the broader national urban policy framework. Therefore, we briefly describe the Portuguese spatial planning system and then make a historical review of the main urban policy events that characterise the current national urban agenda. In a second moment we focus in the city and examine how local urban policies connect to the evolution of the national framework. While doing it we highlight some of the main urban transformations witnessed during the last 50 years or so and concludes by making the bridge between the European and National policies and the territorial changes.

Chapter 4 – Case study: urban regeneration of Bairro da Sé – considers the example of a specific area of the Porto historic centre. We initially contextualise the neighbourhood within the urban development patterns of Porto by making a short

description and diagnosis of the situation. Then we analyse two area-based interventions that have notably contributed to the processes of urban change – the 1990 Urban Pilot Project and the 2006 Urban Rehabilitation Programme.

The analysis allows to draw a more accurate interpretation of urban policy effects, as perceived on the ground. This represents the original contribution emerging from the research, where an in-depth investigation of the areas elucidates the urban changes experienced in the southern Europe cities. It is done in the base of a qualitative approach that sought to capitalise on the literature available and field observations, which allowed to understand how was the local urban policy response to tackle such demanding context.

The final chapter – Conclusion. How EU initiatives can influence local contexts? – takes into consideration the previous three chapters and draws on the EU influence in Porto. It is structured in three sections, which translate the three main research questions that the study sought to answer.

The urban dimension in the EU regional policy

In line with the EC programming cycles, van den Berg et al. [2007] suggested five stages to describe the emergence of the urban dimension within the EU Cohesion Policy. The first stage, 1975-1988, involved the acknowledgment by the Community of the territorial – and in particular regional – differences across Europe. The 1989-1993 period, which coincided with the second stage, was characterised by the emergence of the urban agenda, and its consolidation during the following 1994-1999 period or third stage. The start of the new millennium matched the beginning of a fourth stage (2000-2006), in which the contribution of cities started to be recognised. The key role of cities would be further enhanced during the fifth stage, in particular through the mainstreaming of the urban dimension (2007-2013).

A similar reading of the events was put forward by Medina and Fedeli [2015]. Taking into consideration the milestones events of sustainable, urban and territorial development, the authors found strong links between the European funding periods and the phases of the EU urban policy process. Admitting that the “urban problem” was only recognised by the EU in the 1990s, their first phase of the urban policy

process coincides with the increasing demand for an EU urban agenda emerging, in particular, through diverse documents (1990-1999). In turn, the second phase (2000-2006) is linked with informal meetings between ministers responsible for urban issues and spatial planning. This was related to the EU lack of formal competences in such field, which resulted in a strong intergovernmental participative process. During the third stage of the European urban policy development – The “mainstreaming” of the urban dimension (2007-2013) –, the authors highlight the growing links between the urban dimension and territorial cohesion. The integration of urban actions within the Operational Programmes would promote national and regional urban development strategies, the empowerment of local governance, and urban networking. The last phase, 2014-2020, is characterised by several changes at both EU and national levels, and results from the attempt to formalise the EU-National urban agenda.

Finally, Fioretti et al. [2020] recently presented a more compact illustration for the evolution of the urban dimension of the EU policy [Fig. 1], giving particular emphasis to the year 2007 – coinciding with the sign of Leipzig Charter –, and the year 2016 – when the Urban Agenda was launched. The authors [2020, 9] described the key political milestones and the operational building blocks that led to the consolidation of a EU perspective on the urban question, and defined the current EU sustainable and integrated urban development approach:

- an approach which promotes a strategic vision for the development of urban areas;
- an approach which targets cities of all sizes and promotes integration across scales, from neighbourhoods to wider territories;
- a multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder approach, which coordinates different actors according to their respective roles, skills and scales of intervention, ensuring that citizens are actively engaged;
- an approach which is integrated across sectors, and pushes cities to work across policy-areas;
- an approach based on the integration of multiple sources of funding;
- an approach which promotes result-oriented logic and establishes frameworks for monitoring and evaluation.

In summary, these different interpretations on the path taken by the urban dimension of the Cohesion

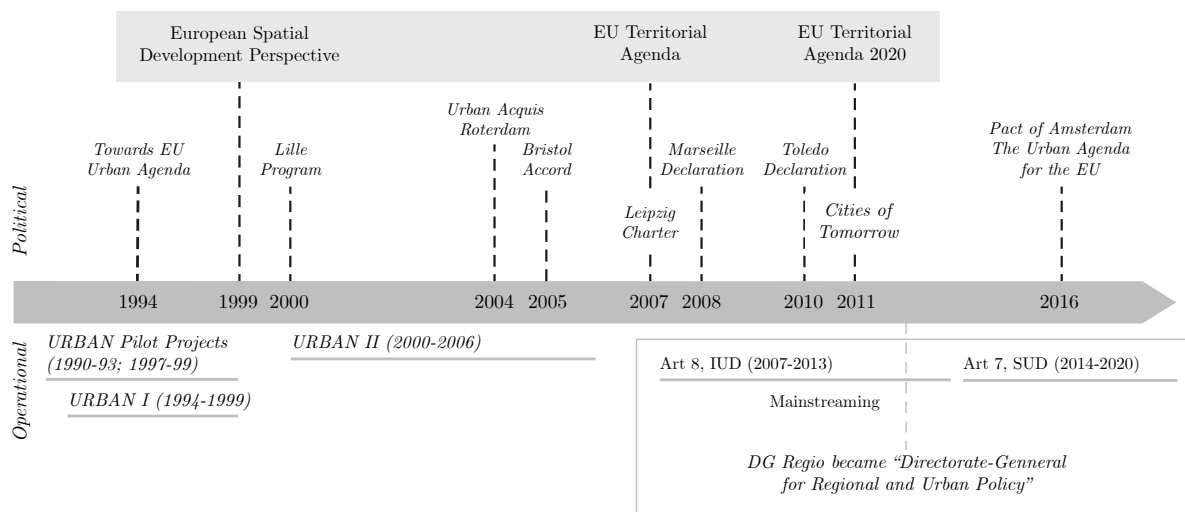


Fig. 1. The evolution of the urban dimension of the EU policy, Fioretti et al. [2020].

Policy give a general idea of the wide range of contents of the EU urban policy, and display the different levels of importance which might be given to the events that steer its development. That being said, we found pertinent to carry out our own diachronic analysis of this process, which allowed the selection of specific subjects that suited the needs and purposes of this research. At a later stage, the insights resulting from this analysis helped shed light on the implications for the national and local urban policy contexts, in particular, the Portuguese.

EU urban policies and the Portuguese context

In Portugal, the 1970s marked a profound transformation in the country's socio-economic, geographic and political context, with the transition from an authoritarian regime and the end of the Colonial War in 1974. The absence of democracy was characterised by a centralised political framework where, among other aspects, local authorities were deprived from autonomy and human resources to operate. This influenced not only local development trajectories, but also the urban and spatial planning systems⁶. After the addition of Portugal to the European Union in 1986, and with the preparation of the Single European Act of 1988, a set of pragmatic policies and reforms were developed to restructure the Community and boost its impact in national public policies. It is around the same time when significant changes began to take place nationally in both spatial and urban policy systems, which had until that time remained largely undeveloped,

centralised and lacked consensual strategic orientations for territorial development.

With the Cohesion Policy and its renewed Structural Funds scheme, Portugal would not only be able to carry out significant physical upgrades in infrastructures, but also to «reinforce the role of the territory as a factor of coordination of the diverse sector policies [...] develop new ways of trans-national cooperation [and] participate in new decision and governance processes in matters regarding the regional management of its territory» [Ferrão, 2010, 78].

In particular, during the period 1994-1999, a considerable impact to national policy-making took place through the implementation of the URBAN I Community Initiative. In this instance, Medeiros and van der Zwet [2019] have argued that its influence cannot be limited to tangible impact on the urban regeneration of cities, while it must also be evaluated in terms of improvement of local capacities and the activation of learning processes.

Later, the URBAN II initiative and the URBACT network were equally relevant to support the development of the EU and national urban policy. As regards the latter, and its particular influence on the Portuguese context, Cavaco et al. [2020, 53] noted that it boosted the exchange with other EU urban policy actors, and «provided political stimulus for the development of national urban policies» [Ivi].

The importance of integrated urban development at the EU level would take a major step in the 2007-2013 period, as it was integrated into the national and regional operational programmes

supported by the structural funds. Meanwhile, the Portuguese government introduced a new policy framework for Portuguese cities, named POLIS XXI. While some authors have touched upon the connections of POLIS XXI to previous initiatives, others have highlighted the indirect influence of policy and planning practices developed in other European countries, along with additional links to trends arising within other sectors of EU regional policy.

Further innovations were introduced into the national urban policy framework in 2009, as for example, the establishment of a new legal scheme for urban regeneration (decree-law DL No.~307/2009 of 23 October) which established with more accuracy the role and scope of urban regeneration companies. Fast forwarding to the latest 2014-2020 programming cycle, due to the economically adverse post-economic crisis scenario, it was crucial for Portugal to make the best use of European funding.

In line with the EU, the Portugal 2020 framework introduced new approaches for territorial sustainable development and, in its efforts to create sub-regional development strategies, gave additional responsibility to inter-municipal institutions. Specifically, the Integrated Urban Development Actions were designed to promote urban regeneration and revitalisation in urban centres.

Several authors recognise some similarities between these plans and the ones developed previously under the POLIS XXI. The practical application of this framework is yet to be thoroughly and comprehensively analysed, but similarly to other southern European countries, the need to reconcile the Portuguese urban system with the innovative framework from the EU proved to be a demanding task.

The urban regeneration of Bairro da Sé

Located on the right bank of the river Douro, Porto is the core city of Portugal's second largest metropolitan area around 1.3 million habitants – and the country's second largest city. The city is the capital of the North region and plays an important role on its urban, social, cultural and economic dynamics. The complex nature and diversity of the challenges that Porto has been experiencing, is directly related to variegated policy-making decisions, governance changes and planning adjustments. These aspects have

been combined with multi-level drivers of change, such as EU financial opportunities or nationally-led urban policy initiatives.

Some of the most urgent issues in the city have been felt in the historic centre that since 1996 has been awarded as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Directly related to its declining process was the ageing population, deterioration in the built fabric, overcrowded housing and social isolation. These have been worsened by the fragility of the local economy, with high levels of unemployment, low rates of economic participation and low incomes amongst residents.

Since the inclusion of Portugal in the EU, the North region has been among the “less-developed” territories, and as a consequence has been target of numerous interventions. While the EU Cohesion Policy seeks in many ways to increase convergence between European regions, it does so by supporting local development, both strategically and financially. In view of the above, Porto has been one of the experimental fields of the European urban policy.

In the old centre of Porto lies the Sé area which gives its name to the presence of the medieval cathedral [Fig. 3]. The proximity to the river Douro enabled important maritime connections and possibly around the first century BC the Romans occupied the area [A.M. Silva, 2010]. The borough grew around two urban centres: the higher ground area was ideal for defensive reasons and the riverside area allowed trading activities and functioned as a communication hub.



Fig. 2. Inside of a substandard dwelling in th historic centre of Porto, late 1960s (Porto, Arquivo Municipal do Porto).



Fig. 3. Aerial view of Bairro da Sé, São Bento railway station and part of the riverside, modified from BingMaps, c. 2007.

The main urban features of the area, as we see it today, were the result of the city's continuous expansion in the Middle Ages and of the multiple demolitions during the 1940s – as part of the strategy to expand the area public space around the cathedral –, and in the 1950s—as part of the new road connections between Dom Luís I bridge and city centre [Fig. 3].

By the end of the ninetieth century, wealthier merchants and tradesmen – that had the means to afford the physical maintenance and vitality of the area – started looking for more attractive housing settings and began moving towards the periphery of Porto. In contrast, new dwellers began to arrive typically from rural areas, with few resources and searching for employment in the industrial

sector. In most cases they moved to abandoned houses that have been divided into much smaller units for rent, in some cases as small as one single room [Fig. 2]. This increase in the number of underprivileged residents, associated with unemployment, led to the creation of alternative types of housing, namely overnight shelters also known as *casas da malta* [Assunção, 2010].

As a result of overcrowding the Sé neighbourhood began to fall into further disrepair. The need to accommodate new people forced tenants to sublet their rooms and several illegal and substandard constructions were erected. The absence of building maintenance, proper infrastructures and urban organisation resulted in narrow, dark streets, lacking basic health and safety conditions.



Fig. 4. Critical physical and social situation in Bairro da Sé do Porto in late 1980s. Drug abuse combined with unsafe physical state of conservation of the built environment [Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1998].

In general terms, in the 1940s and 1950s the historic centre of Porto was already one of the most dilapidated, poor areas of the city and the initial strategy to address the problem involved the demolition of the affected areas. However, throughout the 1960s, an alternative approach began to be discussed, culminating with the Study for the Urban Renewal of Barredo under the co-ordination of Fernando Távora.

Bairro da Sé followed a similar trend, and towards late twentieth century the area saw Cruarb⁷ joining forces with Fdzhp⁸ to deal with the urban regeneration process. In a primitive form of integrated area-based approach, this mirrored a local level network platform that tackled socio-economic and physical problems, encouraged institutional cooperation, created space for interaction, and contributed for building knowledge.

Nevertheless, and despite all their efforts, the neighbourhood undertook a negative social transformation – associated with delinquency, drug abuse and trafficking – which worsen the already fragile situation. By the early 1990s, Morro da Sé was probably one of the most

deprived areas in the city, facing a wide range of socio-economic problems, combined with severe physical decay [Fig. 4].

After being involved in the initial studies for the application to UNESCO World Heritage Site, from 1993 to 1998 the Cruarb was responsible for the implementation of the European Urban Pilot Project (UPP) in Morro da Sé. This project represented the first systematic attempt to reverse the situation in the area, and deployed a long process of urban regeneration. Concurrently, but under Fdzhp management, the area was targeted by an European programme to fight poverty: Poverty III programme.

In 2004, the creation of Porto's urban regeneration company PortoVivo, marked a new effort to bring about change at Porto's city centre, including the Sé area. After presenting a non-executive master plan for the urban and social renewal, the company developed in 2006 the Sé Urban Rehabilitation Programme (URP). This strategic document recognised persistent patterns of social and physical degradation, and the need to integrate multiple actors to reverse the situation. Below we will now dive with greater detail into

these two area-based initiatives that are an example of continuity and allow to grasp a better image of the EU influence on local contexts.

The 1993 Urban Pilot Project: UPP

The Porto UPP, launched in 1993, targeted a small area within the historic Bairro da Sé with approximately 3.25 ha, «in the hope that concentrated investment would have a maximum impact and pave the way for further long-term interventions» [European Commission, 1999, 25]. Different challenges and opportunities motivated its delimitation. On the one hand, the urban fabric's advanced state of decay, the concentration of social issues and the poor commercial context, required immediate intervention [Fig. 4]. On the other hand, the cultural and patrimonial richness of the area represented great potential.

The mission was to renovate public spaces, restore built heritage, safeguard archaeological findings, contribute to the network of social and touristic facilities as well as revitalise economic, cultural and social activities. A comprehensive programme was developed to achieve such vision, and a set of objectives were stated [Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1996; European Commission, 1999]:

- preserve the area's cultural assets and architectural heritage;
- renovate the neighbourhood's urban environment;
- provide housing to temporarily relocated residents during the rehabilitation works;
- consolidation and development of tourism;
- expansion and revitalisation of commercial activity;
- implementation of a local partnership network with public and private actors.

In the face of socially and physically degraded conditions, the project introduced an innovative integrated area-based approach in order to deploy the ideal development conditions for the future. Therefore, rather than a violent action, which could have had negative effects, the programme's strategy encouraged a slow, but progressive, process of regeneration metamorphosis.

The UPP strategic programme was built on inter-related and inter-dependent strategies which sought to positively integrate the local community and create an attractive and accessible neighbourhood [Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1996]. Moreover, the actions were «carefully selected to maximise physical impact and generate spin-off

effects» [European Commission, 1998, 15], while «remaining sensitive to the area's heritage and local culture» [Ivi, 46].

In addition to this strategic feature, the programme relied in operational measures related to the co-ordination and implementation of the UPP (including the creation of the UPP office), the exchange of experience, planning/urban research and monitoring and evaluation.

The implementation and management of the project was under the responsibility of the Cruarbo who established a multi-disciplinary team in order to have a strong presence in the area – therefore enhancing civic participation – and manage the different partnerships, execution and consultation procedures.

Among the actors involved in the different partnerships were local public institutions and associations (social, cultural and retail), residents, religious bodies and private organisations. The work in partnership was reported to have «facilitated the project implementation process» [European Commission, 1999], which resulted from not only having a dedicated local project managing team, but also from the fact that partnerships were oriented for a well defined and fixed objective.

The Pilot Project ran for 5 years (1993-1998) and its implementation period was 2 years longer than initially envisaged due to a set of challenges and difficulties.

It is reported that the nature of project, the complex administrative burden and the late payments by the European Commission were among the main reasons for the delays [Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1998]. Moreover, the expected timeline was argued to be inadequate for the tasks, which resulted in the deadline extension. Under article 10 of the ERDF regulation, the European Commission co-financed ECU 3,515,000 which accounted for 61.7% of the initial eligible budget (ECU 5.7 million). However, the final eligible costs increased by 8.9% and the actual final total cost of the Project, including non-eligible expenses, was around ECU 9.8 million. The non-eligible expenditures were related to temporary relocating costs, the renovation of housing units and unexpected/additional works [Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1998].

Despite the budget deviation, the EC reported that the project succeeded in meeting its initial objectives and the Sé image «changed dramatically since the start of the Porto Urban

Pilot Project» [European Commission, 1999, 41]. It «proved to be very successful in combining physical interventions to conserve and upgrade the historical fabric, with carefully targeted measures to promote the economic potential of the area and to improve the quality of life of its local residents» [Ivi, 51].

Finally, it was claimed the project was able to act «as a catalyst for further public and private investment in the area» [Ivi, 5], thus improving the image of the neighbourhood, building confidence among the residents and boosting relationships between local stakeholders.

The 2006 Urban Rehabilitation Programme: URP After the UPP intervention, Bairro da Sé began to fade into oblivion due to other emerging needs in different parts of the city. As a consequence, the initial long-term strategy gradually lost intensity until 2004, when PortoVivo was created.

The company assumed the responsibility for the urban rehabilitation in historic and critical areas of the city and the context was quite challenging. The situation was described by Câmara Municipal do Porto and PortoVivo [2010, 163] as follows:

[in Morro da Sé] there are buildings in an advanced state of decay, the architectural heritage is impoverished, the environment attracts drug users and breeds criminality, commerce is in a poor state, there is a loss of self-esteem in resident families and this all creates a bad image of the city.

As regards the housing stock, in 2006 there were 285 buildings, 41.4% of which were in bad state of repair, and 883 dwellings, 41.0% of which were vacant and around 235 were rented. Finally, in the neighbourhood lived 367 families, 12.5% of which included a person with more than 64 years old, and the total population was 812 [PortoVivo, 2006].

Following the new vision for Porto's city centre, PortoVivo developed a strategic Urban Rehabilitation Programme for the Sé area. This document considered a target area of around 6 ha which was divided into 11 Unidades de Intervenção. Two of them corresponded to areas previously targeted by the UPP during the 1990s and didn't ask for greater action.

In a later stage, and in accordance with the legal framework regulating the urban rehabilitation, each of these units was subject to the development of Documentos Estratégicos to get a better sense of the needs of the territory and develop individual, but integrated, strategies.

The Sé URP strategy was developed from a initial diagnosis of the neighbourhood that identified the key strengths and main weaknesses of the areas. The idea was to plan a strong operation, able to capitalise on the area's centrality, its heritage value and the existence of many vacant buildings that offered the possibility do be re-purposed. Moreover, the existing institutional tradition of the neighbourhood was seen as an advantage.

In contrast the strategy had do deal with threats associated with the run-down building environment, a economic situation in decline, as well as, a set of issues that contributed for the negative image of the neighbourhood.

Therefore, the strategy carefully selected objectives that could give a new image to the neighbourhood:

- spatial integration between Morro da Sé and the city centre;
- rehabilitation of the housing stock;
- enhancing citizenship standards;
- achieve social balance;
- promote economic revitalisation.

After defining the desired vision, the Programme laid down the strategic vectors to guide the urban regeneration process of Bairro da Sé. These included aspects related to local governance, planning methodologies, physical improvements, and economic revitalisation.

Despite the minimum three years time frame for the partnership to run (2008-2010), the URP Action Programme official conclusion was in 2015, coinciding with the conclusion of the Regional Operational Programme.

By 2015, ten of the twelve operations were concluded, but two of the most impactful actions faced multiple issues and while were suspend due to poor performance.

This resulted from the private partners failing to present alternative financing, forcing PortoVivo and the Municipality to search for new investors. These operations become part of the priorities for the upcoming years.

At the same time, both managing structures within the urban area management scheme unit kept running at least until 2015, providing an important continuity to the longer-term strategy. In fact, the broader Sé Urban Rehabilitation Programme kept going until completing all actions, including the unfinished projects under the URP Permanent Resettlement Programme, and as part of the broader city centre strategy, the neighbourhood kept witnessing scattered actions.

Conclusion. How EU initiatives can influence local contexts?

It can be argued that the case of Porto is, above all, indicative of the diversity and tensions that characterise urban policies. In this context, governance practices and institutional design are a central aspect for understanding the processes of continuity and change in urban regeneration practices. Some tensions can be related to scale, both the scale that can define the problems and the scale on which the solutions are based. In the Porto case area-based interventions have co-existed with more general interventions at the scale of the city or at the metropolitan scale. Moreover, even within an area-based concept, urban regeneration practices in the city centre have taken different trajectories than those on the more peripheral areas of the city.

The Cruarb's initial experience underlies the central role of the State in housing rehabilitation. Subsequently, the role of public investment in public spaces and cultural facilities was seen as an essential trigger for urban change. PortoVivo represents a more entrepreneurial model directed to attract and facilitate private investment in the central part of the city. This diversity can be explained by the evolution of the local urban context, but it is also clearly marked by processes of political change in the management of the city, and reveals important tensions constantly present and active in its urban regeneration project.

At the same time, it serves to reveal a number of continuities as the case of Bairro da Sé has revealed.

Taking into proper consideration the difficulty to 'isolate' the effect of EU policies, we can argue that European projects have triggered, in different modes, urban change. While the ongoing urban regeneration of Bairro da Sé do Porto has to answer multi-faceted problems, it can be asked how the interventions analysed have contributed to the local development.

In order to understand the influence of the EU initiatives on the Sé urban regeneration process, different aspects – e.g., physical environment, economic revitalisation – were taken into consideration based on the particular strategies and fields of action of the Sé interventions, as well as on the challenges experienced on the area.

In what concerns the physical environment, we focused on the transforming built environment which, as stressed above, has been a critical

issue of the neighbourhood. Looking at the city of Porto, and in contrast to the country's tendency, the building sector has shown a clear commitment to reconstruction rather than new construction. At the same time, the combination of a historic context, together with the critical physical conditions of the Sé area, translated in rehabilitation playing a lead role since the early 1990s strategies have been deployed.

At the same time, non-material domains of urban regeneration have been proclaimed to be key strategic elements to restore the area – e.g., economic revitalisation, social issues or tourism. Indeed, both area-based programmes stressed these domains as major factors for the intervention success, but we argue that the impacts struggled to meet the initial strategic vision.

The Sé Urban Pilot Project was, above all, able to deliver physical improvements which included the refurbishment of different buildings and the renovation of different streets and squares within the target area. Together these actions gradually improved the image of Sé and provided better living conditions to the local community.

One of the most impacting examples was the creation of Duque da Ribeira square that resulted from the demolition of strongly degraded illegal constructions. This action mirrors, to a certain extent, the wider urban regeneration challenge in Bairro da Sé, while the square witnessed multiple efforts being deployed to tackle the intricate situation, but the problems have been "stubborn" and difficult to eradicate.

It is undeniable that the physical context of the neighbourhood benefited from the operations carried during the 1990s, however, we argue that the scale of the problem, the restricted scope of the intervention, and the limited extent of the target area, compromised the project which was not able to fulfil all the physical needs of Bairro da Sé.

In fact, the building state of conservation reported in 2006, before the start of the URP, illustrates that the decaying process was faster than the actions to counteract it. Thus, when PortoVivo took the responsibility of managing the rehabilitation process in the Historic Centre, the situation was still challenging. The Sé Urban Rehabilitation Programme stated as one of its objectives the physical rehabilitation of the built environment – including renovating housing buildings that were in great need of intervention and tackling the short-comes of public space. As such, the Action

Programme, in combination with the Permanent Resettlement Programme, contributed actively to improve the area's appearance.

In 2019 PortoVivo reported that a total of 52 dwellings and 15 commercial spaces were successfully rehabilitated. Although it turned to be a slow process, the URP programme shows a good progress, and has contributed to repopulate and revitalise the neighbourhood.

In general, the various public space improvements undertaken under both UPP and URP have positively contributed to the urban regeneration process of Sé. However some other issues still need to be resolved and this idea seems to be in line with the perception of local residents of Sé. Interestingly, this idea of an unfinished urban regeneration process, or sense of faulty delivery by the urban regeneration actors didn't go unnoticed and connected to such logic might have been two operations within the URP Action Programme that were not achieved. These could have helped solving multiple problems of run-down buildings, and by rehabilitating the built heritage and adapting it to new functions, could result in further attracting new residents and contribute to economic revitalisation.

While the EU has contributed to Porto's urban regeneration process at different levels, it is not easy to find a clear direct cause-effect relationship. The case study is an example of continuity in what concerns regeneration, and has shown that such process might be longer than initially expected and desired. At the same time, it was clear that European, national and local level strategies intersect which might boost or undermine the overall results. Finally, the research leaves open the question whether there was an inadequacy between the strategies and the rather particular context of Sé, or a mismatch between the declaration of intent and the actual implementation of the urban regeneration process. Reflecting upon the different events and interventions that have been taking place in Bairro da Sé do Porto since the 1990s, arise some similarities to other European cities. Many cases⁹ have shown that urban initiatives resulting from the EU Cohesion Policy have been active contributors to urban change, Europeanisation of urban policies and innovation of planning practices.

With the insights resulting from this study, we aspire to help the challenging enterprise of

understanding the EU urban agenda. At the same time, while between the European Union countries there are many contextual differences, an analysis including more examples would be needed to get a better grasp of the actual reality. In this way we hope to being able to further strengthen and assist EU policy-making to promote a better future for our cities.

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Notes

1. See, among others, Antalovsky, Dangschat, & Parkinson [2005], Cotella [2019], De Gregorio Hurtado [2020], Fedeli, Carpenter, & Zimmermann [2021], Grazi [2006], Hamedinger & Wolffhardt [2010], McCann [2015], Medeiros [2019], Parkinson [2006], Ramsden & Colini [2013].
2. See Vinci & Igreja [2018] and Vinci [2021].
3. For example, Cavaco, Florentino, and Pagliuso [2020] tackled the Europeanisation of urban policies, Campos and Ferrão [2015] stressed the links emerging in the field of spatial planning and, more indirectly, Allegra, Tulumello, Colombo, and Ferrão [2020] have highlighted the links regarding the EU and national housing policies.
4. See, for example, Alves [2013], Gros [1993] or Rio Fernandes [2011].
5. See, among others, Colantonio & Dixon [2010], Leary & McCarthy [2013], Porter & Shaw [2008] and Roberts & Sykes, [2008].
6. See, among others, Rosa Pires [2005] and Cardoso [2007].
7. Cruarb is the acronym for Comissariado para a Renovação Urbana da Área de Ribeira-Barredo.
8. Fdzhp is the acronym for Fundação para o Desenvolvimento da Zona Histórica do Porto.
9. See, for instance, Palermo in Italy [Vinci, 2019], Malaga in Spain [De Gregorio Hurtado, 2019], Thessaloniki in Greece [Athanassiou, 2020], and Porto [Igreja, Conceição, 2021].

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