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Title

Understanding urban policy through the lens of twenty years of cohesion policy: the case of Palermo

Abstract (2000)

For many European cities the EU's structural funds have led to a radical review of the way of approaching urban policy at different scales. For many others, particularly within the less developed regions, they also have resulted in a unique financial opportunity to carry out large infrastructural interventions as well as complex regeneration projects. After two decades of experiments, it is worth questioning to which extent the structural funds have impacted on the state of the European cities and whether Europeanisation has promoted a real process of innovation in the making of urban policy.

With this question on the background, this paper provides a critical analysis of the evolution of urban policy in the city of Palermo, the fifth Italian city by demographic size and capital of one of the largest less developed region of the European Union.

After an introduction to set the case study within the national and international debate, a main section of the paper is dedicated to explore the different approaches to planning practiced by the municipality under the influence of the European urban agenda. Various programmes carried out in the urban area in the last two decades – from the Urban Initiative in the nineties to the projects under implementation within the Urban Agenda 2020 – are described with the aim of highlighting their spatial, environmental, social and economic motivations. This analytical work seeks to argue that the approach to urban policy in the city's recent history is a complex mediation between different kind of priorities (and rhetorics), empowered by the European programming as well as by the arising of local priorities and long-standing rationales on development.

Keywords

Urban policy, Less developed regions, Europeanisation

1. Europe, European Union and the city: an introduction

When at the end of the eighties the European Commission decided to play an increased role in supporting urban development the European cities were undergoing radical socio-economic transformations (Cheshire, 1995). In this phase, the analysis on the development processes taking place in the European cities had been dominated by a dual perspective: on the one hand, the image of cities as the territorial scale mostly affected by the post-industrial transition, with its consequences in terms of demographic decline, unemployment, social segregation, environmental issues (van den Berg et al., 1982; Cheshire and Hay, 1989) and, on the other, the description of cities as the elective places to take advantage from the emerging globalisation and by the process of European integration (Hall, 1993).

This dualism is perfectly represented by the experiences made by a set of old industrial European cities well known in the planning literature – for instance Glasgow, Lille, Turin, Bilbao – that at the crossroad of the eighties started for a new phase of urban development, marked by the coexistence of strategies to fight against the negative impact of industrial decline and the reshaping of the local economies through a greater relevance given to immaterial factors such as culture, networking and innovation. The recognition of cities and neighborhoods as the places where to combine such a divergent strategies can be considered as the backdrop of an explicit commitment of the European Commission towards urban policy, an incremental effort that over the following two decades has taken the shape of funding instruments, policy papers, regulations and platforms for the dissemination of good practices.

The first step in the construction of a EU's approach to urban regeneration is certainly the reform of the Structural Funds carried out in 1988, after which financial resources were made available within the European Regional Development Fund (under the article 10) for the development of innovative actions at the city level (Urban Pilot Projects) and the creation of networks for the sharing of good practices on the solution of urban problems (Recite, Eurocities, Quartiers en crise). The encouraging results coming from these early experiences were at the base of the decision of the Commission to promote a more comprehensive programme such as the Urban Initiative, started along the planning cycle 1994-1994 and revived in the following (2000-2006) under the label Urban II. While implementing the Urban initiative, a growing political debate along the 2000s put the emphasis on the potential of cities for regional development, advocating a stronger presence of urban matters within the cohesion policy carried out through the structural funds.

Despite the continuous refusal of direct competencies over urban matters (Williams, 1996; Faludi and Waterhout, 2002), this is probably the point of greater optimism towards an urban agenda delivered by the European Union, as being embodied by the document *Cohesion policy and cities: the urban contribution to growth and and jobs in the regions*,

published in 2006 under the form of a communication from the Commission to the European parliament.

For that reason the planning cycle 2007-2013 had been loaded of great expectations, since it should have secured a capitalisation of the investments carried out by the Commission upon hundreds of European cities and, at the same time, to start mainstreaming the URBAN approach within the planning activities carried out by the regions through the structural funds. The outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2007-2008, and more importantly its impact upon public expenditure in several European countries, had the result to frustrate the optimistic view on cities of the early 2000s. As a consequence the EU finished to reshape its urban agenda paying greater attention to the poorer countries and to some drivers for urban policy focused in a different way in the previous planning cycles. This turning point, however, did not lead to the disappearance of the urban question as a EU's priority. The article 7 of the new structural funds regulation issued in 2013 has increased the global investment on urban areas up to at least the 5% of the total resources available. Rather, the new regulations has called the member states for a more selective use of funding for urban areas, promoting sustainable urban development under the light of new thematic priorities conditioned by austerity and new ways of territorialising investments.

If we look retrospectively to this long-term process, trying to providing also an interpretative framework for the development of the case study, we can define the following three stages in the construction of an urban agenda of the EU.

- An experimental phase, roughly covering the nineties, during which the European Union launched the first initiatives directly addressed to the urban dimension – the Urban Pilot Projects (1990) and the Urban Initiative (1994) – with the intention to spread a unified approach to urban regeneration across the European countries and regions.
- A phase of transition, mostly based on the 2000-2006 and 2007-2013 planning cycles, during which the intention of the Commission was to capitalise the good practices accumulated through the Urban initiative, and also mainstreaming its approach to broader urban challenges including those posed by the Lisbon strategy (2000).
- A post-crisis phase, dominated by an austerity rationale in many countries and characterised by an apparent fade away of a unified urban policy for the EU, but also by new policy framework and planning instruments (for instance Integrated Territorial Investments) for the implementation at the urban scale of the Europe 2020 strategy (Atkinson, 2015; Tosics, 2017).

2. Europeanisation and urban development in Southern Europe

In a well known report commissioned by the french DATAR in the eighties (Brunet, 1989), the European urban system was described as dominated by a core urban network –

stretching from central England to the north of Italy – characterised by strong internal interconnections and a set of urban regions able to compete within the emerging global market. At the margins of this backbone, other agglomerations with the potential of world cities or international capitals were depicted as isles surrounded by marginal regions led by urban centres of only local relevance. This unbalanced geography of urban Europe returns in many other analysis carried out in the following years.

In 1992, within one of the first report commissioned by the EU on the complex of the European cities (Parkinson, 1992), the continental urban system had been described as structured according to three main groups:

- the *old core*, covering the older industrialized areas of the United Kingdom, Belgium, northern and eastern France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, northern Germany and Denmark;
- a *new core*, which incorporates southern Germany, northern Italy, south-eastern France and central-eastern Spain;
- the *periphery*, which consists of Greece, southern Italy, the rest of Spain, Portugal, western France and Ireland.

This centre-periphery dualism is represented in many other interpretations of the European urban system carried out in the nineties (Kunzmann and Wegener, 1991; Brunet, 1996; Dematteis, 1996), including some analyses promoted by the European Commission – for instance *Europe 2000+* (1994) –, with the aim of creating the cognitive framework at the base of the first and unique *European Spatial Development Perspective* adopted in 1999 (EC, 1999).

In spite of the aim of the ESDP to promote a more “polycentric and balanced urban system” in Europe (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002), the enlargement of the European Union towards the eastern countries (2004-2007) brought a significant widening of that periphery, since the urban areas of the post-socialist countries were the epicentres, with few distinctions, of the less developed regions being supported by the EU’s cohesion policy. The new urban geography given by the enlargement is well represented by the first *State of European Cities Report* (EC, 2007). This report, while showing a considerable dynamism of many cities also within the periphery of Europe (in Ireland and Spain, for instance), showed the persistence of significant divergences in the development of urban areas between different countries or even within a single country (as in Italy). With few exceptions, these disparities continue to affect urban development in many urban areas of Portugal, southern Italy, Greece and the Eastern countries, as clearly shown in the following editions of the *Report* (EC, 2010, 2016).

In this context, a special attention should be given to the South of Europe, a virtual family that in many interpretations – including the well known Braudel’s ‘true’ Mediterranean area (1966) – makes reference to a large space extending from the Atlantic regions of Spain and Portugal to Greece and incorporates the south of Spain, France and Italy. Despite all agree on the pertinence of this geographical representation, including the role of cities in its territorial evolution, in literature we have only few analysis on the

specificities of urban development in this macro-region (Leontidou, 1990, 1993, 2010; Chorianopoulos, 2002, Seixas and Albet, 2010, 2012; Knieling and Othengrafen, 2016). One explanation is that, beyond the existence of clear common features given by the legacy history and culture, urban development and policy-making are so much influenced by internal factors – government structures, autonomy of local authorities, space given to alternative forms of governance – that any comparison is not easy. For instance, in countries such as Portugal and Greece the formation of urban policy had been prevented for decades by authoritarian and later highly centralised governments (van den Berg et al., 2007), while also within the more decentralised countries, as Spain and Italy, regionalism have historically determined differences in the autonomy of municipalities to drive local development.

In the wake of the Europeanization process, some scholars have tried to give interpretations on the reason of such diversity. In the early contributions of Leontidou (1990, 1993), for instance, the specific path of urban development in many Mediterranean cities, and other phenomenon such as the formation of local government and civic society, are explained as the legacy of complex and sometimes conflictual processes involving the relation between the public and private domains, as well as the role of local cultures in the formation of politics. Looking at the different responses given by a set of cities to the Urban Initiative, Chorianopoulos (2002) analyses the divergences in the urbanisation and economic processes within the north and south of Europe, explaining them as a consequence of the weaknesses in the local governance and highlighting the limited impact on these factors of the the European initiatives.

In the last decade, the social consequences of the crisis on the western countries have refocused the attention of many scholars on the determinants of urban inequalities and the specificity of the southern European cities. This is the case of some comparative works – such as Seixas and Albet (2012) or Knieling and Othengrafen (2016) –, which describe the different responses to the crisis given by local policy under different institutional contexts. In these works the case studies generally witness the emergence of new common trends in the local governance, such as the penetration of neoliberal ideas in the urban regeneration policy, within a broader process of fragmentation in the local politics that in many cases has the result to sectorialise the response of urban policy.

3. Palermo: city description

The city of Palermo is the capital and most populated urban area of Sicily, the largest Italian region by territorial extension and the fourth by number of inhabitants (5 millions). With a population of 674.435 inhabitants (2016), Palermo is the fifth Italian city by demographic size, as well as the functional and economic centre of an urban region of around 1 million of inhabitants, growing up to 1,27 million if considering the boundaries of the metropolitan authority established in 2015.

As all the largest Italian cities, over the last three decades the municipality has experienced a loss of population in favor of the neighbouring towns (around 6%). In the last decade, however, this negative trend seems to have stopped, as the number of residents within the municipality in 2014 is more or less the same of 2003. This process has been helped by the growth of the foreign inhabitants (3,9% in 2016), though the foreign community is the second smaller among the ten largest Italian cities and, on average, three-four time smaller than those living within the urban regions in the north of the country (Cittalia, 2014).

Any socioeconomic analysis of a southern Italian city cannot neglect the regional divergence with the European context. In the case of Palermo, it means being within a region which is one of the poorest in Europe and with no interruptions among the EU' less developed regions since 1989.

According to the first *European Cities Report* (EU, 2007), in 2001 the GDP per capita created in the city was 78% respect to the EU27 average and 66% respect to the national average. In the same year the unemployment rate was 29%, one of the highest among the cities surveyed by the *Urban Audit* platform. The level of satisfaction of the inhabitants towards issues such as environmental quality and public transport, provision of education and health facilities, put the city at the bottom of many of the rankings provided by the EU and UN-Habitat for the 79 largest European cities (EU-Eurostat, 2016; EU-UNHabitat, 2016).

The development divergence with the European context cannot be kept separated by the long-standing disparities between the centre-northern and southern regions of the country (SVIMEZ, 2015). After a period of apparent convergence taking place at the turn of the nineties, the crisis seems to have widened the development north-south gap, increasing the disparities between the largest Italian cities across the country (Calafati, 2009; Cittalia, 2014; Dematteis, 2011; Urban@it, 2016). In 2015 the per capita income in the city of Palermo was around two thirds of that of Milan – the richest of the 10 largest Italian cities –, decreasing of around 3,5% between 2012 and 2015. This gap could be explained through many other indicators, as for instance the unbalanced role of the public sector in the local economy or the poor performance of the local institutions in delivering effective services to citizens if compared to the northern municipalities of the country.

The potential conflicts generated by these divergences provide an essential backdrop for the analysis carried out in this paper. It is worth mentioning that, along the period under observation, the city has experienced a relatively simple political transition. After the turning point of the national reform of local government in 1993, the city has been governed by only two mayors directly elected by the citizens: Leoluca Orlando (1993-2000 and 2012-2017), supported by a centre-left coalition, and Diego Cammarata (2001-2012), supported by a centre-right coalition. While the three political cycles are characterised by differences in the priorities focused by policy-making, there are also elements of continuity between these local governments that will be described in the following paragraphs.

4. Urban policy in the nineties

In the city's modern history, the nineties are marked by the trauma given by the fatal attacks to the judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino occurred in 1992. One year later, the first direct election of the mayor resulted in the overwhelming victory of Leoluca Orlando, a politician with a proud background of mafia fighter. The political dimension of that victory is rendered by two elements: the number of votes taken by the new mayor (75%) and the collapse of the Christian Democrats (from 49% in 1990 to 13%), the party that had dominated local government since the fifties.

The main slogan of the election campaign and, later, of the first government decisions was "a normal city", a way to emphasize a sharp change of direction to remove the factors affecting local government for decades (corruption and inefficiency, first of all) making the city "abnormal" in its development process (Morello, 1999; Azzolina, 2009). At this early stage of the new political project, a great emphasis had been placed on the environmental condition of local development, since the state of widespread degradation experienced by the urban area was considered not only the consequence but also the reason for illegality, lack of development and social deprivation.

The strategy adopted to face the question of urban quality had been based on three main instruments:

- a new masterplan, in order to restore the territorial identity and remove the distortions provided by decades of uncontrolled development, led mainly by private interests and, in some cases, by the Mafia;
- an investment on the most deprived neighborhoods, marginal housing districts such as the ZEN, Borgo Nuovo, Brancaccio, but also the old town, where social revitalisation could have been combined with culture-led policy and an enhancement of tourism;
- a more systematic attention to the external opportunities – in the form of European projects or national initiatives –, as a way to innovate local governance and the planning practices.

A deep reorganisation of the government structure, also, was identified as a precondition to improve quality in the policy-making. One of the most relevant outcomes, in this direction, was the creation of the Historic Centre Office, a special unit where all the competencies regarding the development of the old town (urban planning, public works, economic development, social policy) were integrated.

Not surprisingly, when the municipality decided to participate to the Urban I Initiative the selected area for the programme implementation was the old town, a dramatic symbol of urban decay and, at the same time, a place plenty of opportunity for the relaunch of the city. More precisely, the targeted area was the half of the old town bordering the waterfront, extended 112 hectares with a population of around 11,000 inhabitants. As a result of bombing in the second world war and continuous collapses in the built environment, the area had been abandoned from thousands of old residents and the main

commercial activities (Lo Piccolo, 1996). Within the remaining community, widespread issues such as social marginalisation and unemployment (around 35%) made the place at risk for any visitor and more generally a context for illegal activities.

In the programme implementation, the physical interventions absorbed more than a half of the total budget (54%). They were addressed mainly on the restoration of buildings to be hosting new public and cultural activities, as the flagship project of the Spasimo complex, converted into a music and theatre center in the heart of the ancient Kalsa district. Other important projects regarded the recovering of abandoned public spaces, including the walking over the walls on the waterfront (Mura delle Cative), which became soon one of the most popular place of the old town.

The immaterial part of the programme is focused on supporting cultural activities (theatre and music labs), as well as on creating expertise for the promotion of the old town as touristic attraction. Other incentives were provided to support traditional activities, such as handicraft, in order to reactivate or attract new small enterprises as a catalyst for social revitalisation. The share of the budget supported by the ERDF was around 40% of the total (20,7 meuro), as a result of a significant effort to integrate funds deriving from national and local sources.

According to many analyses (GHK, 2003; Palermo et al., 2002; Veronesi, 2012), the local programme is among the good practices within the Urban I initiatives, at least at national level. The most remarkable outcomes were recognised in the positive impact on the physical dimension, even if the extent of decay in the old town made the programme only a little contribution to such a problem. In fact, at this regard the Urban initiative had been unable to contaminate other dimensions of urban quality, including housing regeneration or the provision of public services for the residents.

Under the period covered by the programme, furthermore, the Urban project had a positive impact on the creation of specific competencies within the municipality in the management of this kind of complex planning initiatives. The end of the programme implementation and, more importantly the change in the local government taken place in 2001, resulted in a change of the strategy for the old town regeneration with the consequence of limiting its contamination over other policies in the years to come.

5. Enlarging the scale of intervention: urban initiatives in the 2000s

As in many other European cases, also in Palermo the approach followed in the use of the structural funds in the 2000s is marked by the attempt to capitalise on the previous experiences and, at the same time, to widen the focus of the planning initiatives both from a spatial and thematic perspective. In Italy, particularly, this follows an explicit address provided by the national government since the end of the nineties, aimed at strengthening the role of cities as the elective places for achieving a broad range of development objectives. A tangible result of this political orientation was that the Community Support Framework agreed with the EC for the implementation of the 2000-2006 planning cycle

included a priority dedicated to the cities (Asse 5), as well as other opportunities for urban development through an integration of the remaining priorities.

Against this national backdrop, the decade opens with a sharp change of political direction in the city's government. After two consecutive experiences of the centre-left coalition at the head of the municipality, in 2001 the government passed to a centre-right coalition headed by the mayor Diego Cammarata, belonging to a party (Forza Italia) that won with a wide margin the political election held in the same year. This administrative turnover brought a significant change also in the political discourse around urban development. The rhetoric of the "normal city" was turned into new slogans claiming a renewed role of the city in the international marketplace through a process of modernisation of its infrastructures and services for the business sector.

After an unsuccessful initiative to develop an Urban II project on the remaining part of the old town, the attention of the municipality had been captured by the preparation of an Integrated Territorial Project (Progetto Integrato Territoriale), the flagship instrument for the place-based implementation of the 2000-2006 structural funds in the Italian Objective 1 regions. The ITP was called "Palermo Capitale dell'Euro-Mediterraneo", following a vision (later translated into a strategic plan) wishing to emphasize the role of the city as an international capital in the new Euro-Mediterranean area (Comune di Palermo, 2002).

Following this strategy, the project conceived by the municipality was very ambitious, relying on a budget of around 100 meuro and a wide partnership including the Province, the University, the Chamber of Commerce and the local Agency for the tourist promotion with various responsibilities in the programme implementation.

The action plan had been structured around two main thematic objectives:

- supporting the identity of the city as a pole of the Euro-Mediterranean culture;
- creating an innovative environment, helping the city to become a pole of technological innovation in the Mediterranean area.

These objectives were supported by a huge number of actions of different nature (infrastructures, aids to enterprises, support to research and training activities), mainly addressed to some well identified targeted area: the old town, three ancient industrial complexes (two of which abandoned since the beginning of XX century), the university campus.

The objective of strengthening city's identity was based on the creation of some new cultural facilities, with a flagship intervention – a new museum of Euro-Mediterranean contemporary art – within the Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa, an ancient industrial site partially reconverted into a cultural district since the end of the nineties. The interventions on the old town included also a programme of incentives for the retailers of the traditional markets, as well as restoration works in different parts of the historic area.

The second objective was based on the creation of two business park (incubators and exhibition area) within the Chimica Arenella and the Manifattura Tabacchi, two sites of industrial archeology at the margins of the city centre. This part of the project was also

supported by several training programmes and aids to enterprises, with the aim of creating a favourable context for the emergence of new innovative companies.

Due to the complexity of the ITP's action plan and other implementation issues the project expectations were revised several times over the years (Vinci, 2009). Some of the largest projects were abandoned, first of all the two business parks, while many others – as the museum of contemporary art – were downsized and only partially carried out. Problems of implementation affected also the section of the programme dedicated to tourism, likely for an overestimation of the potential beneficiaries and the lack of coordination between public and private sector.

As a result, it not simple to provide a comprehensive analysis of the ITP outcomes. If we look at the financial performance of the programme the result were certainly poor (Tulumello, 2016; Vinci, 2009). The vision of the project, also, has been weakened by the lost of many interventions that were considered crucial for the strategy implementation. In more general terms, the project has failed to change the identity of local economy, as well as to provide an upscale of urban policy towards a city or even a metropolitan dimension.

On the other side, we can list some results to be evaluated in a long-term perspective. Investing on the renewal of the old seems a follow up of previous experiences (including the Urban I initiative), reinforcing the political message related of its strategic nature for the city's development. The extent of the project partnership, furthermore, was quite new in the recent political history of the city, contributing to the innovation of local governance and in the spreading of a more inclusive approach to urban regeneration.

6. The transition from the pre- to the post-crisis urban policy

While committed in the initial implementation of the ITP, the municipality was also absorbed by the preparation of the largest infrastructure scheme ever planned since the post-war reconstruction. It is the “Integrated Plan for Mass Public Transport” (PMPT), approved in 2002 with the aim of reshaping the urban rail network and providing citizens an alternative to the car-dependent mobility pattern that characterized the city's development in the XX century. The PMPT was a merging of new and previously planned interventions, as well as an integration of projects promoted by the municipality with others under the responsibility of the national rail operator (RFI). The plan, however, was the first attempt to provide a comprehensive vision of the mobility system in the long-term, and therefore highly emphasized by the new local government as a milestone in the process of modernisation of the city (Vinci and Di Dio, 2016). The PMPT is the combination of four main infrastructure interventions:

- the redevelopment of around 30 kilometers of existing rail lines crossing the metropolitan area from south-east to north-west (Passante Ferroviario), with the aim to serve the airport and some of the most densely populated districts of the city;

- the redevelopment of the Railway Ring (Anello Ferroviario), an underground rail opened in 1990, to ensure a subway service in the city centre and the connections with the two main city's rail stations;
- a new Tram system, based on three lines ensuring the connection of the southern and western suburbs to the city centre and the rail hubs;
- a new automated light metro (MAL) covering the whole city centre, running from the southern suburbs to the residential (and wealthy) districts in the north of the urban area.

Since the mid 2000s the Plan had been cofinanced by the EU for billions of euro through various national and regional programmes, but the four projects has encountered different problems in their implementation. The only completed intervention in 2017 was the tram system, opened in december 2015 after eight years of works and an expenditure of around 214 millions of euro. The Passante Ferroviario, one of the largest project cofunded by the EU in the Italian cities (1,2 billions of euro), is still uncompleted due to the rise of the contruction costs and serious geological issues in the city centre. The extention of the rail network to the city centre (Anello Ferroviario) is indeed under construction but the completion of the project is slowed down by a contractor's financial crisis. The underground project (MAL), whose costs are estimated in 1,5 billions of euro, is little more that a future vision, considering that only half of its route has an approved project and its realisation still lacks of funding.

Beyond these issues, and the protests generated by a decade of construction sites in the city centre, these projects had the effect to reanimate the debate on the city's modernisation process. When in 2012 local government returned to the centre-left coalition, the new mayor declared that mobility would have taken a central place in his government activity. Along with the completion of the urban rail network, the greatest efforts of the municipality were addressed to the promotion of sustainable mobilty systems. In this direction, after two years of negotiations with the local residents and retailers a large free-car zone was created in the old town, as well as several pedestrian areas in the surrounding of the main historic landmarks.

The implementation of these actions were strongly favored by the recognition (july 2015) of the old town within the Unesco World Heritage List as part of an itinerary of the Arab-Normans architecture including other monuments in the urban area and the near municipalities of Monreale and Cefalù. It is interesting to note as the impact of the WHL award in terms of touristic flows has led to a sharp change of opinion towards the pedestrinization of the old town, since new car-free areas were claimed by the local business in addition to the first closure promoted by the municipality.

While the reshaping of the city's mobility system have benefited of considerable aids from the 2007-2013 structural funds, this phase represents also the lowest point for the application of a place-based approach to local development.

This argument can be analysed from two different perspectives. One is the influence of national government, which have repeatedly diverted financial resources from the less

performing operational programmes reducing the role of regional and local authorities in their implementation. An other point of weakness lies in the regional context. The space given to the urban initiatives in the regional programme was not limited in quantitative terms – 443 meuro, around 11% of the total ERDF budget –, but spread over a great number of urban areas without creating a critical mass able to impact on the urban problems of the largest cities.

In 2007-2013 the planning instrument identified to implement the urban section of the regional programme was the PISU (Programma Integrato di Sviluppo Urbano), an integrated programme with the clear objective to mainstream the Urban approach to the city or neighborhoods level. The complexity of the procedures to evaluate the projects submitted by the municipalities, however, had the result to slowdown implementation in the most of cases, until the loss of funding for hundreds of the operations (Tulumello, 2016).

In this context, the project submitted by the municipality of Palermo can be considered as a follow up of the integrated project financed under the 2000-2006 period. The name was broadly the same of the PIT – Palermo Capital City – and very similar was the strategy to improve the international profile of the city through the creation of business and cultural districts in the two poles – Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa and Chimica Arenella – already targeted by the previous project. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the project implementation encountered the same issues experienced by the previous initiative: wrong predictions about the projects feasibility, lack of internal coordination among the measures, and increasing difficulties to match the highly bureaucratized procedures established by the region. More importantly, the project failed as the previous to put in place its two flagship projects, resulting in as a list of small and disconnected interventions with no significance for local development and a final budget of less than 10 millions of euro.

While in this episode responsibilities in the project failure should be shared between the municipality and the region, this experience suggests more general conclusions on the 2007-2013 planning cycle. On the one side, the planning cycle has showed clear limits of the municipalities to cope with complex local projects under the climate of uncertainty given by the financial crisis. On the other, the solution to the structural funds implementation issues have been solved by re-centralising responsibilities to the state level. All this process has resulted in a return of a sectoral and simplified response to local development policy, with practical consequences that will be made clear in the following planning cycle.

7. Post-crisis urban policy: emergence of a people-based approach?

The years across the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 funding periods constitutes non only a simple passage between two planning cycles, but a more radical redefinition of the principles, aims and objectives of the place-based approach of EU's cohesion policy. Although the debate around the Urban Agenda for the European Union provided a very

large framework for the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy at the city level, several countries seem to concentrate their efforts over a more limited set of thematic objectives, in many cases directly related to the socioeconomic consequences of the crisis. Furthermore, the nature of the thematic priorities promoted within the European urban agenda are resulting in new ways of conceptualising the place-based approach respect to the past planning cycles, with thematic objectives (think, for instance, to energy or technological innovation) which may require cooperation at very different territorial scales.

This shift can be clearly observed within the Italian urban agenda, whose strategy is based on a very narrow set of goals and a larger role of national government in addressing urban policy through a stronger coordination of the operational programmes with direct effects on the urban dimension. A first result of this process is the national programme “Città Metropolitane” (PON Metro), approved in 2015 with the aim of supporting the 14 metropolitan authorities established in 2014 in the implementation of its own urban agenda.

The overall goal of the PON Metro – funded with around 900 meuro – is to improve the quality and efficiency of urban services, through a dissemination of the smart city approach, and to face poverty and social exclusion through a mix of material (housing, community facilities) and immaterial interventions (services, social innovation). The metropolitan actions plans, united by a common planning framework, are expected to cover the following areas:

- Digital agenda, by spreading and sharing new models of interactive services within the metropolitan area;
- Energy efficiency, through interventions on the public buildings and the technological networks;
- Sustainable transport, with a focus on ICT solutions and soft mobility;
- Social inclusion, through the creation of housing facilities and services for the most fragile targets.

Within this framework the action plan prepared by the city of Palermo, funded with around 92 meuro, focuses on the following development objectives:

- supporting the metropolitan government, through an investment on seven ICT platforms to be made available of the 82 municipalities of the metropolitan area;
- increasing the efficiency and sustainability of the services provided by the municipality to citizens and city-users, with a greater focus on sustainable mobility and public transport;
- fighting social exclusion, through the creation of community facilities in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, the increasing of the public housing stock and the creation of a public agency to facilitate the access to the housing market to families with low incomes.

Despite the emphasis placed on the metropolitan relevance of the programme, it must be noticed that the greater part of the programme (around 80% of the budget) is addressed to the capital city. While this circumstance raises questions about the real impact of the project over metropolitan governance, it certainly represents an opportunity for the city to consolidate through large investments the strategy developed in the last years.

It seems the case of sustainable mobility, which has attracted increasing attention in local government up to being an hot topic of the recent electoral campaign. While the 2007-2013 planning cycle ensured conspicuous investments on the development of the transport infrastructures, the thematic objectives of the current planning cycle are pushing the planning focus towards the “soft factors” of sustainable mobility. Within the PON Metro action plan, in fact, there are several projects to make more smart and green the mobility systems of what has been described (TomTom Index, 2016) as one of the most congested city of Europe. Accordingly, several millions of euro will be spent to ensure a complete remote control of the bus fleet, alongside with an ICT platform to provide informations on the traffic flows in the urban area and to control accesses in the car free zone within the old town.

The urban regeneration initiatives will be mostly concentrated in the suburbs along the south-east coastline, with interventions ranging from the creation of new facilities for the community to the realisation of innovative housing solutions for the most disadvantaged people. At this regard, however, it must be noticed that the choices practiced by the local action plan makes no exception to the overall strategy of the PON Metro as regards the social question. In fact, a relevant part of the budget is dedicated to develop the immaterial factors able to fight poverty and social exclusion – as for instance the services provided by the third sector – and with a priority to specific social targets (like homeless or migrants) instead of working on the neighborhood dimension as the preferential target of policy.

In the programming cycle 2014-2020, also, the Sicily region decided to reserve around 10% of its budget to develop a regional urban agenda with the involvement of the largest 18 urban area of the region. The main thematic objectives focused by the regional urban agenda are broadly the same as those selected by the national government for the PON Metro (digital agenda, energy, sustainable mobility, social inclusion), with the result that the two initiatives must be complementary in the case of metropolitan cities. The city of Palermo will benefit of around 80 millions to develop an integrated programme in cooperation with the neighboring city of Bagheria, the largest municipality of the metropolitan area, with interventions that has not been already identified.

It should be mentioned also that in april 2017 the mayor announced to have reached with the national government an agreement (Patto per Palermo) for the investment of around 746 meuro on a programme of interventions on transport, environment, culture and the regeneration of deprived neighborhoods. The largest part of the budget (521 meuro) – made available mainly by national and local funds and more limited by European funds –

will be employed to double the tram network built between 2008 and 2015 with the support of the 2007-2013 structural funds.

8. Synthesis and conclusion

In the twenty years after the launch of the Urban programme, the thematic objectives and the territorial targets of the initiatives funded through the EU's structural funds have followed different trajectories. This is the result of external factors, such as the directives given by the European, national and regional frameworks, as well as by internal factors, as the changed priorities of local government.

In terms of thematic objectives, the first decade has been marked by a huge attention to physical regeneration and the recovering of public spaces and historical buildings with the double goals of supporting a culture-led development of tourism and revitalising the most deprived areas within the old town. Culture have remained a relevant topics of policy-making also in the following period, but with a greater emphasis on the creation of large cultural facilities with less links to urban regeneration. The last decade is also characterised by a growing attention towards sustainability, mostly concentrated on the realisation of mobility infrastructures in the 2007-2013 period and in the development of the smart city concept in the last planning cycle. Social inclusion, furthermore, became a dominant argument of urban policy over the last few years as a consequence of the crisis and the related housing emergence.

Main Programmes	Main Thematic Objectives	Territorial Targets	Extent of partnership	Efficiency in implementation
Urban (1994-1999)	Culture Employment	Old town	Average	Good
PIT (2000-2006)	Business development Tourism	Urban area	Large	Limited
PIST (2007-2013)	Business development Culture Tourism	Urban area	Average	Very poor
PON Metro (2014-2020)	Smart city Environment Social exclusion	Urban area Metropolitan area	Limited	Ongoing

If we look at the territorial targets of the planning initiatives we witness a progressive enlargement of the spatial scale of intervention till the metropolitan area which is the target of the integrated programme under implementation. Starting from the very small area targeted by the Urban initiative – only 1,36 sqkm within the old town – the integrated projects of 2000-2006 and 2007-2013 focused their attention to the whole urban area, even if following the idea of concentrating investments on certain flagship projects (the Zisa cultural district for instance) with an expected impact also in terms of neighborhood

regeneration. Over the last years, the need to contrast the social effects and to improve sustainability within the whole urban system seems to bring a greater attention towards services, networks and social targets that are not necessarily expression of specific places, with the result of overshadowing dominating concepts within the past urban policy like those of community or neighborhood.

Understanding the effects of the EU's initiatives on the development of such large cities in the long term is not easy for several reasons. Typical difficulties lies in the evaluation of the socio-economic impact of the programmes and, especially in the large cities like Palermo, its isolation respect to the overall amount of measures carried out by the municipality. Change in the local governance, also, can affect a project implementation, as well as capitalising its results over the time especially when they are exclusively led by the public sector.

The external factors furthermore, as witnessed by the crisis, can play a crucial role in limiting the effectiveness of a local project. In many Italian cities, including Palermo, the austerity measures imposed by the crisis has had a negative impact on the ability of the municipalities to carry out the most complex planning initiatives. The 2007-2013 programming cycle is exemplary in this regard, with a general failure of the place-based initiatives and a progressive diversion of the investments towards sectoral projects (i.e. transport infrastructures).

With the recognition of these limits in the analysis, we can discuss anyway the effects of the EU initiatives through several perspectives, such for instance:

- local development;
- governance;
- planning innovation.

As mentioned before, especially in the case of large cities it is extremely complicated understanding the impact of the local projects on socioeconomic development. It's even more difficult when the spatial scale of the project is not limited to a specific place but to the broad urban area, as in the most recent integrated projects. For this, even if poorly supported by measurable indicators, the Urban initiative has played a clear role in starting the revitalisation process of the old town. The reconversion of public buildings into cultural facilities within some of the most abandoned portion of the historic centre has started a spontaneous clustering process of small business, later supported by other public initiatives (such as incentives for housing reconversion), with a positive impact over the image of the district and its attractiveness to new comers. The other interventions with a more recognisable impact over local development are those regarding mobility. It is the case of large infrastructure projects – like the tram system – but also of smaller initiatives with a higher degree of integration, such as the car and bike sharing systems, which became very popular among the citizens. As a result, the city is experiencing a relevant shift in the modal split with an increasing amount of users moving towards the sustainable modes of transport.

The influence on local governance can be understood making reference to the public-public cooperation and, on the other side, to the public-private cooperation. All the projects promoted by the municipality have seen the participation of public stakeholders with different roles in the implementation. In the Urban initiative, many interventions on historical buildings were supervised by the local authority for the protection of cultural heritage (Soprintendenza). In the PIT (2000-2006) a mayor role has been performed by the University, being the beneficiary of several measures, including the support to research and training activities and the realisation of green areas and sport facilities within the campus. In the current initiative (PON Metro 2014-2020) the programme has been designed and is being carried out with a close cooperation between the municipality and the metropolitan authority.

Much more controversial seems to be the involvement of the private sector in the mentioned initiatives. While cultural stakeholders – such as music associations or theatres – have been partner of the municipality in several initiatives, up to to take the responsibility of successful projects (as in the Urban initiative), the involvement of the business community has not led to the expected results. The PIT 2000-2006 is the largest, and at the same time the most unsuccessful, experiments of public-private cooperation under the opportunity given by the European programmes. A huge amount of investments and incentives had been agreed with the local Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholders (Association of retailers) to support the development of two business districts and the revitalisation of the traditional markets within the old town. Both actions were abandoned during the implementation, making an end to any extensive operative role of private stakeholders in the following programmes.

Despite the difficulties experienced by local government in the post-crisis phase, the EU's programme have proved to be an important driver of change in policy-making in several southern cities and Palermo makes no exception. Looking at such a long period as that under observation, however, the increasing of institutional or planning capacity cannot be considered as a linear process. The nineties have seen moments of radical reorganisation in the local government that, in the case of Palermo, have resulted in the creation of special units dedicated to the European programmes, which are still in operation within the administrative structure of the municipality. In other periods – mainly in the 2000s – the design and implementation of the European initiatives have more largely benefited from external expertise, with the result of limiting the role of these units to administrative tasks. Wishing to create a nexus between the success of the planning initiatives and the role attributed to the municipal units we might argue that projects management have benefited of having retained larger responsibilities in the hands of the internal staff.

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