

Urban Maestro

New governance strategies
for Urban Design

Co-City Torino

the city of commons and collaboration (IT)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. SUMMARY.....	3
2. URBAN REGENERATION IN TURIN.....	4
3. THE CO-CITY PROJECT	6
4. PEOPLE AND PLACES	8
5. KEY CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED	11
KEY REFERENCES	14

1. SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to give a brief account of a collective learning process; a process that implies the effort of both citizens' organisations and the city administration towards the definition of a collaborative field in the design and implementation of urban regeneration processes. This process is currently in progress in the city of Turin, Italy, thanks to the CO-CITY project, implemented between 2017 and 2020 and financed by the UIA initiative.

The European Union initiative *UIA - Urban innovative actions*, was launched in 2016 in order to identify and test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges and sustainable urban development.¹ Cities throughout Europe have been tasked with going beyond traditional policies and services and to be more innovative. The idea behind this initiative is to stimulate urban authorities to experiment with innovative and creative solutions, even if there is the risk of a failure.

The first call of the initiative finds the City of Turin at the right moment to test a new way to respond to the needs of its neighborhoods—especially the most deprived—with urban policies that rely on civic engagement and social innovation. Turin and other Italian municipalities, starting from the example of the city of Bologna, were have already begun to experiment with new tools—for example the pacts of collaboration between the administration and the citizens' organizations—and an innovative juridical framework: the notion of urban commons.² All of this comprised the starting point for the CO-CITY project.³

In the first part of this paper, we will briefly provide an overview of the background and context of the project, in the second part its implementation will be described, while in the third part certain examples will be given. Finally, in the fourth part, we will focus on the challenges that have been addressed and some of the lessons learned.

¹ Based on Article 8 of the ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

² The notion of “commons” has been studied by Garret Hardin’s famous *Tragedy of the Commons*, and by Elinor Ostrom’s Nobel prize-winning work on governing common pool resources. More recently, law scholars have studied urban commons from a new perspective, claiming that the “commons is less a description of the resource and its characteristics and

more of a normative claim to the resource. In these situations, the claim is to open up (or to re-open) access to a good - i.e., to recognize the community’s right to access and to use a resource which might otherwise be under exclusive private or public control - on account of the social value or utility that such access would generate or produce for the community” (Foster, Iaione 2016, 288). See also Mattei, Quarta (2015), Albanese, Michelazzo (2020).

³ For further information in English on the CO-CITY project see: http://www.comune.torino.it/benicomuni/eng_version/project/index.shtml; <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/turin>

2. URBAN REGENERATION IN TURIN

The City of Turin has long-lasting experience in the field of urban regeneration—in recent decades, it has been working to implement a set of policies, tools and frameworks in order to manage the city’s physical and social, cultural and economic transformations.

Turin’s awareness of the importance of regeneration was stimulated, in part, by the need to deal with the existence in the area of numerous abandoned industrial buildings and disused land, which called for a reimagining and reconsideration of the city’s identity. On the other hand, the Administration had to endure a crisis that took place in its various peripheral and inner city neighborhoods, also stimulated by the consequences of a financial crisis that has contributed to the spread of poverty. Between 2008 and 2013 the percentage of the city’s population living in absolute poverty—meaning those deprived of basic human needs—rose to 7%, while 14% lacked the income necessary to maintain an average standard of living and were thus defined as living below the relative poverty line. The current unemployment rate is 10% and has continued to rise at a faster pace than in other Italian cities.

This situation and the budget constraints for the social sector have forced the City to partially rethink their public service delivery, and their dialogue and exchanges with their citizens when it comes to urban regeneration.

A process of local dialogue and community engagement started at the end of the Nineties and developed through different urban regeneration programs that culminated, between 2007 and 2013, in the formation of eight community centers called Neighborhood Houses (*Case del Quartiere*), located in various districts of the city and which are constantly evolving to better respond to the needs of local communities.⁴ These Neighbourhood Houses comprise a network of multi-purpose hubs which work together to support community cooperation and civic engagement.

In 2014, a national debate on urban commons regulation started in Bologna and soon spread to several major Italian cities. In 2016, the Turin City Council issued the *Regulation on collaboration between citizens and the City for the care, shared management and regeneration of urban commons*, an instrument allowing for the



Photo 1. One of the street posters of the CO-CITY communication campaign.

⁴ For the urban regeneration processes in Turin see Cavallaro, Ferrero (2016). The Neighborhood Houses are community centers that host and disseminate socio-cultural activities, helpdesks, public events, etc. They are at the same time places to socialize and participate. They are typically located in public buildings and most also host a restaurant-cafeteria,

and are managed by various entities from the third sector. The most important funding source for their ordinary activities is a local philanthropic foundation (Compagnia di San Paolo) in agreement with the City of Turin. The Neighborhood Houses Network has an established agreement of cooperation with the City Administration, and they rely on a combination of public and private funding. See also Patti, Polyak (2017), Roman (2014) and: <https://encc.eu/network/members/rete-delle-case-del-quartiere>; <http://www.retecasedelquartiere.org/>

deeper involvement of urban actors—citizens and civil society, but also private actors and knowledge institutions—in the care and regeneration of urban commons. The aim is to encourage and sustain new collaborative forms of dialogue with civil society related to the management of public goods and the provision of collective services.

In 2017, the City of Turin undertook a project entitled *AxTO - Azioni per le periferie torinesi*,⁵ which sought to implement an integrated set of public interventions addressing the fragility of Turin's periphery linked to the economic crisis and the lack of resources. The AxTO project has been selected in the framework of the call for the regeneration of urban peripheries, issued by the Presidency of the Italian Council of Ministers. So far, AxTO has implemented 44 different actions (public works, services, socio-cultural initiatives).

The Turin social innovation ecosystem is represented in the *Torino Social Impact* platform,⁶ which was activated in 2017 within the European project *BoostINNO - Boosting Social Innovation* (financed by URBACT). It has an open structure for the aggregation and convergence of stakeholders in order to promote social impact while tackling in the most compelling urban challenges diversified manner. The long-term objective is to make Turin into an ecosystem for entrepreneurship and investments with a social impact and high technological level. It aims to support the growth of companies able to respond to emerging social needs in different fields and transform innovative ideas into services, products, and solutions able to create both economic and social value. Among its objectives is the development of a more collaborative, inclusive and sustainable economy.

Ultimately, in 2019 the social services of the City underwent a substantial reorganization, which has included the creation of new Social Inclusion Poles (*Poli di inclusione sociale*). In these new structures, various services from the third sector and the City administration will be integrated to better anticipate needs and provide support and integrated intervention for social inclusion.

This CO-CITY experiment stems from and builds on the ecosystem of policies, projects and actors that was developed in more than 20 years in the field of urban regeneration in Turin.

⁵ <https://www.axto.it/>

⁶ <https://www.torinosocialimpact.it/>

3. The CO-CITY project



Photo 2. The red chairs prepared for the kickoff event of Cumiana15 and the postcard of the communication campaign with the building before rehabilitation.



Photo 3. A community lunch in the street of the Barriera di Milano neighborhood.

The CO-CITY project is included among the 18 winners of the first *UIA - Urban innovative Action* call in 2016, which resulted in a 4.1 million euro grant from the European Commission. CO-CITY takes as its starting point the juridical framework provided by the *Regulation on collaboration between citizens and the City for the care, shared management and regeneration of urban commons* approved in 2016, and adopts the *Pacts of collaboration* between citizens' organisations and the City administration as a tool to foster and cultivate mutual trust between local communities and local institutions.

The project addresses the challenge of regenerating various urban neighborhoods and fighting social exclusion. In order to do so, it aims at transforming abandoned buildings, vacant land, and underused public spaces into *urban commons*: spaces co-managed by the community and the City administration. The commons are entrusted to the care and management of the citizens through forms of active participation, supported by the Neighbourhood Houses. The aim is to promote social mixing, community cohesion, social enterprise development and job creation so as to contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

The CO-CITY project has been carried out by the City of Turin in partnership with the University of Turin (Computer Science Dept. and Law Dept.), the Italian National Association of Municipalities (ANCI) and the Cascina Roccafranca Foundation as the leader of the Neighborhood Houses Network.

The first step of the project was the public call launched in May 2017, which aimed at collecting proposals from citizens' organisations for pacts of collaboration, therefore communicating with target beneficiaries and adopting a participative approach. This public call laid down the conditions for the submission of proposals allowed in the co-design phase, which was meant to define and finalize the contents and activities of the pacts of collaboration.

Such a legal device was forged in order to facilitate the resolution of local communities' controversies and to admit proposals from city inhabitants without requiring a particular level of expertise, meaning accepting informal groups even if they were not assembled in formal organizations. Thanks to the public call framework, the City has involved urban communities starting from the initial phase of the regeneration process.

The proposals were to comply with one of the four types of measures encompassed by the CO-CITY project:

A. Peripheries and urban cultures. For proposals concerning the regeneration processes of abandoned buildings selected by the City;

B. Underutilized infrastructure for public services. For proposals intended to enhance and bring value to the use of urban infrastructure—such as public facilities, buildings, and libraries selected by the City—which have an idle capacity in terms of usage possibilities;

B. Schools. For the enhancement of the use of school/educational facilities outside of school hours as a proper civic space for local communities;

C. Care for public spaces. For care and co-management interventions of community gardens, green areas and other open spaces at risk of decay or under-utilization.

The City appointed a committee for the evaluation of the proposals for collaboration put forward by the various stakeholders coming from the various City departments relevant to the topics of the projects presented. The evaluation aimed to determine which proposals would have access to the co-design phase on the basis of the following criteria:

- positive impact on the socio-territorial conditions of the neighbourhood;
- ability to work in synergy and integrate other initiatives that are not exclusively local in nature;
- ability to generate working opportunities and foster active inclusion;
- financial and economic feasibility and sustainability;
- inclusiveness of the governance model;
- innovation and ability to develop generative social processes;
- replicability of the project.

The launch of the public call received a high response rate from the citizens' organisations: 124 proposals were received from all over the city, and 65 were admitted to the co-design phase, being selected based on the above mentioned criteria.

The co-design phase is a key aspect of the implementation of the CO-CITY project. Its goal is to define and finalise the content of the pacts of collaboration between the City and the proponents. It permits delving deeper into the proposals, bringing about changes that allow them to respond to the project's purposes and to fine-tune their economic and technical feasibility. This has represented the most crucial and longest phase of the project, given that it started in February 2018. Following the approval of the proposals, the co-design phase also involved the proponents, public officers, Neighbourhood Houses and whichever other organisations or stakeholders had an interest in contributing to the projects.

As a result, 46 proposals have been positively incorporated in the co-design phase and the pacts of collaboration were defined and signed, outlining the objectives of the collaboration, the scope of the activities, the spatial interventions, the roles of the partners, public works or equipment provided by the City, and the duration, governance mechanisms, responsibilities, insurance and liabilities. The City made investments in terms of public works regarding building refurbishment, spatial renovation and equipment provision, wherever it could be a key enabling factor for the co-management and co-production of innovative services.⁷

The project's implementation has been accompanied by a communications campaign both on social networks and in the streets, with posters prominently displaying portraits of people that have participated in the pacts of collaboration, with the claim "I take care of the city."⁸

The CO-CITY project and its financing were officially concluded in February 2020, although the process for the realization of its objectives is still ongoing and the co-management phase of the pacts of collaboration is in progress.

3. PEOPLE AND PLACES

The issues addressed by the signed pacts of collaborations can broadly be divided into six main topics:

1. *care for green areas and public space*: improvement of the quality of urban green areas with the adoption, restoration and maintenance of small gardens, playgrounds, portions of urban vegetation in public spaces, squares, streets, etc.;
2. *sports in public places*: promotion of sport and outdoor physical activities, especially for young people in marginalised areas;
3. *arts, culture, creativity*: improvement of the quality of urban areas through the use of creative tools, cultural installations and creative placemaking;
4. *socio-cultural animation*: stimulation of the integration and the participation of individuals to encourage development and integration of the local social life;



Photo 4. The arrangement of a flower bed in Don Albera square, in the Porta Palazzo neighbourhood.

⁷ The project investment in public works and equipment provision is 2.2 M Euro. Moreover, the City administration provides the payment of utilities (electric, water supply, and heating) for the whole duration of the pacts. Each pact is meant to be self-sustainable; investments in works and equipment alongside all the efforts put toward community

building, facilitation, mutual learning and training have to be considered during their start-up phase.

⁸ The photographer Laura Cantarella was in charge of the photographic campaign. The final exhibition, to take place in February-March 2020, unfortunately has been cancelled due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

5. *community welfare services*: provision of services and support to disadvantaged people such as the elderly, disabled, homeless and unprivileged groups;
6. *youth protagonism*: participation and socialisation opportunities for young people.



Photo 5. An evening event in the Neighborhood House of San Salvario.

The level of complexity, both in terms of the physical intervention necessary and of the activities proposed, has varied greatly among the proposals. One of the most challenging has been that regarding the complete refurbishment of a small, abandoned industrial plant (approximately 600 square meters in side), in the Borgo San Paolo neighborhood. The budget allocated for this undertaking was insufficient for both the initially designed renovation and the safety-guarantee needed for the rest of the building; therefore, it has been transformed into a “covered square” with a basement of the same size that has been refurbished yet still remains inaccessible due to safety concerns. This has also implied a redefinition of the activities initially presented by proponents, which had to be readapted and reconsidered together with the public administration during the co-design process that lasted over two years and which also witnessed a change in the initial group of proponents. The activities regulated by the pacts of collaboration include a mix of sports and cultural and community events and initiatives. The space will also be made accessible as a venue for other proposals from other local organizations, which can encompass a wide range of activities. The name of this space is *Cumiana15*.

The pacts also had different features, especially in the types of the actors involved and the partnerships created. *BeeOzanam*,⁹ a community hub located in a former industrial site in the Borgo Vittoria neighborhood, is founded on a wide and diverse partnership of structured social cooperatives and associations already active in the area. Their project has a multi-purpose aim, forming a bridge between the production of welfare services for the community, cultural innovation, and environmental sustainability. Additionally, a community garden has been created on the rooftop.

Falklab, located in the northern neighborhood of Falchera, stemmed from voluntary groups and associations mainly composed of teenagers that in the last years have been committed to the organisation of activities for young people living in this peripheral area.¹⁰ The former canteen of a school has been at the core of their after-school activities and summer camps, which has been transformed into a meeting place for people to gather together to play music or engage in other artistic activities and pursuits. With the CO-CITY project, this small building has been renovated and provided with energy efficient solutions. The pact of collaboration guiding this project

⁹ <https://www.beeozanam.com/>

¹⁰ <http://t.ly/81il>

has defined a new governance model, together with the District administration, local schools and the local public library.

Eleven different pacts of collaboration have been signed between community groups, the City administration and the City's schools administration to renovate school courtyards, provide equipment and regulate activities outside of school hours that are open to the rest of the neighborhood.



Photo 6. Painting works in The Hood, a basketball court and community place.

The care for green spaces lies at the core of the majority of the pacts of collaboration that have been signed: central and peripheral areas have witnessed the involvement of associations and informal groups committed to improving the quality of urban settings, enhancing local resilience and promoting sustainable lifestyles, thereby improving both the health and well-being of urban residents. Moreover, some pacts have focused on recreational and athletic activities in fragile and poor urban neighbourhoods, such as the renovation of a basketball court promoted by a youth association deeply rooted in the neighbourhood. The renovation has been accompanied by a street art intervention¹¹, which has helped to redefine the social perception of a deprived neighbourhood by giving a new character to the area. They decided to call it *The Hood*, as a tribute to the hip-hop urban culture.



Photo 7. Vegetable gardens maintenance begins.

Not far from *The Hood*, in the *Centro Interculturale* — a cultural hub managed by the City — a pact of collaboration with local NGOs is promoting intercultural dialogue, and under the arcades of a building that hosts associations and public services, another pact regulates street art interventions, maintenance and associated activities for homeless people.

Finally, the CO-CITY project has also supported the creation of the *Attrezzoteca*, a Library of Tools that allows for the free lending of tools for those people who operates within the pacts of collaboration. This Library of Tools is managed by four different Neighbourhood Houses so that the tools (from battery-powered lawn mowers to video systems, from portable gazebos to cargo bikes, etc.) are stored in different locations all over the city.

¹¹ <https://vimeo.com/370830717>

5. KEY CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The self-reinforcing cycle of socio-spatial polarization (i.e. segregation, marginalization, and exclusion of citizens from citizenship and participation, both physically and socially) is the issue identified by the CO-CITY project and addressed by its actions. The urban socio-spatial polarization has several interconnected dimensions that reciprocally and cyclically affect and reinforce each other:

1. local institutions: the reduction of public expenditure leads to the deterioration of living conditions. This feeds mistrust in local institutions that are decreasingly capable of responding to the needs of local communities through their welfare services provision;
2. spatial polarization: poverty produces deprived neighborhoods, which in turn exacerbate poverty. One visible sign is the presence of many derelict buildings. Around 6% of the about 1,600 buildings and about 1M sqm of land owned by the City are unused or underused and have no prospect of economic exploitation;
3. social polarization: poverty is linked to citizens' indifference, their lack of participation in civic life, engagement, sense of empowerment, and lack of interest and attention for urban public spaces;
4. social and spatial peripheries do not always coincide and poverty is exacerbated by a situation of social fragility and degradation.

Poverty is included in the definition of *lack of capacity*, which is not strictly related to the lack of an income. The quality of the urban space does not depend only on the amount of infrastructure and number of services, but on the relationships established between the material city and the people who live in it and on the concrete opportunities that the city offers to the people about "living" the city.

In order to address these challenges, the project encourages the generation of different changes both in the technical/administrative and relational/participative spheres, which are mutually reinforcing and interrelated:

1. *legal/administrative dimension*: the production of a new paradigm of collaborative administration based on increased mutual trust between citizens and the urban authority. Starting from the adoption of the Regulation on urban commons, a new normative basis has been developed that affects the functions and attitudes of the public officials in relation to the urban commons and the active citizens' requests and instances. This does, in turn, have an impact on the exchange, cooperation and definition of the roles of the participants in the shared care of urban spaces. What is particularly innovative is the administration's effort to build a *lean* infrastructure within the City's bureaucracy that is responsible for coordinating the efforts of different departments in order to encourage them to work in synergy on the collaborative proposals;

2. *polycentric urban welfare*: the spatial and physical polarization is addressed with the investments for the requalification of the urban assets and resources that will generate the polycentric and collaborative ecosystems that will enable collective action. This will be obtained thanks to the development and establishment of co-management projects in urban commons so as to test collaborative and innovative forms of polycentric “commons-based” urban welfare. This investment in the urban commons is a lever for addressing key urban governance issues and targeting vulnerable communities in the city;
3. *generative communities*: citizens’ organisations are identified, activated and enabled to develop ideas into sustainable social innovation practices, pilot projects and services to be developed in urban commons. Their knowledge, relations, resources, energies and skills are channeled for the creation of “generative communities” for the co-production of urban welfare services and the co-creation of innovative solutions to urban challenges;
4. *social inclusion*: a specific focus on the inclusion of those citizens in need as agents of change within the different actions of the project has also been considered. As such, they are integrated and involved in the projects activated in the urban commons. This is related to the city-structured social services in view of their complementarity with the urban regeneration policies: the protection and preservation of public spaces and local services being seen as urban common goods have had direct, positive implications for social inclusion.

The CO-CITY project first launched this innovative experiment by relying on the idea of distinguishing urban commons from other public goods and assets, and that this should be a value worth developing and disseminating. However, this required a strong learning effort from all of the involved stakeholders and parties, which sometimes led to misunderstandings, bottlenecks and extensive efforts to communicate new ideas and concepts.

A general accomplishment of the project that can be identified is the facilitation of the emergence and consolidation of new city makers and their networks that have started a collective learning process by understanding their capability to be engaged in urban social change. The preliminary effects can be also seen in the emerging changes in attitude of the public administration and the public officers that are starting to adopt and maximize a multisectoral approach to face the urban challenges that have transcended the traditional sectoral boundaries. In doing so, this project has fostered accountability across the various sectors of the public administration and also encouraged broader participation in the realization and governance of the pacts of collaboration. It is also possible to identify the efforts that the single public officers are putting towards the creation of partnerships with the citizens within the limits of their responsibilities, roles and competences. Yet, sometimes this perception of the citizens

seems to be compromised by the difficulty in identifying—among the various City departments—who is the real partner in the dialogue with them for the realization of the activities, thus requiring additional partnering efforts from both sides.

Many shortcomings have been evident during the implementation of the CO-CITY project, starting from the timing: the co-design phase and the approval of the pacts of collaboration have been a long and burdensome process, both for public officers and citizens' organisations. This situation can be attributed to a combination of controllable and uncontrollable factors. On one side, there is the lengthy nature of the bureaucratic procedures that has been detrimental given the creation of delays in carrying out the project's activities. On the other side, the project has been testing new procedures and processes that still need time for standardization and assessment in order to provide systemic solutions and changes. Nevertheless, according to the surveys conducted within the project's evaluation framework, the majority of both the public officers and the active citizens involved in the project implementation have positively considered the enabling role of CO-CITY¹² as a way to innovate policies and practices, unlocking the potential of urban communities.

¹² The CO-CITY project has been evaluated using the Theory of Change approach, in doing so describing how the intervention contributed to bringing about long-term changes. Both the active citizens and the public officers involved in the project have been administered questionnaires that registered

their positive perception of the enabling role of the project. See: http://www.comune.torino.it/benicomuni/bm-doc/d-2-3-2_final-evaluation_report.pdf

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