



The Urban Lab of Europe!

CASE STUDY

REPORT

Democratic Transitions for All

PROJECT

Co-City - The collaborative management of urban commons to counteract poverty and socio-spatial polarisation (Closed)

Turin, Italy

TOPIC

Urban poverty

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Co-City Turin, Italy

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1. What has the project been about?

The project's context

Turin's Co-City was an innovative project that promoted the shared management of urban commons to tackle poverty. One of the most visible signs of Turin's decline was its number of abandoned buildings and derelict land, most of them the product of the city's industrial past. Approximately 6.5% of about 1,600 buildings owned by the city are unused or underused. There are also many derelict sites.

A wide range of actions have been put in place by the city to combat social exclusion, but the shortage of resources made it hard to respond to the high demand for welfare services. Turin has also supported the creation of social enterprises by creating one of the most vibrant urban contexts for innovative entrepreneurship. However, people in poorer neighbourhoods were excluded from these forms of urban innovation. This was reflected in a growing lack of trust towards local institutions.

The project's goals and vision

Co-City's main aim was to regenerate deprived neighbourhoods located in different areas of the city, where 14% of people live in relative poverty and which, at 13%, suffer from a relatively high unemployment rate. Co-City aimed to re-engage local communities using the regeneration of the urban commons as a way to promote active citizenship and rebuild trust with the city. By urban commons, the city refers to spaces or buildings that are held 'in common' and are open to all, whether this is for sport, gardening, recreation, playgrounds, or other uses.

By the start of 2023, they had signed 61 pacts of collaboration agreements with civil society organisations across the eight targeted neighbourhoods. 50 of these agreements were signed during the lifetime of the Co-City project. The majority of these were for regenerating land as it has proved more difficult to renovate dilapidated buildings because of issues around cost, insurance, and liability. But several buildings have been the object of pacts of collaboration.

The links to Just Transitions

Co-city focuses on urban poverty and is rich in ideas on how to make Just Transitions inclusive. The project sought to build the capacity of local communities to engage with the city through a policy of shared commons, which when harnessed for socially and environmentally beneficial use can serve to increase wellbeing. The pact of collaboration involves a formal & legal agreement between an organisation, such as a local association, and the city. This approach could act as a template for future collaboration around other policy fields including those around climate change.

The 'pacts of collaboration' facilitated the policy of creating 'Casa del Quartiere' or 'neighbourhood houses' in disadvantaged areas of the city. The first was Cascina Roccafranca in Mirafiori North, which was supported by a local foundation. From 2008, there was a formal policy for neighbourhood houses that are managed by local associations and provide a wide range of services, although each one is different.

Since 2008 seven more community houses have been added. There is now the potential for a new one in a former foundry building that has been partially refurbished through the Co-City project. Outreach workers in the eight

existing neighbourhood houses provided support to civil society project proposers during the proposal and the feasibility phase.

2. What solutions for Democratic Transitions have been found?

Fostering citizen involvement and ensuring inclusiveness by Casas de Quartieri

Civil society organisations were invited to bid in an open process. They were able to receive support with writing applications from outreach workers at the existing neighbourhood houses, the Casas de Quartieri. The Casas del Quartieri are funded by the city as well as by other sources and provide a range of community services both in the buildings and through outreach. Typical services include childcare, a canteen, adult education courses, and vocational training.

The selection of neighbourhood commons projects for Co-city was conducted by the city. After the call for expressions of interest was published, a total of 135 applications were received to renovate an urban commons asset (either a site or a building). Most of these applications came from existing community associations in the city but it was also open to new organisations that were not formally constituted. There has been no analysis of the membership of organisations, but anecdotally there are roughly equal numbers of men and women. No data is available on ethnic minority participation or participation by young people or people with disabilities. The goal of the organisations applying was to bring back into use and co-manage a space or a building.

Scoring model for applications

The scoring model applied by the city gave preference to projects that mobilised the local community and produced an integrative and inclusive effect. In terms of eligibility, the sites selected had to be located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The applications were scored by a city-based team using eight criteria, several of which have a strong inclusion focus. For example, one criterion was the ability of the plan for the site to foster active inclusion. Another was on inclusive governance and the contribution to the neighbourhood's 'positive socio-territorial condition'. Other criteria focused on the ability to generate work in the local community, the ability to integrate people, and the ability to develop regenerative social processes. Approximately half of the applications were accepted into the feasibility or codesign phase by the city's assessment team. Once selected the project would go into the co-design phase.

Pacts of collaboration for co-creation with local community organisations

Project delivery relied on 'pacts of collaboration', which were drawn up during the co-design/feasibility phase in which the selected local community organisations would work with officials from the city to draw up a plan for the space or building. This co-design phase allowed the feasibility of the proposal to be assessed, enabled further work to refine the plan and risks and assumptions to be assessed. Normally, there are about six meetings between the city and the association promoting each project over several months. For building projects, where, according to local activist architects, things are much more complex, it took longer to agree the pact with the community organisations. One example is Beeozanam (see photo below), where the proposal was to convert roughly half the building by installing a new roof garden and converting the building underneath to be an art space and coworking space. Sites involving buildings involve much greater complexity and cost than the simpler land-based sites and therefore more meetings are needed between associations, experts such as architects, and the city authority, which takes longer.

The Turin Regulation that enables the drawing-up of 'Pacts of Collaboration' was inspired by what had happened in Bologna where the model had previously been tested. The pact governs the forms of collaboration among citizens and administration for the care, shared management, and regeneration of a site, either as requested by city inhabitants or responding to an invitation by the city.

There were several differences between the Turin version of pacts of collaboration and the original Bologna approach. These allowed the co-management to be either short-term or long-term, the regeneration can be temporary or permanent, and the city can take financial responsibility for realising operations provided for by the pacts of collaboration as well as pay for specific aspects such as utility bills and maintenance expenses. The increased flexibility made the negotiations between civil society organisations representing the community and

the city officials more productive. As a result, it was possible to approve more pacts and ultimately for them to be more sustainable in terms of finance and co-management.

New Commons

The project sought to build trust both within the communities where the urban commons - the abandoned and derelict land sites and buildings - would be developed and between the community organisations representing citizens and the city's officers.

Each project is based around a site. Typical new uses for community land sites are gardens, sports facilities, and playgrounds. The buildings that have been revitalised have a range of uses, including: an art display area, a wellness community health facility, a community garden with a cafe on the roof and in the future other uses will include residential units, although this will depend on further funding.

The makers

According to project evaluation the two greatest changes are in developing 'makers' in the community who have, through the project, experienced participative co-design and implementation processes, and have become networked with each other. The networking may be within one project or with maker counterparts from another project. Thanks to Co-city, these participants came to realise their capacity to engage with the processes of urban change. The Co-City project established this new capability, which has created additional energy for subsequent action if someone gets involved in a subsequent site improvement operation or project proposal. Although it has yet to be tested, this greater capability in the community can serve as a basis for future action on Just Transitions.

Officials became more open to collaborative governance

Both civil society actors and city officials found the process challenging. For civil society actors, it was routine to blame the council and to campaign for change. Having to sit down with council officials and plan the next steps was a new experience for many. City officials also found it difficult to adapt to their new relationship with community organisations. For Just Transitions, it shows that developing capacity is best organised through practical projects in the community. These can help to build practical skills and capabilities.

As a result of the project, civil servants have experienced change and have started to use a more integrated multi-sectoral, multi-departmental approach that works across traditional sectoral boundaries. According to the project's final evaluation^[1], the mindset of officials has also changed as a result of the community engagement processes and the way that they have worked with other departments. Officials have become more open to these new ways of working with other departments and consulting with the community. Over 300 officials were trained to work on the pacts of collaboration and were subsequently involved in negotiating pacts with community organisations.

[1] http://www.comune.torino.it/benicomuni/bm~doc/d2-3-2_final-evaluation_framework.pdf and http://www.comune.torino.it/benicomuni/bm~doc/d-2-3-2_final-evaluation_report.pdf

3. What can cities learn from the Co-Cities governance?

Keys to success

- The project trained civil servants prior to engaging with community organisations. This learning effect helped the co-design process to succeed despite misunderstandings, setbacks, and extensive efforts to communicate new ideas and concepts.
- The training also helped to convince civil servants in the public administration about the merits of promoting new uses for abandoned urban commons.
- Institutionalise the co-design / innovation process. The city created an integrated administrative structure, cutting across its own policy silos and strengthening the interplay between central city administrative offices, the city's district offices, and neighbourhood houses, to ensure an integrated approach towards the creation of urban commons.
- The inclusion of co-design processes in the project design, made it possible to address feasibility issues in the pacts of collaboration by fine-tuning and resolving them before they became a problem. The co-design process enabled better

drafting and management of the pact of collaboration, which consequently helped empower local organisations engaged in neighbourhood revitalization.

- The city and the civic actors share decision-making powers, identify reciprocal legal responsibilities, and distribute economic benefits and public value produced by the urban regeneration processes.
 - The project helped to build mutual trust and social inclusion on a large scale. City officials and civil servants from 24 different city departments (around 90 officers) and social actors (more than 214 NGOs) were involved in the project's implementation and evaluated positively the enabling role of Co-City in catalysing innovation in policies and practices delivering sustainable urban development.
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4. Scaling up and replication potential

The results achieved by the Co-City project are relevant for other cities wishing to develop common spaces and buildings. Although each member state has its own regulatory framework, which cities must take into account when establishing new local laws or ordinance.

The Co-City Project built on the Commons approach developed by Bologna. Nearly all cities in Europe have sites and buildings that could be brought back into community use with an approach that combines the energy of community-based organisations and the legal and financial framework provided by different departments in the city administration.

Turin succeeded in leading an 18-month Urbact transfer mechanism with Cluj Napoca, Gdansk, and Budapest starting in 2020 and completed in 2022. Other cities participated as observers, including: Ljubljana (Slovenia), Jelgava (Latvia), Bansko (Bulgaria), Bergamo (Italy), Koper (Slovenia), Alexandroupolis (Greece) Igualada (Spain), Sosnowiec (Poland) Split (Croatia), Boulogne-Sur-Mer (France) Osijek (Croatia) and Rome (Italy). Of the three partner cities, Gdansk and Budapest succeeded in transferring the methodology to their cities. Cluj was not so successful. The evaluation of the five URBACT transfer mechanism networks will be completed in 2023.

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