

Annex 1 - Paper

The making of the collaborative city Social innovation and design for city making

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The following text is an up-dated version of an initial document (September 2017). This Draft 3 has been written on the basis of formal and informal discussions and seminars on this topic that took place inside DESIS Network, in the period October 2017- March 2018. This text will be progressively up-dated and up-graded following the evolution of the whole Thematic Cluster project.

Cities can be seen and described by different points of view. The most frequently adopted has been the bird's-eye view: the city observed from the high and from outside. The city you can see in this way is what, traditionally, has been the city of the planners.

But a city can be seen and described from inside too. That is, as it is seen by who lives in it: the city of people and communities. And the city made of places, roads and square, but also of products, services and communication. This city of people and communities is, or should be, the city of design.

There are good reasons to say that this second point of view has become, and is becoming, more and more important. Of course, it doesn't substitute, the other one. But for sure, it offers new insights and opens new possibilities for action. In fact, it introduces us to a city-making process moving from the citizens and the place where they live and the actions they do. An urban planning done by triggering and coordinating several self-standing projects that become, by all means, *city-making projects*: initiatives with different aims and scale that, interacting with their context and with other projects, impact on the whole city functioning and identity.

City making projects can move in different directions. The main stream ones are producing more and more unsustainable cities, transforming in marketable goods of everything in them had been public and common. But, *driven by social innovation*, other projects move in the opposite direction and, considered as a whole, they tell us that social innovation, and the related city-making projects, can highly contribute in regenerating the urban fabric.

The paper is organized in two parts: the first one introduces the city making processes motivations and characters. The second one presents the lessons we can learn from social innovation in the city and, on this basis, it outlines the emerging *Scenario of the Collaborative City*.

City-making processes

Historically, cities have emerged from the interaction between two structurally correlated systems: the physical one (the city as a collection of buildings, products and infrastructure) and the social one (the city as a mesh of encounters, conversations, projects and social forms). In the past, both the physical and the social cities evolved slowly, interacting and

mutually influencing each other: at times one of the two poles might look more dynamic and carry the other forward but, in average, the evolution of one could not be separated from that of the other.

Given that, up to few years ago, the theory and the practice of city planning focused their attention on the physical city. The idea was that the social one (including in this term the city economic and cultural components) would have adapted to the physical city changes, regenerating itself in a quasi-natural fashion. For centuries this way of doing seemed to work. However, something happened in the last century that forces us to look at cities in a different way. In particular, in the past decades, the speed and dimension of the changes broke with that age-old mechanism of quasi-natural mutual adaptation, producing an unprecedented crisis. Facing all that, the role of the social city has been progressively recognized and considered in the city planning processes.

In parallel to that, in this fast changing world, given the turbulence and the difficulty to foresee the future, the traditional long term planning appears too rigid and it has been progressively substituted by forms of planning implemented via a series of light, flexible, quickly implementable projects involving both the physical and the social side of the city: the city-making projects.

The result is a *planning by projects* in which several self-standing initiatives, the *city-making projects*, interact being loosely coordinated by horizontal *framework projects*. This way of doing permits to adopt an experimental and dialogic approach in urban planning. That is, prototyping innovative solutions and reacting in a flexible way to the changes that, in the meanwhile, will take place in the society and in the city.

City-making criteria. At the core of the planning by projects proposal there is the notion of city-making projects. This expression stands for result-oriented initiatives that, aiming at different goals and operating at different scales, impact on the whole city functionalities and identity. Their goals nature can be mainly physical (as a square or park), or social (as a program for elderly care or for migrant inclusion), or economic (as commercial or manufacturing activities), or cultural (as schools, theatres, festivals). Or, as it usually happens, a blend of all these dimensions. Their potentiality as city-making agents can be evaluated using different criteria, such as:

- *Multidimensionality.* How a project blends its physical, social, economic, cultural dimensions.

When all the different dimensions are well developed, the project itself becomes, at its own scale, a building block in the city making process (for instance: a neighbourhood garden can be conceived from the beginning as a place where different communities meet, a social enterprise of gardeners works, and kids have lessons on plants and gardening).

- *Interconnection.* How a project is connected with other projects and with a neighbourhood and/or the city in general.

When different projects collaborate and synergize, being rooted in a place, the system they generate becomes a larger building component of the city making process (for instance: different projects related to a garden, to migrant inclusion and to renewing school programs can be connected and coordinated by a framework project at the neighbourhood scale).

- *Openness.* How a project makes possible unforeseen events and initiatives to happen.

When the project leaves space to activities that are not, strictly speaking, included in its main goal, it contributes to the (social, cultural, and economic) dynamism of the city and, therefore, to its city-making processes (for instance: a neighbourhood garden is conceived – also- as a platform permitting and supporting different social and socioeconomic activities from open air schools, to spaces for cultural events).

- *Heritage*, What a temporary project leaves to the city after its end.

This heritage could be in continuity with the project original aims or not. This possibility to evolve in new, and initially unforeseen, initiatives can be seen as a special form of openness, contributing in time to the city dynamism (for instance, a neighbourhood festival, can create the interests and the energy to transform an empty lot in a garden, and/or its organiser can create a social enterprise to start and manage similar initiatives in other neighbourhoods).

It can be noted that these characters, and in particular the last two (openness and heritage), indicate also the project infrastructuring role. That is, its contribution to the creation of the physical, social, cultural and economic conditions that permit to other projects and activities to emerge and to thrive. Of course, every project, taking place in a city, presents a certain degree of multidimensionality, interconnection, openness and heritage. And, therefore, in some ways, every project can be considered as a city-maker. But it can do that with *different degrees* of intensity and bringing the city evolution in *different directions*.

The Collaborative city

Today, dominant ideas and economic forces tend to orient city-making projects towards initiatives resulting in reduction of public spaces; displacement of poor, middle class, small businesses outside the city; self-segregation of the rich in protected zones; and historical neighbourhoods transformed in tourist attraction and theme parks. The main driver of these processes is the idea of city-as-a-commodity. And its consequent commodification, intended as the transformation in marketable goods of everything in the city has been public and common.

But city-making projects can also move in the opposite direction. That is: to solve practical problems and, at the same time, to improve the physical environment and regenerate the social fabric and the urban commons. In other terms, city-making projects can be conceived and developed to revitalise a neighbourhood, integrate migrants and new comers in the social fabric, reintroduce farms and production activities in the urban contexts, and imagine and implement new economic models. Even though this direction is not the main one, several cases of *social innovation* show that it is viable. In other words, they tell us how city-making projects can become agents of city regeneration strategies.

Social innovation, lessons learnt. More than ten years of experiences in the field of social innovation, and design for social innovation, show us several initiatives capable to regenerate the urban fabric and the cities as a whole. These experiences tell us something meaningful on three different levels: (1) *design approach*: how to look at the city (to promote and support city making projects); (2) *design guidelines*: how to act (to orient the projects towards sustainability); (3) *emerging scenario*: a vision and the way to implement it (to give different projects a common narrative).

(1) *Design approach.*

- *The city seen, and built, from inside.* The city made by citizens, and by their projects

Cities can be seen and described by different points of view. Social innovation teach us to see it, and operate in it, from inside. That is, as it is perceived, and used and transformed, by who lives it: the city of people and communities. The city made of places, roads, square, products and infrastructures, and, the more and more, of services and communication.

- *The city as an environment where a variety of projects thrives.* The city as enabling ecosystem

Cities can be seen as meshes of projects of different nature and scale: from the individual life projects, to the community's ones, to the one driven by coalitions including different institutional actors. The environment in which these projects live can be more or less favourable. It comes that to regenerate the city, enabling ecosystems must be realized.

- *Citizens and their different ways to be active.* The city as ecosystem for a variety of active citizens.

Citizens are not city-users, but also co-designers and co-producers. The way they can and will do it can be quite diverse (on the base of different factors, first of all the maturity of the social innovation in which they are involved): from social inventors to participants to new forms of transformative normality. And with different roles: from social activism to active participants. This implies different demands in terms of required enabling systems.

(2) Design guidelines.

- *Collaborating: producing results and social values.*

Moving in this direction means to regenerate the city by developing collaborative projects. That is, by projects driven by collaboration between citizens, and between them and other social actors (as public administration, companies, non profit enterprises, associations, universities). It implies different forms of collaborations (blending horizontal and vertical collaborations), different motivations (blending economic and cultural motivations), and different positions in the innovation trajectory (from initial activism to different forms of normality).

Collaborating (i.e. producing at the same time practical results and social value) gives life to unprecedented economic and organizational models. At the same time, and for the same reasons, collaborating is a strategy to build the power for systemic changes and to produce and regenerate social commons.

- *Bridging: connecting diversities.*

Moving in this direction means to cultivate and connect diversities. That is, to develop projects capable to bridge elderly and young people; residents and migrants; rich and poor. And capable to integrate working and living spaces (as: residences, schools, offices, factories and workshops, farming and gardening, commerce, entertainment, sport, meeting spaces) creating more diverse and dynamic activities.

Bridging (i.e. connecting diversities) is an antidote to the on-going main trend towards gentrification, segregation and creation of communication bubbles. And, in positive, it is a way to improve the social and environmental resilience of the city.

- *Commoning: weaving people and places.*

Moving in this direction means creating spaces cared by communities. That is, to produce "third spaces", between the private and the public ones. It also means regenerate social commons, as mutual trust, empathy, collaboration and shared knowledge and expertise. All of them can be the result of renewed traditions, or of unprecedented collaborative projects. *Commoning* (i.e. the process of building commons) is antidote to main trends of city commodification and marketization. It implies to keep in account the different nature of commons and of the commoning processes.

- *Democratizing: supporting active participation.*

Moving in this direction means to develop a project-centred democracy. That is, a environment where individuals and communities can develop at best their life projects: an enabling ecosystem that is *also* a democratic ecosystem where citizens can take decisions and to make them real.

Democratizing (i.e. the process of improving the participative ecosystem) is an antidote to the on-going crisis of participative democracy (and of democracy in general). It implies a power shift towards citizens and communities

(3) Emerging scenario. Connecting the different experiences of social innovation, and assuming the proposed approach and guidelines, what appears is a new scenario: *the Scenario of the Collaborative City*. This scenario can be described by four urban qualities corresponding to the four proposed guidelines (where the first of them, to the degree of collaboration, gives the name to the whole scenario because collaboration is the quality on which the whole scenario and the other qualities are based):

- The city of collaborative projects
- The city of connected diversities
- The city of commons
- The city of project-centred democracy

In short, the Scenario of the Collaborative City can be seen as

- *The city where collective intelligence thrives and becomes collective design capability*

The *scenario of the collaborative city* outlines a city generated and regenerated by collaborative projects, thanks to which diversities are cultivated and connected, and social commons are produced. To be implemented, this scenario asks for:

- developing a material and immaterial infrastructure (sustaining a multiplicity of projects)
- enabling both social activism and transformative normality (scaling and regenerating)
- supporting *and* orienting collaborative projects (keeping in account both qualitative and quantitative criteria)
- creating *designing coalitions* in which active citizens collaborate with other social actors (as public authority, companies, non profit enterprises, associations, universities) giving life to unprecedented economic and organizational models.