URBAN AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN SOCIAL INNOVATION

POLICY BRIEF

MARCH 2022

Introduction

The innovation of public administration is at the center of an intense debate in these times of transition. This is especially true at local and urban level, where public administrations are facing several challenges such as financial crisis, pandemic outbreak, digital transition, climate change and, more recently, the effects of the international crisis. To tackle these several challenges, new solutions and the involvement of several actors are needed.

On the one hand, the austerity policies that followed financial crisis in 2007 have seriously undermined the capacity of public administrations. According to IFEL (Institute for Local Economy and Finance), the cuts to the budget for personnel in Italian Municipalities correspond to 16,7% between 2010 and 2017. According to ANCI, Italian Municipalities have lost in ten years the 25% of their personnel (from 480.000 employees in 2011 to 360.000 employees in 2021). The employees are on average 54 years old. This lead to a lack of competences and to a growing difficulty for municipalities to give answers to the new emerging challenges.

On the other hand, the crucial role of Local and Urban Authorities in identifying innovative solutions in times of transition is at the center of an intense debate that emerged in the last decade. In 2016, the Urban Agenda for the EU was adopted in Amsterdam with the approval of all the EU Member States. Afterwards, the "New Leipzig Charter- The transformative power of cities for the common good" was adopted on 30 November 2020 under the German Presidency of the European Union. The New Leipzig Charter sets the stage for the involvement of Urban Authorities in the programming and implementation of development policies at European level. In the Charter it is stated that "We, the Ministers responsible for urban matters, agree upon the New Leipzig Charter that emphasizes the pursuit of the common good using the transformative power of cities. This includes general welfare, reliable public services of general interest as well as reducing and preventing new forms of social, economic, environmental and territorial inequalities". Moreover, the ministers highlight "the important support from the European Union for integrated urban development including Cohesion Policy and other EU policies".

According to the Charter, "Cities are also laboratories for new forms of problem-solving and test beds for social innovation". Urban and Local governments are asked to answer to new needs and to a growing demand for public services, public spaces and citizen participation. The pandemic outbreak in 2020 made these demands more urgent and more challenging.

This led many Municipalities to activate new public policies trying to compensate the lack of budget and personnel identifying and involving new energies existing in society. The Next Generation EU initiative as well as the new programming period of the Cohesion Policy are unique occasions to make resort to the innovative potential of Urban and Local Governments to implement new inclusive and innovative investments.

The activities of +Resilient Project focusing on Urban Public Authorities and Social Innovation

In the context of +Resilient project several activities were carried out that have focused on the innovation of public administration at a local and urban level. In the last decade, a large number of initiatives have been promoted by Italian Municipalities involving actors basing on the quadruple helix approach and providing new services to the cities in the fields of welfare, public space, education, mobility. In the framework of +Resilient project, ANCI made resort to the concept of "generativity" to define these policies. By "generativity" we mean the ability of local policies to generate social and economic value with "a strong orientation towards future generations; an explicit pro-social purpose; and concrete, empowering actions towards members and other stakeholders" (Magatti, 2017, Social Generativity: an introduction). Among the many actions carried out in this field, the following can be mentioned here:

- On February 2019 a study visit was carried out in Reggio Emilia to spread the knowledge of the Quartiere Bene Comune project. The municipality of Reggio Emilia is at the forefront in Italy in what regards public policies promoting employment and development via social and digital innovation. Reggio Emilia is a middle size city in the Emilia-Romagna Region. It has a strong industrial and productive tradition, alongside with a tradition of strong welfare state and vibrant political participation. Reggio Emilia is particularly famous for being a pioneer in establishing preschool services of excellent quality. The process of de-industrialization, alongside with the abolition of elected submunicipal districts pushed the City Government to find new solutions for local development and citizen participation. This led to the activation of many different projects of urban regeneration of abandoned industrial areas and citizens involvement in managing public buildings and spaces. Most of these projects are framed in the "Quartiere Bene Comune" (Neighborhood as a Commons) initiative. The study visit has been the occasion to see urban regeneration processes that led to the activation of economic opportunities related with digital innovation, start-up incubation, social inclusion and socio-educational service. A strong attention has been given to the role of 4 helix partnerships in these experiences, considering them as cases of SVRCs (Clusters with high social vocation and responsiveness) in order to compare them with other clusters visited in different contexts during previous study visits (rural and metropolitan areas).
- Several training materials were produced that focus on the role of public authorities in social innovation. On march, 14th 2021 a webinar was held on the topic "Public Authorities and Public Policy in Social Innovation". The webinar has been the occasion to present and discuss activities developed in the framework of +Resilient and that directly

involved Public Authorities. Study visits and pilot actions showed how Local and Regional Governments are key actors in supporting social innovation. The webinar focused on the lessons learned on the role of Public Authorities in promoting Social Innovation and Clusters with high social vocation and responsiveness.

- From 2020 to 2021, a Pilot Action was carried out by ANCI in Brindisi, that supported the Urban Innovation Lab activated by the Municipality of Brindisi. The pilot action has been focused on territorial analysis, policy analysis and production of data. The action has supported with knowledge and data the experience of Palazzo Guerrieri, a community hub realized by the Comune di Brindisi in a disused public historical palace. The City Government of Brindisi is using this space to enact a wide set of policies aimed at promoting innovation in different areas of intervention. Among them it is possible to mention: a public bid for offering support to start-ups, a public call for entrusting to associations urban parks and public buildings, a co-working, a high number of cultural events. ANCI produced data and information on the potential of social innovation for social and economic development in urban contexts. This information will be useful for the improvement of the support provided by ANCI to its member cities in designing and implementing policies for urban regeneration and social innovation.

Some recommendations: including Urban Innovation in development policies.

The many different results of the activities carried out by +Resilient project and focusing on the role of Local and Urban Public Authorities in Social Innovation can be summarized in 4 main dimensions. For each dimension some recommendations are proposed here, that can be taken into account in the programming of funds and initiatives at European, national and regional level. Making resort to the lessons learned, the recommendation is to include in the development programs tools and resources to activate local initiatives that present the following features:

1) Social dimension and networking

- Involving a significant and heterogeneous number of people and organizations in the processes (trying to avoid the exclusion of social groups with low social and cultural capital);
- Promoting the creation and/or strengthening of entrepreneurial groups in the area;
- Promoting the creation and/or strengthening of accessible and generative places in the territory.

2) Cultural dimension

- Promoting knowledge about context-specific problems and resources;
- Promoting a shared view of the problems, resources and strategies of the territory;
- Promoting a sense of positivity towards the concrete possibility of acting, individually and collectively, in/on the context.

3) Economic dimension

- Taking advantage of unused or underused public and/or private assets;
- Promoting useful tools for supporting new enterprises and start-ups with high social vocation and responsiveness;
- Promoting new perspectives and shared economic vocations for the territory;
- Connecting instruments, investments and new businesses also with the traditional vocations of the territory and with the internal market.

4) Political and administrative dimension

- Strengthening local public administrations with new personnel to compensate the cuts that they have undergone in the last decade;
- Producing policies and administrative procedures that are easily accessible and usable;
- Establishing administrative paths that entail participation and co-design involving different actors (both for the realization of projects and for the production of goods and services);
- Building a more symmetrical and trusting relationship between the Municipality and the local social organizations;
- Improving the capacity of Urban Governments in thinking and planning the local development of the territory.

Interreg
Mediterranean
EUROPEAN UNION
+RESILIENT

www.plus-resilient.interreg-med.eu
E-mail: plus-resilient@regione.veneto.it
Tel. +32 2 743 7013
Project co-financed by the European
Regional Development Fund

Project partners

Lead Partner

REGIONE DEL VENETO

AURORA
REGIONALNI KOORDINATOR ISTRE
COORDINATORE REGIONALE DELL'ISTRIA

Aix Marseille
université
Initiative d'excellence

Region
of East Macedonia & Thrace

rCDI
REDE DE COMPETÊNCIAS
PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO
E A INOVAÇÃO

CAMERA DI COMMERCIO
TREVISO - BELLUNO | DOLOMITI
bellezza e impresa

ITAINNOVA
INSTITUTO TECNOLÓGICO DE ARAGÓN

GFOSS
Open Technologies Alliance

Ajuntament de
Barcelona
Barcelona
Activa

GenTIC
Researching Gender
in the Network Society

UOC R&I

PRIZMA
Foundation for Improvement of
Employment Possibilities

anci

U.C.C.I.AL