

Is the future of the city the co-city? Insights from the Italian context

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Book of Abstracts

Symposium Delivering Urban Transformation through
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Table of contents

MONDAY 16:15-17:45

Session A: Public Spaces I.....	1
Research framework with user-centered approach for urban public spaces in Tokyo	1
The aftermath: co-production of social life in post-pandemic public space ...	3
Co-design as a creative way of improving the quality of public spaces	5
How co-design improves public space resilience: Lessons from two urban parks in the Atacama Desert.....	6
Session B: Digitalisation	7
A Room of our Own - How does the 'digital twin' produce a co-production space?	7
Digital platforms as (dis)enablers of urban co-production – Evidence from Bengaluru, India	9
Artificial-Human Knowledge Co-Production: Assumptions of AI Urbanism. Understanding urban planning in a mediatized world.....	11
The use of ICTs in the planning and design process of public spaces, a co-creation analysis	13
Developing 4D Musrenbang to support co-planning process through citizen participation in Indonesia.....	15
Session C: Governance I.....	17
Overcoming the limits of co-production in shrinking cities: the role of the 'brokers', NGOs and cultural tools	17
Urban Living Labs as an instrument for co-creating sustainable cities? – Reflections on Hamburg and Milan in the CLEVER Cities project.....	19
Reflections on co-creating design-led innovations for London's Recovery Programme.....	21
From car-centred to soft road user-centred urban planning: traffic planning in Norwegian cities and landscape architects' role in co-production	23
From Municipal to Municipalist Co-production: Rethinking the Role of the Local State in Greater Manchester	26

Session D: Informality I	30
Urban Change at the Margins of Society: Transformation of Deprived Neighbourhoods through Co-production of Communal Services – A Case of Seoul.	30
Gradients in participation: When can poor urban communities co-produce more effective sanitation solutions?	32
Social Enterprises and Collaborative Local Participation for the Development of Marginalized Communities in Egypt	34
Coproducting infrastructure and citizenship: Stories from Delhi	36
MONDAY 18:00-19:30	
Session A: Green Space.....	38
Co-designing Local Monitoring Plans in the CLEVER Cities Project: Nature- based Solutions for urban transformation in Hamburg, London and Milan .38	
Co-producing Green Infrastructure	40
Co-design and Co-creation process in Piraeus for Natural Based Solutions, within the framework of the Horizon 2020 project: ProGIreg	42
Co-creation of green infrastructure in degraded urban areas: dimensions of Multidisciplinary collaboration	44
Session B: Citizen-led Co-production	46
What makes a citizen’s park? A critical view on current participatory planning practices	46
Who are the 'citizens' in co-producing smart sustainable cities? An intersectional analysis of the Borgerkraft citizens' jury in Trondheim, Norway	48
Learning to Participate as a Citizen in Smart City Vienna.....	50
Session C: Knowledge Co-production I	52
“Art as a common resource?!” The Festival 7hoch2 as experimental platform for renegotiating urban life & civic engagement	52
Co-producing climate adaptation: developing a tool and process for integrating local knowledge into climate planning.....	54
"Co-production Expertise" in World Heritage Cities: the Experience of Bamberg	57
“They seem more make sense”: how documents and meetings shape the Integrated Tourism Master Plan of Lombok	59

TUESDAY 15:00-16:30

Session A: Public Space II.....	60
Co-production as an experimental and experiential process	60
Blurred boundaries: Quality of life impacts of organically co produced urban public space in local neighbourhoods in Bengaluru, India	62
Urban Transformation in Johannesburg: Co-production of Public Space ...	64
Planning practice for privately owned public spaces: actor, instrument, motivation, challenge and desire. The case of Germany	66
Session B: Community Scale Co-production.....	67
Is the future of the city the co-city? Insights from the Italian context	67
The Riccio: a book-sharing pavilion realized in a context of collaborative governance.....	69
Suggestions for co-producing urban resilience – insights from the Gängeviertel redevelopment process.....	71
Social co-production of urban regeneration in France. A framework for activist research with residents and facilitators.....	74
The Urban Trialogue for the Co-production of the Social Infrastructure of Hope	76
Session C: Urban Renewal.....	79
The role of co-production in spatial justice and urban transformation in Budapest: The case of Magdolna Neighbourhood Programme in Józsefváros, the 8th district.....	79
Democratic innovation: co-governance experience within urban regeneration project.....	81
Contrasting the influence of success perception in meanwhile use employment within urban regeneration processes: A comparison between a German and a Spanish case study.....	83
The Co-production and the urban renewal: The case study of Märkisches Museum quarter in Berlin	85

TUESDAY 16:45-18:15

Session A: Governance II	87
Infrastructures for the common: How housing corporations finance and govern spaces for co-producing sustainable and resilient neighborhoods .	87

Co-Design between Municipalities and Housing Developers in Swedish Sustainability-Profiled District Developments.....	89
Co-production and the passive transformation of art and cultural affairs	91
A Social Ministry: The Politics of Co-Production in FBO-led Housing Interventions in Kerala, India.....	93
Session B: Knowledge Co-production II	95
The co-production controversies over urban regeneration interventions through nature-based solutions (NBS)	95
Co-production at the periphery of the urban and academia: lessons from the metropolitan area of Acapulco	97
Knowledge exchange and enhancing capacities for Urban Sustainability Transformations through co-production.....	99
Session C: Informality II	101
Understanding Coproduction: Framework analysis of CLHI and Jaga Mission, India	101
Co-Production of Services in informal neighborhoods	103
The barriadas of Lima: Co-Production and Housing-Production	105
Coproducting Tenure Security in Urban Informal Settlements: A Case of Slum Formalisation in Odisha, India	107
Bridging the gap between city planning & the working poor: Reflections from a people's campaign in Delhi	109

Session B: Community Scale Co-production

Is the future of the city the co-city? Insights from the Italian context

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Abstract

Within the complexity of the current socio-economic scenario, it is increasingly evident that there is a need to rethinking the relations between urban actors, especially those between governments and civil society. In particular, drawing from previous work, governments are increasingly looking for their civil society (Bragaglia, 2020) to build new shared ways 'of doing things'. In the last decade, social innovation and commons are two concepts increasingly used to convey these new paradigms of urban governance based on co-production. The 'co' paradigm implies, on the one hand, that there are active local communities capable and willing to spend time and resources to improve their local areas. On the other, it implies that governments rethink their policies and open up new institutional spaces to allow new partnerships with civil society to become operational and robust. In Italy, some cities are experimenting with the new paradigm of the 'co-city'. This new model of urban governance attempts to overcome traditional urban planning and welfare models with a view to co-production. Small community services and reclaimed and transformed urban spaces sprout thanks to the socially innovative forces of civil society and public institutions that enable these processes within new institutional frameworks. However, this new model is not immune from pending issues and possible downsides. On the one hand, the 'co-city model' can indeed be a driver for a more open and inclusive city. On the other, in times of scarce public resources, it could also be a Trojan horse where co-production is just urban management with a 'community face'. Thus, there is a tension between the actual empowerment of civil society and the mere devolution of managerial responsibilities to the latter. Moreover, the 'co-city' paradigm also has several ethical implications related to the use of civil society's voluntary time. Therefore, this contribution investigates the potentials and threats of this new model of urban governance, the new challenges it brings, and its long-term sustainability. In order to do so, two case studies are investigated. The Collaborare è Bologna project, promoted since 2016 by the Municipality of Bologna to activate new forms of collaboration between administration and citizens and the

Co-City urban development project launched in 2017 by the Municipality of Turin through the European Programme UIA. Both experiences are based on activating the co-production of services and the collective regeneration of urban spaces, leveraging on grassroots practices of social innovation and networks of civic actors already rooted within the local areas. Is the future of the city in the 'co-city'?

Keywords: co-production, urban governance, social innovation, commons

Reference:

Bragaglia, F. (2021). Social innovation as a 'magic concept' for policy-makers and its implications for urban governance. *Planning Theory*, 20(2), 102-120.