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

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Symposium Delivering Urban Transformation through Co-production

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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.