

“Spaces for the co-governance of the urban commons. Urban public policies and community spaces: Italian Cities and more”

Abstract

The development of collaborative practices in the field of urban commons might represent an observation point for the study of democratic innovations. This issue shall be considered particularly interesting because it arises from the intersection of different fields of study: in addition to studies on democracy, the theory of the commons (Ostrom 1990) and the urban commons, studies on local co-governance, active citizenship (Morlino & Gelli 2010; Bang 2005;). Research efforts on the open government framework, of which collaboration is one of the constitutive dimensions (Lathrop & Ruma 2010; de Blasio & Sorice 2016) also shows how the creation of public-private-civic/commons partnership (Foster & Iaione 2016) as a component of this variable. Finally, the body of scientific knowledge focused on cities is extensive and rapidly expanding, stressing the role and power that cities will exercise in the 21st century, and the challenges that the urban context pose for democracy (UN Habitat 2016; Sassen 2014). The analysis of policies and projects addressing urban commons, involving different actors that aim at building forms of public-private-civic partnerships and ultimately achieving forms of urban co-governance might shed lights on the emergence of a different analytical framework for studying and practicing urban democracy. This topic is also taken into account because it implies the government's action to be directed to the development of a culture of collaboration with citizens, aimed at enhancing their contribution to the general interest, which is not uniformly spread across and within cities. The study of democratic innovations and the quality of democracy has highlighted the role of equality concerns in the institutional design (Font 2014) and the impact of institutional design itself on the dimensions of the quality of democracy, such as responsiveness and equality (Pogrebinsci 2013).

1.1 Guiding research questions

There is an emerging literature asking whether it is possible to deepen quality of democracy at the urban level by opening the doors for collaboration between citizens, public administration and private institutions into the content of local governance? The local level is an important testing ground for democratic quality (Gelli & Morlino 2008). Thus, is the small level to encourage innovation by allowing the testing of new institutions and the first processing of a new urban democracy (Della Porta 2006) new models of democracy (Cotta, Della Porta & Morlino 2001). Democratic innovations that raise at the local level would help to improve the quality of democracy (Morlino 2011) overcome political apathy, reduce the lack of legitimacy, increase political satisfaction and lead to more effective policies (Geissel 2008). But how can democratic innovations be evaluated? (Geissel & Newton, 2012)?

The object of study are the processes of collaboration between different actors in the City addressing urban commons or urban services of common interest, constituting hybrid spaces (Cornwall 2004) and generating what can be identified as “urban collaborative governance (Foster & Iaione 2017; 2018). The dimension that we will focus on in this work are the dimension of input (participation) and equality (output) as the empirical dimension that measure the re-distribution of urban resources at the urban level and the improvement of social and economic equality/solidarity in the City, ultimately contributing to the shape of a fair and democratic City.

The institutional genesis of those processes is twofold:

- community design/claimed spaces (Gaventa 2006): civic actors take a proactive role, in an antagonist or subsidiary/collaborative approach. In this category we can find both cases of non-conventional participation (Quaranta 2012) specifically addressing urban commons; exercise of active citizenship or self-organization (Moro 2014); heterogeneous experiences of self-governance, collaborative economy, services co-production realized through urban commons or through governance arrangements inspired by design principles of the commons.
- by institutional design: urban public policies aimed at regulating the urban commons or institutionalize / promote collaborative governance arrangements.

The questions that this work is aimed at answering are the following:

- What are the qualities of urban co-governance of the commons? *What* is governed and *how* it is governed when we are talking about co-governance of the urban commons?
- Do the hybrid spaces of urban co-governance of the commons contribute to re-shape the dimensions of participation and equality at the urban level?

Building on the research questions, we can identify a set of sub-questions:

- Can the study of hybrid spaces of urban co-governance applied to the urban commons can shed light on what is governed and how it is governed in those part of the cities and of urban societies that seems ungovernable (Les Galès & Vitale 2015)?
- How is the re-shaping of democratic qualities at the urban level realized? Does urban co-governance of the commons entails simplification of procedures? Does it entail inclusive economic development? Does it involve the different actors at the urban level? Does it entail redefinition of the use of urban public assets and urban welfare?

1.2 Methodology

Given the lack in empirical research on governance of city commons of generalized observations and comparable data available on this issue and taking into account feasibility constraints, this work will

combine methodological approaches adopted in the study of the commons with those adopted in the study of local democracy and urban policies. The research design is inspired by a mixed method approach (Creswell 2014) and it combine methodologies of institutional analysis for the study of the commons (Mc Ginnis & Walker 2010; Ostrom 1986; Poteete et al. 2010) with methods adopted in the study of democracy and urban research (Robinson 2011; Morlino 2011; Morlino & Gelli 2008). Cases' selection is based on a Most Similar/Different Outcome (MSDO) (Przeworski & Teune 1971) logic. This is the most appropriate logic for a research design focused on the study of urban policies as tools for the formation of collective institutions for the governance of urban commons since it focuses the attention on the object of studies and not on the systemic variables and is aimed at observing features and outcomes resulting from the same context. Data analysis will rely upon institutional analysis, meta-analysis (Glas 2017) and analysis of data resulting from urban design experiment and urban living lab methodologies (Bakker & Denters 2012; Stoker & John 2012). Cities' case studies analysis relies upon the case study approach (George & Bennet, 2004; Della Porta & Keating, 2008, 112; Ostrom, Poteete & Janssen 2010).

The policy and projects mapping was carried out in Italian metropolitan cities (Venezia, Torino, Roma, Reggio Calabria, Palermo, Napoli, Milano, Messina, Firenze, Catania, Cagliari, Bologna, Bari). The mapping and the resulting database of 500 case studies (available in Chapter II, at p. XX) is then filtered and a sub-set of cities is selected for the analysis. The sub-set of cities (Turin; Milan; Bologna; Rome; Naples) is selected according to the fact that they present examples of hybrid spaces of urban co-governance involving at least two categories of actors (i.e. the City and urban communities; urban communities and knowledge actors) and it was initiated by urban actors.

The data collection was carried out relying upon the following sources:

- a) secondary data and indicators of the socio-economic and institutional profile of the city: UN Habitat (2016) *World Cities Report*, statistical annex; the Metropolitan database included in OECD (2012) *Redefining Urban: a new way to measure metropolitan areas* (At the time this work was realized, data on Eurostat was updated at 2014); ISTAT, "Allegato statistico Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sulle condizioni di sicurezza e sullo stato di degrade delle città e delle loro Periferie" (2017 For data on the population of New York City and the Greater Area the World Cities Report Statistical Annex od 2016 and the official data released by the City of New York were used.
- b) participant observation of urban design field experiments. Applies to the case of Bologna, two projects: "Cities as commons" (2013-2014) and "Co-Bologna" (2015-2016) and Rome, one project: Co-Rome (2015/ongoing).
- c) policy documents
- d) qualitative semi-structured interviews and group interviews conducted in person, by Skype, or phone interviews. Applies to all cities.
- e) site visits. Applies to Milan; Turin; Naples.

f) digital ethnography

In depth analysis presented in each City case study will try to account for the total amount of the cases mapped in the city, although in order to achieve a high degree of clarity and methodological standardization across the whole work, the analysis will stress the attention on the most advanced and intense cases in each city, covering the spectrum Community Space / Public Policy. The conclusions for each City case study is focused on connecting the analysis of the City case study with the analytical framework and will not attempt a comparison between the cases. Although this work might have the ambition to produce a comparative analysis as a next step, in this first phase the Cities (that are unique and not influenced by a standardization due to the absence of a common policy or a commons legal framework) are analyzed in their internal dimension. Therefore, the conclusions will stress the results of the analysis of the dimension of urban co-governance of the commons, outlining the approach that each City embodies.

The selection of the cases' subset is aimed at ensuring feasibility. In further development of this work, it would be useful to include also crucial case studies that entails both success and failure of co-governance attempts although involving only one actor. One instance would be the case of Messina, where the former City Government promoted an interesting process to modify the governance of the Agency for local public services and turn it into a participatory one. Or the case of Bari, where a very interesting process of participatory urban regeneration was promoted (it was excluded since it was promoted mainly by the Region and not by urban actors). A category of case studies which could be particularly interesting to include in future development is also those of administrative barter. The administrative barter is a legal provision introduced by the Italian Code of Public Procurement (law 50, 2016) that at the current moment is not implemented yet by metropolitan cities but only small size or medium size city. It foresees the possibility for city administration to regulate a sort of exchange between city inhabitants and the city administration. When the city inhabitants realize activities of general interest, including taking care of their city also with simple actions such as cleaning the street or going to work with the bike or sharing their car the City can recognize it and provide them with incentives such as tax exemptions. The observation of the empirical functioning of this mechanism would be highly relevant for the purpose of this work because it would also allow us to understand whether cities use this legal in a restrictive or expansive way, how it is interpreted on the civic side and whether it influences the policies and projects already existing on the urban commons.

1.3 The research design

The research design is divided in five phases:

- a) interdisciplinary review of the literature
- b) development of an analytical codebook
- c) case study mapping and data collection
- d) coding
- e) drafting of Cities' case study analysis

The first phase of the work is focused on a) interdisciplinary literature review across studies of the commons, studies of urban democracy and urban policy studies and b) development of an analytical

codebook based on of a set relevant indicators. an analytical codebook based on of a set relevant indicators.

The literature review constitutes the baseline to develop an analytical tool that includes contextual urban dimensions and empirical dimensions of co-governance of urban commons.

The work then proceeds with c) a case study mapping in the cities selected and the data are collected d) the analytical tool is then applied for coding case studies selected in the cities object of analysis and provide a quali-quantitative account of the main features of policies and projects of active citizenship, civic collaboration and governance of urban commons.

The coding relies mainly on qualitative methods of data collection, in particular in-depth interviews. As already stated, the analysis will also rely upon meta – analysis (Glas 1976; Poteete et al. 2010) which means that information on the policies will be researched and extracted from previous research on the same case studies. This method is a useful tool when dealing with complex object of studies characterized by a lack of data and a high costly data collection. The results of the coding through the lens of the analytical tool provides a quali-quantitative account of the features of the policies and their outcomes in terms of urban co-governance. The coding is both manual and software assisted, using Atlas.ti.

e) Finally, replying upon the case study approach (George & Bennet, 2004; Della Porta & Keating, 2008, 112; Ostrom, Poteete & Janssen 2010) the case studies are described and analyzed in depth in order to realize appropriate cities' profile.

1.4 The structure of the work

In Chapter I the research question and the main concept and theories regarding collaborative governance, the quality of democracy at the urban level and the urban commons will be introduced, in order to justify the methodological and analytical approach adopted. In the second chapter, the main concepts and theories for analyzing the city as an object of study will be introduced. We realized that, in order to measure urban co-governance of the commons and the democratic innovation capacity of the different urban approaches developed in Italy, we must draw from two basins: on the one hand, the urban theories and urban paradigm/model developed by different literatures and on the other hand, the literature on democratic participation and equality in urban contexts. The review of the urban theories and urban paradigm/models, which will be presented in the second chapter, will help us identify the key definitions and theories that stays behind the conceptualization of the city as a complex spaces where the democratic outcome of policy and community efforts towards the commons results from the interaction between different categories of actors and actions.

Chapter II will focus on different “urban model” emerging from a transdisciplinary literature review, in order to position the approach and object of study adopted in this work with similar although distinct research efforts, such as the study of the smart city. This part of Chapter II deserves particular attention because it will also identify the points of intersections between literature addressing the commons and literature addressing the city. We will see, for instance, how the literature on urban roots of social movements active in the seventies as described by Lefebvre when proposing the idea

of right to the city will translate into a right-based normative model of the city.

Chapter III introduces and justifies with literature the empirical dimensions of urban co-governance and their operationalization, ultimately presenting the Codebook produced to analyze the data collected. Chapter III concludes with an overview on the whole database of case studies.

Chapter IV and V focus on the case studies analysis. The chapters provide both a descriptive qualitative analysis of the genesis of the policies/projects and their main features and then present the result of the analysis according to the empirical dimensions of urban co-governance.

In Chapter VI, the conclusions, we will summarize the result of the analysis and the controversial reflections' they raise. On the basis of the analysis, we will draw future research questions.