

Local partnerships and urban governance: The case of Lisbon

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1. Introduction

Collaborative forms of governance in urban regeneration are increasingly gaining ground in cities around the world, contributing to the active engagement of citizens in decision-making processes that affect their neighbourhoods and lives. In some cases, municipalities embrace local grassroots initiatives, as for example with the implementation of participatory budgets, enabling active citizens to creatively invent ways to regain and co-manage the urban commons.

In a similar vision, the Department of Housing and Local Development of the Municipality of Lisbon launched in 2011 a participatory budget program, namely BIP/ZIP, to annually fund bottom-up initiatives led by local partnerships in priority neighbourhoods that enable responses to social and territorial emergencies.

The aim of this research is to investigate the matrix of local partnerships that have been formulated throughout the eleven years of BIP/ZIP and understand their dynamic role in the transformation of the urban governance in the city of Lisbon.

2. Participatory budgets and urban commons

Participatory budgeting is a tool to democratise urban governance, in the sense that it facilitates collective decision-making on the allocation of municipal or state resources. As one of the most successful innovations of democratic governance of the last 25 years (Allegretti & Hartz-Karp, 2017), it not only enables the dialogue between public administrations and the general public, but also promotes inclusive democracy, in the sense that it most often aims at engaging into public policy those parts of the society that are frequently excluded from political processes.

The promotion of the collaborative management of urban resources and facilitation of multi-stakeholder cooperation has been also theorised in the notion of urban commons⁹. Several commons theorists, also referred to as “institutionalists” (Huron, 2018), explore the role

⁹ The concept is based on the idea that city resources such as public spaces and infrastructure ought to be accessible by urban communities, not only for use but also for co-responsibility and management in a way that supports the sustainability of those communities and especially the most vulnerable.

of urban commons in reshaping the urban governance through the integration of their collaborative management in local strategies. Christian Iaione (2015, 2017) also in collaboration with Sheila Foster (2020; 2015) argue that in order to establish the city as commons, it is necessary to facilitate “quintuple helix” governance structures, that stimulate partnerships among five types of actors: civic (social innovators and active citizens), social (third sector organizations), cognitive (cultural institutions, schools and universities), public (public institutions) and private (local enterprises and industries) (Quintuple Helix | LabGov, n.d.).

2.1 BIP/ZIP local partnerships program

The BIP/ZIP participatory budget aims to foster the socio-territorial cohesion in Lisbon by integrating 67 ‘priority’ neighbourhoods (Figure 1). To do so, the programme promotes active citizenship through the establishment of partnerships between parish councils, societies, local associations and non-governmental organisations that propose initiatives towards specific local issues. To present, the programme has funded 426 projects with an implementation grant of up to 50,000 euros per project, involving thousands of different partner entities.

Structurally the facilitation of partnerships targets the democratisation of local governance based on ‘quality delivery’ that is territorial intervention through concrete local action (Crespo & Caetano, 2021). The partner types per project is open, given that the public sector, represented by the parish councils is always involved, as well as ensuring that the third sector and local community are an essential part too. Therefore, the collaborative culture is on the one hand formally regulated by the municipality and on the other hand informally produced by experimentation between new associations and local communities.

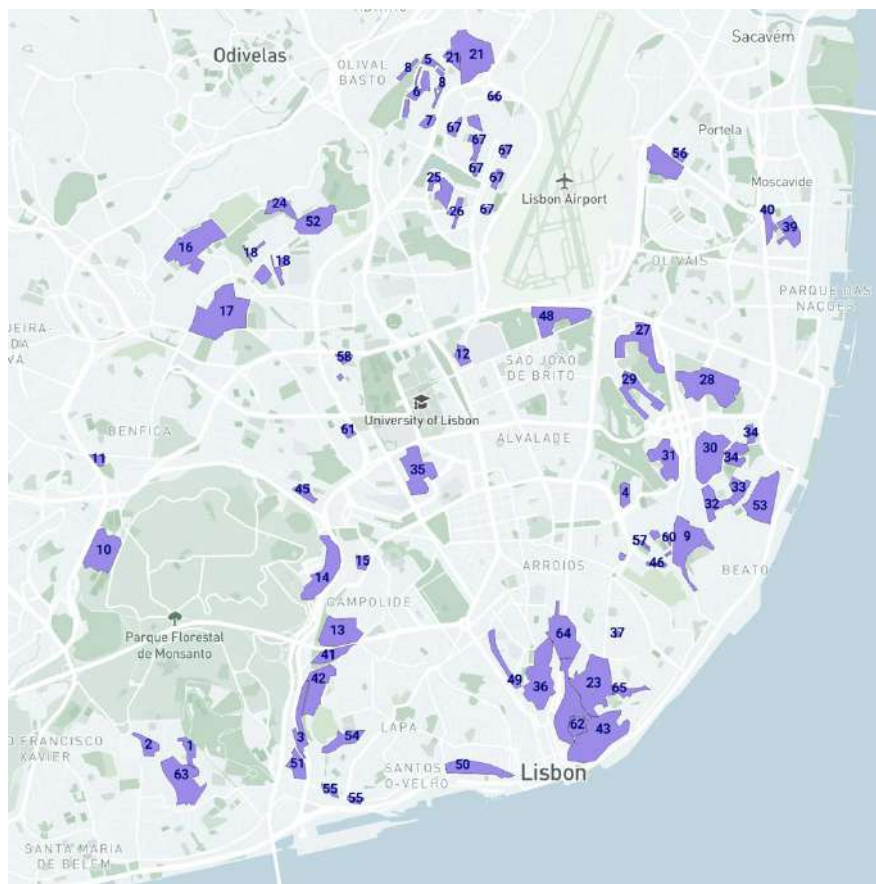


Figure 1. The 67 Priority areas of BIP/ZIP. Source: Author

3. Methodology

The first step of the methodology employs data analysis to explore the transformation of the urban governance through the emerging roles of different types of partners – organisations, based on two key aspects: i. the types of partners/institutions and their involvement in projects, which entails the indicators of partner type, number of entities in each type and number of different projects in which they are involved; and ii. the evolution of the types of partners through time based on the parameter of year of participation. This second aspect of the evolution of the partners through time is also extrapolated to the quintuple helix governance model to offer an overview at the level of urban actors. To do so, the partner types are correlated to the quintuple helix's urban actor types.

The dataset for the analysis is composed by coding qualitative information from three sources: the successful application files available at the website of BIP/ZIP <https://bipzip.cm-lisboa.pt/>; the website ForumUrbano <https://forumurbano.pt/>; as well as documents shared by the Municipality of Lisbon with the first author during a four-month research secondment.

In overview, we analysed 416 projects and recorded 1276 individual partner entities which through their repeating involvement reach almost 4000 participations. Each project involves between 2 and 22 entities with the most frequent being 3 partners.

3.1 Results

In overview, we analysed 416 projects and recorded 1,276 individual partner entities which through their repeated involvement reach almost 4,000 participations. A preliminary statistical analysis revealed insights into the overall participation in the programme, such as the observation that 45% of the partner entities participated only once, and the fact that each project involved between 2 and 22 partner entities, with the majority of projects involving three partners. When examining the different types of partners/institutions, our analysis found that among the 18 types we identified, informal groups, cultural associations and private institutions for social solidarity each include more than 200 entities. They have a high involvement in projects, as well, being involved in 400 to 997 projects. Additionally, the analysis of the evolution of partner types, and consequently the quintuple helix actors over time, showed fluctuations in the number of entities and their participation in projects for most types. However, the types of partners associated with the social sector have a significantly leading involvement, compared to other types, while the cognitive sector consistently has the lowest level of involvement.

4. Conclusion and discussion

This study presents a first step in understanding the transformation of the urban governance in Lisbon through a study of the emerging roles of the local partners of BIP/ZIP. The statistical analysis and visualisations provide insightful information on who is engaged in this transformation, showcasing two paces of involvement: one of institutions with a short participation in one or two projects and one of institutions that are repeatedly involved.

Looking at the types of partners/institutions, a further step would be to reconsider the categorisation beyond their governance model and use the scope of the project, for example the categories defined as “other” and “informal group”.

The analysis of the partner types through the number of entities and the number of projects involved provides information on the temporality of the institutions in terms of governance. However, due to data limitation, this research has not taken into consideration the lifespan of

each institution to understand if and for how long have entities that were explicitly formed for the participation in a BIP/ZIP project remained as operational entities after the completion of the project.

Lastly, the analysis of the types of partners over time and their correlation to the quintuple helix illustrates the evolution of the governance change and points out leading and less involved sectors. The analysis based on the dimension of time can further integrate social or urban phenomena, such as the pandemic.

Methodologically, the next stage of this research includes the spatial depiction of the matrix of partnerships in the urban fabric, to illustrate the complex relationships of partners in the formation of the city.

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