



Governing the bairro clandestino of Cova da Moura (1974–2015): Decentred and collaborative governance in an informal neighbourhood in Lisbon’s metropolitan area

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Abstract

Cova da Moura was established in the municipality of Amadora in the mid-1970s as a *bairro clandestino* (‘informal’ or ‘illegal neighbourhood’). Since then, it has grown into a community of thousands of residents; having escaped the large rehousing operations of the 1990s, Cova da Moura is today one of the few surviving *bairros clandestinos* in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, as well as a ‘distressed urban area’. In the four decades of its life, Cova da Moura has passed through different eras of policymaking, and has been the object of a variety of public interventions. The article provides a critical assessment of the *Iniciativa Bairros Críticos* (Critical Neighbourhoods Initiative, 2005–2013), as an example of a policy initiative embodying a normative vision of collaborative governance. The case of the *Iniciativa Bairros Críticos* in Cova da Moura provides some lessons on how collaborative governance design can address key challenges that ‘distressed urban areas’ pose to public intervention – but at the same time shows us the unavoidable pitfalls of the process, as well as the limits of their reach vis-à-vis broad, structural issues.

Keywords

Collaborative governance, decentred governance, housing informality, Lisbon

Introduction

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, a housing crisis of vast proportions mounted in the metropolitan area of Lisbon. In the early 1990s, tens of thousands of *bar-racas* (shacks) had been built in the metropolitan area of the city, among which several large *bairros clandestinos* (‘informal’ or ‘illegal neighbourhoods’

in the local vocabulary) hosted hundreds of families (Allegra et al., 2020; Tulumello et al., 2018).

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Cova da Moura (hereafter CdM) is one of them. Contrary to many other *clandestinos*, CdM was not targeted by the extensive rehousing operations that contributed to drastically reduce the scale of the problem between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s. At the end of the period under examination (1974–2015), CdM counted some 6–7,000 residents (most of them Portuguese citizens of African origins), which are to this day trapped in an administrative, legal and planning limbo.¹

Based on extensive fieldwork, we try to understand how CdM has been governed in the last few decades in the light of the idea of ‘de-centered governance’ (Griggs et al., 2014), by showing how a fuzzy but nevertheless real system of governance of the *clandestino* of CdM has emerged from the interaction of a set of different actors over time, and from the stratification of successive generations of policy initiatives and programmes. Against this background, this article will refer to the *Iniciativa Bairros Críticos* (IBC, Critical Neighbourhoods Initiative, 2005–2013) as an innovative example of ‘collaborative governance’ (Ansell and Gash, 2008). The case of the IBC provides some interesting lessons on how collaborative governance design can address key challenges that ‘distressed urban areas’ (OECD, 1998) pose to public intervention; at the same time, it shows us the unavoidable pitfalls of the process, as well as the limits of their reach vis-à-vis broad, structural issues.

This article is based (1) on data collected through 21 semi-structured interviews (2017–2019) with key IBC players with different professional training (e.g. geography, economics, social services, urban planning, local development, civil engineering) and profiles (from civil servants working for agencies of the central and local state, to project officers, to representatives of local nongovernmental organization (NGOs)); (2) on the analysis of policy documents produced across the various phases of the IBC; (3) on several rounds of participant observation (2012–2018); and (4) on the abundant literature existing on the subject (Ascensão, 2013, 2016; Horta, 2006; Jorge and Carolino, 2019; Mendes, 2008; Raposo and Jorge, 2013; Santos, 2014; Søholt et al., 2012; Vasconcelos, 2007; Wildemeersch and Pestana Lages, 2018). Interviews have addressed all phases

of the IBC policy cycle, with a specific focus on the drafting process of three key IBC documents (Participatory Diagnostic, Partnership Agreement, and Action Plan) and on the actors’ understanding and appropriation of the policy framework. Key, among the policy documents examined is the IBC’s *Registos de Processo* (IBC, 2012a), which was drafted by IBC’s central technical team as the main project repository and memory, identifying IBC’s main results as well as the main lessons learnt throughout the process.²

De-centring governance and distressed urban areas

The concept of ‘governance’ has been widely used in the last 30 years to describe key features of the transformation of public policy in recent decades, that is, a process in which the state has delegated part of its powers to non-public actors, supranational institutions and *ad hoc* bodies. The literature on the transition ‘from government to governance’ (Mayntz, 2017) has thus explored the way policymaking is based on networks incorporating public authorities, corporate actors, civil society, and other forms of organized interest groups (Rhodes, 1996; Scharpf, 1999). From an analytical point of view, ‘governance’ is the word that describes these (expanding) arenas for policymaking (Pierre and Peters, 2000). The word ‘governance’, however, has also strong normative undertones, as this concept has become a policy paradigm, for example, in EU policymaking forums such as the European Commission, the Eurocities network, and the European Urban Agenda. In all of these contexts, the EU policy debate is based on negotiations that include a variety of organized interest groups, and not only the representatives of Member States; while this negotiation process is subject to EU rules, its development and results also influenced these groups’ agenda in the political, social, and economic spheres (Piattoni, 2010; Wallace et al., 2020).

The observations presented in this article reflect this double understanding of the idea of governance (analytical and normative). On the one side, by looking at the history of CdM through the concept of ‘de-centred governance’ (Griggs et al., 2014; see also

Le Galès and Vitale, 2015), we extend the analytical reach of our observation beyond a narrower, notion of governance, that is, one founded on public-sponsored formal partnership. A study of governance should thus pay attention to both ‘the experiences, the interactions, the uncertain rules that regulate everyday life’, and ‘the efforts to build structures, to create a social order, to deal with authority, inequalities or incremental change, with the goal of “keeping the city in line”’ (Le Galès and Vitale, 2015: 10).

On the other side, this article is concerned with how, and to what extent, collaborative and integrated governance initiatives such as the IBC can meet the challenge that distressed urban areas present to policymaking. In this respect, this article works on the hypothesis that a normative approach based on collaborative governance (i.e. on consensus-oriented, deliberative process in which all actors develop a sense of ownership of policymaking) is especially well equipped to translate into policymaking the analytical insights of decentred governance (i.e. that governance systems emerge from the interaction of a pluralistic set of actors, including state and non-state actors, and across policy sectors and administrative levels).

As Griggs et al. (2014: 9) have argued,

the process and outcomes of collective problem solving [. . .] are the result of the involvement of many actors, across traditional boundaries of state and civil society, who, from the informal, everyday, experiential space they occupy in society, act upon the meaning they ascribe to particular problems and their proposed solutions.

The idea of ‘de-centred governance’ thus provides us with a complex model of the dynamics of collective decision-making, in which policymaking emerges as ‘public action’ (Allen et al., 2004), that is, as

the outcome of a system of relationships among the different actors involved. . . Public action also involves looking at both direct and indirect forms of action, and its boundaries are drawn to include forms of deregulation or decontrol, and even the systematic non-implementation of existing rules (Allen et al., 2004: 157).

De-centred governance thus offers a general analytical framework to make sense of the way our societies function, by charting all the less visible ways in which governance *emerges* besides and beyond the boundaries of what is explicit, rule-based, planned and directed (such as planning law and regulation, voting and invited participation, or partnership agreements). In her study on the ‘informal governance’ of EU Structural Funds negotiations, Simona Piattoni points at

those non-codified settings of day-to-day interactions concerning policy issues in which the participation of actors, the formation of coalitions, the processes of agenda setting and (preliminary) decision making are not structured by pre-given sets of rules or formal institutions (Piattoni, 2006: 59, referring to Van Tatenhove et al., 2006).

In this article we look at collaborative governance as a normative vehicle, one that can incorporate into governance design those forms of individual and collective agency that are usually deployed ‘in the interstices of formal governance arrangements supplanting, complementing, correcting or counteracting them at least in part’ (Piattoni, 2006: 59).

This conceptual framework informs our general approach to the challenges inherent to governance design and implementation in ‘distressed urban areas’ (Conway and Konvitz, 2000; OECD, 1998: 29). As Henriques (2010: 3) notes, in distressed urban areas unfavourable territorial conditions (e.g. a degraded housing stock) combine with spatial segregation (e.g. the concentration of large social housing estates) and, often, with social or ethnic stigmatization. The interdependent and ‘wicked’ (Rittel and Webber, 1973) nature of problems in distressed urban areas defies sectorial policy interventions, thus making public intervention more difficult.

How to address these challenges? The trend towards the de-centralization of decision-making through ‘area-based’ interventions has informed mainstream urban policy for a long time throughout the EU (Aalbers and Beckhoven, 2010; Andersson and Musterd, 2005). This was the case, for example, of urban regeneration initiatives such as the *New Deal for Communities* in the United Kingdom,

launched by the Blair government as part of the reform agenda of New Labour; or the *Contrats de Ville* (Alietti, 2004; Epstein, 2013) implemented in France. Both cases represent influential approaches for policymaking in the EU and, according to Colombo (2021), Portugal was no exception in this respect. The added value of area-based policies is premised upon two ideas: first, that there are urban contexts in which a negative ‘neighbourhood effect’ heavily weighs on the local population; second, that addressing physical, economic and social issues at once is the appropriate way to change the local dynamics. Area-based approaches, however, have also been the objects of criticism in relation to their adequacy in meeting the challenges inherent to distressed urban areas (Andersson and Musterd, 2005; Atkinson et al., 2008), and their inability of creating an effective inter-sectoral and inter-organizational integration tailored on the needs of the situation at hand (Aalbers and Beckhoven, 2010).

The collaborative approach to governance (see Ansell, 2012 for a review) represents yet another tentative answer to these challenges. The idea of collaborative governance includes all ‘governing arrangement[s] where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets’ (Ansell and Gash, 2008: 544). The added value of collaborative approaches is premised on the idea that a crucial factor in governance arrangements is the upgrade of the mutual relations between local actors and the development of a common understanding of the policy process. As Colombo (2021) notes, public interventions in distressed urban areas typically fails when the provision of specific financial and regulatory instruments is not supported by a process of effective territorial animation geared towards the population’s collective autonomy – something that in Portugal became especially clear in the 1990s in the debate on the *Programa Especial de Realojamento* (PER, Special Rehousing Programme, Cachado, 2013; Guerra et al., 1999).

The approach of collaborative governance highlights the role of the stakeholders in defining the

‘rules of the game’ through a process of ‘institutionalization of collective decision-making processes’; thus, ‘commitment to collaboration is a critical variable in explaining success or failure’, because it reflects the stakeholders’ ownership of the process (Ansell and Gash, 2008: 548, 559). In the absence of such an effective commitment, the decentralization of decision-making would simply amount to outsourcing the provision of public services to non-state actors. We argue in this article that the IBC is a good example of collaborative governance design: as a ‘proof of concept’, the experience of the IBC shows the potential of innovative forms of integrated and collaborative governance in addressing the challenges inherent in distressed urban areas; and it also shows that their success ultimately depends on the flexibility of governance models in adapting to the context.

Cova da Moura: the context

The history of CdM needs to be placed in the broader context of the historical trajectory of housing as a policy issue in Portugal (Allegra et al., 2022), and especially in the housing crisis of the 1980s in the metropolitan areas of Porto and Lisbon.

The crisis started to build with the flows of rural–urban migration of the 1950s and the 1960s, but urban pressure greatly increased after the demise of the Portuguese colonial empire in the second half of the 1970s, which originated a rapid inflow of hundred thousands of *retornados* (white Portuguese settlers) and black immigrants; as a result, tens of thousands of *barracas* (shacks) were to be found in the metropolitan areas of the two cities at the end of beginning of the 1990s. Throughout this period, public policy had been unable to provide adequate housing opportunities; this started to change in the late 1980s, when the scale of the problem had become impossible to ignore. Portugal’s adhesion to the EU in 1986 made this blatant policy failure even more apparent, and, at the same time, provided new financial resources for infrastructural investments and a range of social programmes.

Between the late 1980s and the early 1990s, different national and municipal housing programmes targeted the *bairros clandestinos*: the national

legislation on the *Áreas Urbanas de Gênese Illegal* (Law on Urban Areas of Illegal Genesis); local programmes such as Lisbon's *Plano de Intervenção a Médio Prazo* (Medium-Term Intervention Plan); and the PER (Special Programme for Rehousing, see exPERTs, 2020), which probably represents the last major rehousing programme implemented in Western Europe: PER operations, which only targeted unlicensed construction built on illegally occupied land, involved some 130,000 residents in the metropolitan area of Lisbon.

CdM is part and parcel of the historical trajectory that we have just sketched (see Horta, 2006; Jorge and Carolino, 2019; Mendes, 2008; Taviani, 2019: 63–68). The municipality of Amadora (north-east of Lisbon, where CdM is located) represented one of the areas most affected by the 'plague of the shacks' (as the decree of the PER put it): a small and relatively poor municipality, hosting some 4,000 *barracas* – and with very little land available for developments. *Autoconstrução* (self-building) began in CdM in the mid-1970s, mostly on the initiative of several groups of *retornados* and Lusophone black immigrants, which had come to Amadora to improve their material conditions, and found in the *bairro clandestino* of CdM a way to remedy the lack of housing solutions of the metropolitan housing market – or, to put it in a different way, the state's failure in addressing the expanding demand of a rapidly growing population. By the 1990s, CdM had grown to be one of the largest *bairros clandestinos* of the metropolitan area of Lisbon – and, as we will see, it was bound to remain so.

CdM, however, represents a rather peculiar case against the general background we have just sketched, in at least two ways. First, CdM has always been a relatively strong and cohesive community (Iniciativa Bairros Críticos (IBC), 2012a), with a local cultural dynamic that has its roots in the immigrant origin of the population (and especially Lusophone Africa, with 80% of the residents tracing its origins to Cabo Verde). CdM is also characterized by a relatively strong economic dynamic based on entrepreneurial initiatives on the part of the residents, mostly directed at providing local services and goods (restaurants, hairdressers,

groceries, travel agencies); and by the presence of a significant social capital based on family and neighbourhood relations as well as on a network of local associations – the local Comissão de Moradores (Residents' Commission) was founded in the late 1970s, followed in the next decade by the Mohino da Juventude, the Clube Recreativo, and the Centro Social Paroquial (see Horta, 2006; Jorge and Carolino, 2019). All in all, the community of CdM has showed a significant ability in moving between different levels of governance, producing local initiatives in different areas (culture, education, employment, etc.) with the involvement of a number of other actors. Fieldwork has shown, in particular, how the local network of associations has been able to accumulate sufficient social capital to establish productive relations of collaboration with a wide range of actors outside CdM (see also Horta, 2006: 278–283). Over the years, local organizations have acquired technical expertise and knowledge in managing financial and human resources, and in developing projects in the fields of employment, education, entrepreneurship and so forth – the *Registos de Processo*, for example, note the role of local actors in fostering a vibrant socio-economic dynamic (IBC, 2012a; see also Santos, 2014).

Second, the history of CdM is that of an exception – it is, in fact, the only large *bairro clandestino* excluded by the rehousing operations of the 1990s, which in a decade substantially reduced the number of these settlements in the metropolitan area of Lisbon. Thus, from the point of view of planning regulations, CdM is still technically a *bairro clandestino*, built without licencing on illegally-appropriated land (ownership of the area being 70% private and 30% public), and for which no detailed plan exists. Over the years, some attempts have been made to solve this issue – with scarce success. In 2002, the municipality put forward a plan for the demolition of some 80 per cent of the built structure of CdM and the *in situ* rehousing of the vast majority of the population, which was met with fierce opposition on the part of the residents and the associations, and eventually never materialized (Ascensão, 2016: 570–575; Jorge and Carolino, 2019: 25). Between 2008 and 2011, a further attempt at resolving land ownership issues was made in the context of the

IBC, once again without success (Colombo, 2021). Besides being reflected in its urban morphology and in several planning and housing issues (e.g. poor quality of the housing stock, overcrowding), the origins of CdM as a *bairro clandestino* are thus key factors in the decades-long planning stalemate.

Governing a *bairro clandestino*

The development of a *bairro clandestino* represents, as we have argued, an act of non-compliance with formal rules and standards, one that runs counter to the explicit regulations of a governance system – in this case, planning law. That does not mean, however, that CdM is not governed. First, the *bairros clandestinos*, like any other local community, develop their own institutions and rules, which sometime might have real sanctionary power in the local community – this is the case of the role of the local Comissão de Moradores as the unofficial planning board of CdM, defining (and enforcing) local planning standards (Jorge and Carolino, 2019: 10). Second, the *clandestinos* live in constant exchange and negotiation with other institutions and groups, in the forms of local authorities, courts, private companies, activists, service providers and so forth. Third, these neighbourhoods are often the object of policy programmes of different nature and impact.

Part of this story of engagement, negotiation and conflict around governance issues is constituted by the relations between CdM's local associations, on the one side, and local and central public institutions, on the other. First, the municipality of Amadora runs schools in CdM, provides road maintenance, takes care of cleaning the streets and so forth. This is part of a broader, informal understanding between the community and public authorities that has emerged since the foundation of the settlement – a fact confirmed by informal conversation held with older residents, as well as from the observable role that the Comissão de Moradores has had in steering planning operations in CdM since the late 1970s (Horta, 2006: 275–277; Jorge and Carolino, 2019: 21–22).

Second, local organizations have relations with public authorities and bodies in many ways (IBC, 2012a): through formal process of cooperation and negotiation (e.g. in policy initiatives such as the

IBC); informally (e.g. by building relationship of familiarity with civil servants or policymakers, through informal cooperation and exchange of information); and in the day-by-day operation of public administration (e.g. when an association assists residents in their relation with offices and bureaucracy). Two of the most relevant examples in this respect are the collaboration between local organizations and central government agencies such as the Alto Comissariado para as Migrações (High Commissariat for Migrations), for socio-educational initiatives such as the programme *Escolhas* ('Choices'); and the Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF, Foreigners and Borders Service), for the regularization of immigrants from former Portuguese African colonies. This last partnership resulted in the creation, in the context of the IBC, of the programme *SEF em Movimento* ('SEF on the move'), an agreement for easing the procedures of regularization of foreign citizens living in CdM, following which the SEF started to operate part of its services using the facilities of local associations.

Finally, CdM has been consistently considered (by the central state, the municipality of Amadora, and the EU) as a potential beneficiary of a number of public programmes in fields such as housing, social inclusion, urban regeneration and employment (for a more thorough account, see Jorge and Carolino, 2019). CdM was defined as a *Área Crítica de Recuperação e Reconversão Urbanística* (Critical Area for Urban Recovery and Reconversion) in the 1990s, and a 'strategic area of development' by Amadora's municipal master plan; in the same span of time, it was at the receiving end of community initiatives (Medeiros and Van der Zwet, 2019) such as *URBAN I* and *II* (in the field of urban regeneration) and *EQUAL* (in the fields of employment and anti-discrimination, see Câmara Municipal de Amadora (CMA), n.d.), which in many ways anticipated the experience of the IBC:

EQUAL was a European program for the development and innovation in different areas, from the perspective of vertical and horizontal coordination. It was impossible to solve local issues without the commitment of local and central organizations, so this matched very well with the philosophy of the IBC (E20MI, IBC external consultant in the field of social services, interview).

The IBC: genealogy and key principles

The IBC (Critical Neighbourhoods Initiative, 2005–2013) was launched in 2005 in the context of the *Nova Política de Cidades* (New Urban Policy, under the programme *Polis XXI*) promoted by the socialist government – which included the renewal of critical urban areas among its four pillars (RCM n.143/2005). The IBC, which had an experimental character, was based on three pilot projects in distressed urban areas (i.e. ‘bairros críticos’), which would serve as a test for future policy initiatives at national scale: Cova da Moura (Amadora), Lagarteiro (Porto) and Vale de Amoreira (Moita). The IBC extended the concept of urban requalification to encompass a broader set of social and economic issues, and aimed at producing an innovative model of multi-level and collaborative governance (Sousa, 2008). In a policy perspective, the IBC represented Portugal’s most ambitious effort to address the challenges that distressed urban areas such as Cova da Moura pose to public action.

The genealogy of IBC is rooted in the debate on the urban dimension of EU policies (see, for example, RCM n.143/2005), which had recognized since the 1990s the need to adopt specific initiatives to address distressed urban areas (European Commission, 1997), and in the concrete local experience of national and EU policy programme (such as the *POLIS* programme and the *URBAN* initiative respectively, see Medeiros and Van der Zwet, 2019; SEOTC, 2008). As one of our respondents notes (see also Ferrão, 2015), the *Nova Política de Cidades* (and the IBC specifically) represented a turning point with respect to the previous tradition:

[a]t the time, there were two main references, one was the British urban policy, which was based on the concept of urban competitive advantage, and [the other] was the French *politique de la ville*, more social in nature, and with welfarist undertones. . . [In the case of *Polis XXI*] we wanted to replicate neither of those. . . Our recent terms of comparison was the *POLIS*, which had a completely different philosophy [in relation to the IBC]. . . *Polis*’ urban policy was about building nice gardens, etc. [so that] the people would see the results. . . It was funny because we had to maintain the name ‘polis’ to show some link to the previous *POLIS*,

so we called [the *Nova Política de Cidades*] ‘*Polis XXII*’, but we did something completely different (E2MA, cabinet member, interview).

The IBC was an initiative of the newly established Secretaria de Estado do Ordenamento do Território e das Cidades (SEOTC, Secretary of State for Territorial Planning and Cities), and was implemented by the main governmental agency in the field of housing, the Instituto da Habitação e da Reabilitação Urbana (IHRU, Housing and Urban Rehabilitation Institute). At the centre of the IBC’s governance model stood the Grupo de Parceiros Locais (GPL, Local Partners Group), which included all IBC’s local partners – from representatives of central state (such as the local branches of the governmental agencies operating in the sectors of employment and welfare), to municipal authorities, to local NGOs. The GPL was assisted by an *ad hoc* Grupo de Apoio Técnico (GAT, Technical Support Group) and by a Grupo de Trabalho Interministerial (GTIM, ‘Inter-Ministerial Working Group’). While the former provided the GPL with the necessary technical expertise, the latter, chaired by the SEOTC and including high-level representatives of the ministries, was assembled to guarantee inter-sectoral cooperation (for a synthetic but thorough description of IBC’s governance model, see Sousa, 2008).

The first stage of the IBC (2005–2007) brought together all the participants with the goal of producing a strategic alignment of the participants a collective vision for the neighbourhood (Sousa, 2008), and resulted in the drafting of two key documents, the *Protocolo de Parceria* (Partnership Agreement) and the *Plano de Acção* (Action Plan). In the case of CdM, the partners identified nine strategic axes (including urban planning and land issues, local economy and cultural services, environmental issues and so forth), each of them corresponding to several specific actions (see Colombo, 2021; IBC 2012a). Based on these documents, IBC’s second stage (2007–2012) corresponded to the implementation of the *Plano de Acção*; in this phase, the initial governance model was reshuffled by creating a Unidade de Acção Estratégica Local (UAEL, Local Unit for Strategic Action) for the development of the plan. The UAEL was formed by an Equipa Local de

Projeto (Local Project Team) that acted in coordination with two bodies representing the local partners (the Comissão de Acompanhamento/Monitoring Commission, and of a Comissão Executiva/Executive Commission), as well as with the external support by the GTIM and GAT.

The objective of the IBC was to build an innovative system of multilevel governance based upon a collaborative, integrated approach; its main goal was testing a methodology for policy intervention in distressed urban areas that would bring effective inter-sectorial integration. This article makes use of the IBC as a case study of public policy, and as an example that incorporates some of the insights of de-centred governance into a normative vision of collaborative governance. The IBC shows four interesting features in this respect.

First and foremost, the IBC represents a model of collaborative governance in its emphasis on the role of local stakeholders and their ownership of the policy process – and therefore on their capacity for self-organization. Reflecting this logic, the design and implementation of the IBC was founded upon the establishment of a local *Protocolo de Parceria*, which represented a collective commitment on the part of the actors involved in the action and defined flexible forms of inter- and intra-organizational innovation (i.e. in the relation between the partners and within each participant organization, respectively). As two participants to the project remember,

For us [the partners of the IBC] the [*Protocolo de Parceria*] was a Bible – but it was a Bible in its principles, not in the list of activities that were included; and also their weight was changing over time according to the dynamics of the partners (E6ME, IBC technical officer in the field of social services, interview).

That [*Protocolo de Parceria*]. . . built with everyone's contribution, with its own *Plano de Acção*, its resources, the identification of functions and responsibilities – to me it was like a 'constitution' of the neighbourhood, a constitution for the territory (E4ME, IBC technical officer in the field of community development),

The second key trait of the IBC was its open-ended nature, which reflected an acknowledgement of the emergent nature of governance. Based on the

Protocolo de Parceria and the participatory diagnostics, the *Plano de Acção* detailed an implementation programme for each action – including timelines, intermediate and ultimate goals, and division of labour and responsibilities between partners. The definition of the goals of the IBC as such, as well as the means to reach it, was by and large left to the negotiation between local actors. This is the case, for example, for the so-called 'anchor projects' (i.e. projects that should lay the basic conditions for the a policy intervention to succeed). While the programme *URBAN* dictated that anchor projects should insist on the requalification of physical space, in the course of the IBC choices were made based on the negotiation between the actors, rather than on pre-existing guidelines:

I went to read the resolution of the government, and nowhere it was written that [the anchor project should be a physical space]. What it is written there is that in every neighbourhood we must select a project able to mobilize people. . . it does not say that it has to be a physical space, or a cultural initiative (E1MA, IBC central government manager, interview)

It is important to note, in this respect, that the IBC was not conceived as a way to address the status of CdM as a *bairro clandestino* and the long-standing impasse concerning land ownership – or, for that matter, any other specific sectorial issue (e.g. housing, employment). Although the IBC process did address (with mixed results) some of these issues, its overarching aim was to test a methodology of intervention based on the actors' ownership of the policy action, which would then lay the conditions for successive rounds of policymaking. In other words, IBC's main goal was the construction of a partnership model and of critical mass of actors that would sustain local initiatives on a continuative basis, in a multi-scale and multi-sector governance system. A key factor in this respect was the possibility to open up public policy to residents and local organizations, by fine-tuning the procedures regulating their interactions with the public administration.

The GAT teams developed the participatory diagnostic and the *Plano de Acção*, and, together with the IHRU, the cabinet of the Secretary of State and the various

ministries, agreed on the action of the *Plano de Acção* and of the *Protocolo de Parceria*, based upon the work done with the local teams (E6ME, IBC field technical officer in the field of social services, interview).

A third key feature of the IBC was its emphasis on a more holistic approach to the challenges inherent to distressed urban areas, and in particular through IBC's emphasis on inter-sectorial integration. A first important element in this respect had to do with the financing of the programme: to lay the ground for inter-sectorial integration, the IBC was based on a multi-funding approach, which combined national funds (from both the private sector, and different ministries and public agencies), EU funds and the EEA Grants. Financial commitment from different organizations was thus instrumental to achieve real inter-sectorial cooperation. As far as specific actions were concerned, IBC's methodology of inter-sectorial integration was based on assembling an *ad hoc* critical mass of human resources across the participant organizations and agencies, to be mobilized in support of a specific policy. For example, the inter-ministerial structure of the IBC was instrumental for the coordination in the implementation of planned actions, in that it provided a multi-scale governance framework to address problems that would otherwise remain outside the reach of local actors. In discussing the issue of reinsertion of ex-offenders, one of our respondents provides an example of this dynamic:

The report on the [incarcerated residents] listed individual situations and the respective problems, in order then to articulate the reintegration in the society in coordination with the local branches of governmental agencies [‘serviços desconcentrados’]. While local partners could deal with some of the issues [affecting ex-offender], for others it was necessary to work at the inter-ministerial level (E11ME, IBC technical officer in the field of urban planning, interview)

In broader terms, participation of ministries from different policy areas was meant to lay the conditions for addressing (albeit within the boundaries of an experimental initiative) not only the *problemas do bairro* (‘problems of the neighbourhood’, i.e. urban regeneration issues such as land ownership

or the upgrade of the housing stock) but also the *problemas no bairro* (i.e. ‘problems in the neighbourhood’ such as unemployment), which deeply affected CdM but whose origins were to be found by and large outside it.

A fourth important feature of the IBC was its normative approach on the agency of local community, that is, the emphasis on the ‘non-spontaneous emergence of local governance’ (Colombo, 2021). Despite its emphasis on local actors, the IBC was founded on the idea that even assuming the existence of emergent forms of governance (e.g. in the form of relatively strong communal organizations, such as in the case of CdM), policymaking in distressed urban areas should be founded upon a proactive attitude on the part of public authorities. Public intervention should thus reinforce local networks and create a critical mass, with the goal of eventually triggering a virtuous circle in terms of organizational dynamics. This represented a key innovative element of the IBC in relation to previous policy experiences, such as the *URBAN* initiative, and namely, in regard to the tendency of public action to fade away after the implementation phase of the project. Indeed, the IBC's policy objective was precisely to create a partnership model that would prove sustainable in the long run, and survive the end of the initiative. As a technical officer of the IBC said:

One of the principles was: ‘we don't want to replace the organizations’. And one of the lessons learned from previous projects is that when the project ends, the territories tend to become orphans of the structure. Since we knew we were going to leave, we weren't going to create a community that was dependent on us. Our work consisted in working with the organizations and increase their capacity (E6ME, IBC technical officer in the field of social services, interview)

The IBC: a critical assessment

In many ways, and despite some positive results, the IBC was not able to successfully address key urban issues in CdM. This was particularly evident in the realms of planning and housing policy, that is, in the actions that were designed to address issues such as the residents' housing needs and the lack of a detailed

plan for the area of CdM (*Eixo 1 – Um bairro legal para todos*, IBC, 2012a). The IBC could not create better conditions in relation to the existing regulatory framework, and showed at the same time that public administration agencies at central and local level (i.e. the IHRU and the municipality of Amadora respectively) were ill equipped to meet the challenges inherent to public action in CdM. Specifically, the IBC was not able to activate new mechanisms to solve the long-standing conflict on land property issues, which remains open to this day; in turn, the persistence of this impasse determined the impossibility to implement some of the housing projects produced in the context of the IBC. Finally, the partial nature of IBC's achievements is also due to its abrupt end. In 2010, the municipality of Amadora and the Comissão Executiva of the IBC (in which local associations were represented through the Comissão de Bairro) started to discuss various options for a new *plano de pormenor* (detailed plan) and for rehousing part of the residents. After the outbreak of the economic crisis, however, the government and the head of the IHRU changed; in 2012, alleging lack of funds, the IHRU withdrew from the IBC and the project was terminated (Jorge and Carolino, 2019: 25–26).

While some of these failures had to do with structural and contingent factors, others had to do with an inadequate overall management of the process on the part of public authorities. In particular, public authorities did not show the necessary flexibility that would have allowed the realization of *ad hoc* agreements in different areas (employment, urban planning, education, etc.) – that is, agreements between public institutions and local organizations which could derogate established administrative practices, or even the existing legislative framework (e.g. on the recruitment of human resources supporting IBC's projects). Years later, one of the local associations that had participated to the IBC still lamented the absence of positive developments in this respect:

For the next year, we will once again continue to wait for the ministerial decision regarding the approval of the *ad hoc* agreement ('acordo atípico') for the community centre, by the Instituto da Solidariedade e Segurança Social (Activity Plan and Budget of a local association for the year 2019).

We suggest that this also denotes a lack of commitment on the part of some central state's agencies – which became evident after the demise of the IBC, as some ministerial representatives *de facto* abandoned the initiative after the execution of specific projects of the *Plano de Acção* co-produced with the local organizations.

Given these constraints, the implementation of new forms of governance remained by and large an 'incremental process defined by the process of adjustment of procedures and the actors' reciprocal positions, which aimed at reaching an equilibrium between the interests at play' (Colombo, 2021: 309). Still, this process was not without an impact: the emphasis on local partnerships, their autonomy, and the open-ended nature of the process represented not only the main characteristic of the design of this initiative, but also its most durable result. As a respondent notes,

[t]he inter-ministerial governance model managed to leave a network of relationships that had to do with the way being and relating to the territory, and with the social capital created between the various actors. In Cova da Moura, the only thing that is certain is that the Comissão do Bairro persists, and, as long as it persists, it means that something still exists there (E1MA, IBC central government manager, interview).

This is consistent with the IBC's emphasis on 'non-spontaneous emergence of local governance' and the idea that the creation of an *ad hoc* critical mass is not only instrumental to the implementation of any particular action, but also constitutes a goal in itself. Indeed, the Comissão de Bairro of IBC continues to exist as an umbrella for local associations, years after the programme has been terminated: for example, it still had a meaningful role in 2018, in the context of the launch of the *Nova Geração de Políticas de Habitação* and of the programme housing programme *1º Direito* (see Jorge and Carolino, 2019: 27).

The results of IBC's investment on the stakeholders' ownership of the process are visible not only in terms of the actors' mutual relations, but also in terms of policy actions. As the *Registos de Processo* (IBC, 2012a: 35–36) notes, the co-construction of the initial diagnostic was the phase of the project that brought together the highest number of

organizations, while the elaboration of IBC's *Plano de Acção* represented the most intense moment of engagement. Several IBC projects, however, such as Centro Local de Apoio aos Imigrantes (Local Support Centre for Immigrants) and the Gabinete de Inserção Profissional (Centre for Career Development) continued to run after the demise of the initiative, following the same logic of policy integration and the same management model based on inter-institutional and inter-ministerial cooperation – meaning that the IBC produced different results depending on the policy sector observed. The IBC seems also to have cemented horizontal relations between local actors, as well as eased the dynamic of institutional learning between central and local authorities, and community organizations – which, in turn, had positive spill-over effects on contexts other than CdM (Colombo, 2021: 330–334).

Concluding notes

Our account of the experience of the IBC thus provides a mixed picture in terms of its achievements in CdM. As an experimental policy initiative, however, the value of the IBC also lies in its ability of providing a 'proof of concept', that is, of how an integrated and collaborative approach can work and what it can achieve – and thus whether it can be a sound basis for future policymaking.

In this respect, our first observation is that the IBC has been to some extent successful on its own terms. Specifically, and as far as its achievements in CdM are concerned, the IBC was successful in upgrading the quality of relations between actors. It would be myopic to evaluate the impact of the IBC only by looking at its failure in, say, producing an official detailed plan for the settlement; consistent with the principle of collaborative governance, the IBC offered instead a platform for the stakeholders to negotiate themes and forms of open-ended cooperation. Based on our account, the most significant and durable results of the IBC in CdM have been produced by the interaction of a broad and diverse set of stakeholders, which have developed a true sense of ownership of the policy process.

As a pilot project (and precisely because it was a relatively good proof of concept of integrated and collaborative governance design) the IBC also

provides some interesting lessons for public intervention in distressed urban areas, and for urban policy in general. While some specific remarks on governance design are presented in Colombo (2021) we would like to make here some broader considerations.

First, the experience of the IBC shows the difficulties in defining the perimeter of the governance process vis-à-vis the problematic cocktails of socio-economic issues that can be found in specific urban areas. The case of CdM shows how even in a territory relatively rich in terms of community relations and civic engagement, these issues can defy public intervention, and even sabotage it, as unsolved problems reverberate onto other areas. In CdM one can see a number of issues affecting the local community that are beyond the reach of cooperation between local partners because solutions cannot simply be provided at local level (e.g. for unemployment); and others for which the local stakeholders themselves are unable to find a consensual position (e.g. in the case of CdM's land ownership). All in all, these observations seem to give credit to long-standing scepticism (see, for example, Andersson and Musterd, 2005) on how much is possible to expect from selective approaches, singling out specific areas or target populations vis-à-vis broad and pressing social issues. In turn, this raises the question of whether area-based interventions represent an answer to the inefficiencies of more traditional forms of public interventions, or just a way to partially make up for their absence.

Second, the experience of the IBC suggests that integrated, collaborative governance might be an asset for policymaking in distressed urban areas – but also that its chances to succeed rest on the key role of central government. In particular, our account has shown how a collaborative governance approach (i.e. one based on a strong emphasis on local partnerships and their open-ended nature) still requires a strong and proactive role of the state: as spur and facilitator of local action, as well as in ensuring a better match between the goals of policy interventions, on the one side, and the existing regulatory framework and administrative practices on the other. Our account seems also to give some credit to Aalbers and Beckhoven's (2010) scepticism about the actual reach of integrated approaches: as the

authors put it, the logic behind these initiatives ‘is flawed because it ignores the complexity and the path-dependency of administrative organisations and cultures’ (p. 459). It would be perhaps excessive to call the logic behind the IBC ‘flawed’; however, precisely by virtue of its inter-institutional approach, the experience of the IBC has highlighted the inability of the Portuguese central and local government to deploy the necessary regulatory and organizational flexibility – and especially with regard to the local branches of state agencies, such as welfare offices.

Third, and last, the debate is open on the impact of the IBC on the trajectory of Portuguese urban policymaking. The demise of the IBC was rather abrupt, and followed a change of the governing coalition in the midst of a severe economic recession. As such, the experience of the IBC also constitutes a reminder that the timeline for experimenting in collaborative governance does not necessarily coincide with (but is always irremediably affected by) the rhythm of electoral cycles or administrative reform, and is subject to the impact of contingent events that can be exogenous even to the national system. And one could certainly wonder whether, under different conditions, the IBC could have influenced the subsequent trajectory of Portuguese urban policy in more direct ways. What is certain is that the experience of IBC, and the wide debate around it, has marked the reflection of an entire generation of academics and practitioners in the field of urban policy – similarly to what happened in the field of housing policy the 1990s with the PER, a much larger and far more consequential programme. While policymakers seem today rather uninterested to IBC’s approach to urban policymaking, the IBC might have left some more profound, if less visible, traces.

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Notes

1. In the absence of a formal census of the population, this is just a rough estimate (see IBC, 2012a: 14).
2. The *Registos de Processo* (IBC, 2012a) had originally been published online, but since 2013 the full version of the report is no longer available; two sections (Index and Synopsys) can still be found online (IBC, 2012b). The respondents have been anonymized. All the English translations of the original Portuguese texts and interviews are the authors’.

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