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Policy constellations as ecosystems of design actions: Exploring three cases of social innovation policies in Italy

Constelações políticas como ecossistemas de ações de design:
explorando três casos de políticas de inovação social na Itália

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Abstract

The article considers social innovation in an eco-systemic perspective, focusing on policies able to foster it and discussing design's role within them in terms of professional skills and a widespread capability among all social actors involved. To be expressions of an innovative governance, social innovation policies must themselves be innovative and form *policy constellations*: clusters of initiatives able to interact positively with the socio-technical system on which they seek to impact. The article is specifically devoted to illustrating the notion of policy constellation, discussing three social innovation policies in Italy: 'Bologna Regulation', 'Milan Smart City' and 'Bollenti Spiriti' in Apulia. All three case studies refer to project strategies that lead to the creation of ecosystems of independent (but mutually synergic) initiatives. Until now, expert design has had a sometimes significant, but generally marginal, presence in this field (mostly as strategic design and, to a lesser extent, as service and communication design). This article suggests that this could and should increase in the future. The authors conclude by posing a new question: what holds together the constituent projects in a social innovation policy? A possible hypothesis is that this something is a cultural frame: a vision of the world shared by all the actors involved.

Keywords: policy constellation, social innovation, design for social innovation, strategic design, design for services, co-design.

Resumo

O artigo ilustra o conceito de constelação de políticas. Especificamente, considera a inovação social numa perspectiva ecossistêmica, com foco em políticas capazes de promovê-la, e discute o papel do design em termos de competências profissionais e de uma capacidade difusa entre todos os atores sociais envolvidos. Para ser expressões de uma governança inovadora, as políticas de inovação social devem ser inovadoras e formar constelações políticas: aglomerados de iniciativas capazes de interagir positivamente com o sistema sociotécnico em que procuram impactar. São discutidas três políticas de inovação social na Itália: "Regulamentação de Bolonha", "Milan Smart City" e "Bollenti Spiriti" em Puglia. Todos os três estudos de caso referem-se a estratégias de projeto que levam à criação de ecossistemas de iniciativas independentes (mas mutuamente sinérgicas). Até agora, o design profissional tem tido uma presença às vezes significativa, mas geralmente marginal, neste campo (principalmente como design estratégico e, em menor medida, como design de serviços e de comunicação). Este artigo sugere que esta pode e deve aumentar no futuro. Os autores concluem levantando uma nova questão: o que une os projetos constituintes em uma política de inovação social? Uma hipótese possível é que esse algo seja uma moldura cultural: a visão de mundo compartilhada por todos os atores envolvidos.

Palavras-chave: constelação de políticas, inovação social, design para inovação social, design estratégico, design de serviços, co-design.

Background: social innovation policies as constellations of design actions

The background knowledge of this article¹ is based on the connection of three different notions: social innovation, public policy and design (mainly strategic design, but also service and communication design). The Young Foundation defines social innovation as

new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. In other words, they are innovations that are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act (Murray et al., 2010, p. 3).

According to different authors from the DESIS network (Meroni, 2007; Jégou and Manzini 2008; Manzini, 2014a), social innovation as a whole may be viewed as the result of a multiplicity of co-designing processes directed towards diverse purposes. More specifically, Manzini (2015, p. 90-92) defines these processes as “ecosystems of autonomous and interacting initiatives” led by various social actors who more or less explicitly and deliberately adopt approaches and methods proper to design. So, in this context, design is intended both as specific professional expertise (*expert design*) and as a capability with which all the social actors involved are potentially endowed (*diffuse design*) (Brown and Wyatt, 2010; Manzini, 2015; Selloni, 2014).

The main interest in social innovation lies in the fact that it allows us to tackle problems that are otherwise difficult or impossible to solve (Mulgan, 2006; Murray et al., 2010). The specific innovations derived, which we shall call *solution-oriented innovations*, emerge and develop in socio-technical systems that make them imaginable, possible and more or less easily workable (*enabling eco-systems*) (Manzini, 2015, p. 90-92). The characteristics of these socio-technical systems are determined by a multiplicity of factors, one of which is public policy, defined by Wilson as the “authoritative statements or actions of government which reflect the decisions, values, or goals of policy makers” (2013, p. 15). This is a crucial notion for this article because it determines the standards and programmes that tend to modify the characteristics of the socio-technical system to which they are applied. To be effective, these policies must be innovative in themselves: coherent with the new ideas and practices of governance that have been emerging in recent years, mainly related to the active involvement of citizens (in this regard we can refer to a wide variety of authors and lines of work, among which: Cottam and Leadbeater [2004]; Pestoff [2009]; Björgvinsson et al. [2010]; Mulgan and Stears [2012]; Manzini and Meroni [2013]; Bason [2014]; Iaione [2012]; Arena [1997]).

According to Manzini (2014b), social innovation and public policies, i.e. *public social innovation policies* (which for the sake of brevity we shall hereon refer to simply as *policies*) may be viewed as innovations that aim to modify a context so as to make it more conducive to the birth and

autonomous spread of a wide variety of solution-oriented activities. In other words, the aim of these policies is to produce one or more *context-orientated innovations*.

In this article we argue that, if these policies aim to be successful and express innovative governance, they must come forward as a diversified series of initiatives that are able to relate positively with the socio-technical system on which they are to impact. In other words, these policies take shape as *policy constellations*.

Three policies have been selected to illustrate the concept of *policy constellation* in this article: ‘*Bologna Regulation*’, ‘*Milan Smart City*’ and ‘*Bollenti Spiriti*’ in Apulia.

We chose these policies building upon several criteria: the first one is their relevance within the national context. Not by chance, they are three ground-breaking programmes that represent a reference point for Italian municipalities wishing to adopt similar policies (for example, the ‘*Bologna Regulation*’ has, according to Labsus [2016], currently been replicated in 80 Italian cities).

Another important criterion for selection is their more or less explicit connection with design, meaning that these policies recognize design as an important element for the conception and application of their programmes (for example, in the document related to the ‘*Milan Smart City Guidelines*’ [2014], design is suggested as a means by which to involve stakeholders in different projects in a collaborative way, actually ‘*designing together*’ and thus proposing a co-designing approach.)

Finally, we selected these three policies because they all consist of a set of interconnected and autonomous actions, which is an integral part of their identity. In other words, these three are the ones that best fit the notion of *policy constellation* here presented (for example, the programme ‘*Bollenti Spiriti*’ [2015] comprises five main actions which are in turn composed of other independent initiatives essentially managed from the bottom-up).

Types of design actions

By their very nature the overall policy and its various constituent initiatives require designing. Each of them calls for an approach and tools that are primarily those of design (Bason, 2014; Junginger, 2014; Christiansen and Bunt, 2012; Howlett and Ramesh, 2003). If expert design is to play a significant role, it must adopt a new set of skills and expertise that we shall refer to as *emerging design* (Manzini, 2015): a design that centres on the expertise and tools of strategic design and service and communication design, but that in many ways goes beyond any traditional disciplinary confines.

Here we propose a classification for the various actions that constitute a *policy constellation*, considering each of them as a ‘*design action*’ according to the aims and results that best characterize it. This classification builds upon another classification (Manzini, 2014b): according to the author, design experts should use their creativity, sensitivity and skills, firstly, to conceive a variety of design

¹ This article is based mainly on the results of two lines of research conducted by the authors and to which frequent reference is made: one, growing out of the work of the international network DESIS – Design for Social innovation towards Sustainability (DESI, 2015), led one author to write the book named *Design, When Everybody Designs* (Manzini, 2015) and the other, emerging from various research activities in the field, led the other author to write her doctorate thesis, at the Politecnico di Milano, entitled *Designing for Public-interest Services* (Selloni, 2014).

initiatives essentially devoted to co-creating 'enabling solutions' and, secondly, to give rise to 'favourable environments'. The first type of action aims to generate specific co-creation processes (such as *exploring, triggering, enabling, prototyping* etc.), while the second aims to make co-creation processes (such as *amplifying* and *storytelling*) easier.

The classification proposed here considers and reinterprets some of these (design) actions and also includes a specific action which corresponds to what would, in a traditional perspective, be the main or only activity of the policy, that is: *regulating*.

Regulating: conceiving and developing a set of rules, norms, guidelines and programs.

The notion of regulating proposed here presents some elements of innovation that are mainly attributable to a shift from the authoritative nature of rules in general to the practical and experimental character of rules that serve to inspire and facilitate the relationship between private citizens and institutions: in other words, from 'administrating for' to 'administrating with'.

Here we would like to underline briefly that this change in paradigm is given ample space in design literature and is discussed from different approaches according to the discipline and school of thought: 'amministrazione condivisa' (Arena, 1997); new public governance (Osborne, 2010), participatory governance (Turnhout *et al.*, 2010; Fischer, 2012), collaborative governance (Donahue and Zeckhaus, 2011). All these expressions are somehow heirs to the analyses made by Ostrom (1990) in her book *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*.

Mapping: searching for and visualizing existing initiatives, to give them more visibility and to prepare a common ground for future policies.

This is one of the characterising activities of design for social innovation. For example, the pioneering work carried out by Meroni in her book *Creative Communities* (2007) can be seen as a systematic mapping of *on-field creativity*: a collection of case studies organised into thematic clusters that tell us how groups of *ordinary people* are able to elaborate attractive solutions to improve their everyday lives. Hence, it is about identifying activities already in progress and recognising active subjects in the territory.

Empowering: transferring knowledge, skills, methods and tools development, to improve different actors' competences in designing and managing their own initiatives and in supporting future policies.

This capacity building may be developed by using co-design, which, according to the authors, is a way of empowering people (Selloni, 2014) and enhancing their confidence in the possibility of being able to affect their local situation. The type of empowerment here described may be viewed as both subjective and collective empowerment. According to TEPSIE research (Davies and Simon, 2013), and building upon the study of McLean and Andersson (2009), it is possible to distinguish subjective empowerment (the feeling of being able to influence decisions) and objective or 'de facto' empowerment (actually being able to influence an outcome or a decision).

The use of co-design does not lead automatically to objective empowerment, but it could spark a 'virtuous' flow. This is one more reason to evaluate the importance of subjective

empowerment and also of local conditions, because "many things need to be in place to result in genuine 'de facto' empowerment" (Davies and Simon, 2013, p. 12).

Envisioning: feeding social conversations and co-design processes with visions and ideas, to trigger different actors' motivation and their ability to activate themselves in new directions and to support innovative future policies (Manzini, 2014b).

Envisioning is a characterising activity of expert design that benefits from the designer's capacity to give shape to intangible things, providing powerful images able to inspire people and to create a shared vision on crucial issues. These visions work as the 'boundary objects' conceived by Star (1989) and then redefined by Ehn (2008) as tools for aligning different participants and different matters of concern.

Amplifying: giving higher visibility to existing best practices and policies, and also to generative ideas and new value systems, to make them recognizable by larger audiences and give them the possibility of moving towards new sociocultural and geographic contexts.

When dealing with a constellation of initiatives, it is possible that they remain below the radar of the general public and need to be acknowledged in order to become visible and attractive. This is why Penin *et al.* (2013) talk about the importance of applying an 'amplification method' in order to expand weak signals and make them strategic.

Case study discussion

The idea of *policy constellation* is examined further here through an exposition of three Italian social innovation policies. The three case studies are first described briefly, then their constituent initiatives are classified and examined in various aspects: motivation, functioning and expected results; times and modes of existence; types of interaction with other initiatives and their context; possibility of replication.

- (i) The '*Bologna Regulation on collaboration between citizens and the city for the care and regeneration of urban commons*': this is a proper city council regulation governing shared administration, consisting of 36 articles created so that citizen participation in the government of the city should no longer be a sporadic event, but a normal way of administrating.
- (ii) '*Milan Smart City*': this is a programme of guidelines, strategic actions and initiatives aimed to make Milan a 'smart city' from the point of view of social innovation. The expression 'smart city' has a special meaning here. It means a more inclusive city that welcomes sharing and collaboration between various actors in the public and private sectors, the third sector and civil society. It is not by chance that within this programme there are initiatives like 'Milano Sharing City' and 'Milano IN' (where IN stands for INclusive and INnovative).
- (iii) '*Bollenti Spiriti*', which translates as 'Boiling Spirits', is a programme of youth policies in Apulia: a combination of actions and interventions to enable young citizens to take part in all aspects of life in the community. It is a coherent model,

based on the co-ordination and integration of a series of long-term projects with a common purpose: to see the younger generations as a driver of social, economic and cultural re-birth for Apulian cities.

Though different from one another, from the point of view of their complexity, breadth and longevity these policies can be seen as a progression. The most recent, the Bologna case, is essentially a regulating policy to provide a series of activities with a regulatory framework; the example of Milan is a sort of umbrella-policy covering a wide range of initiatives; with ten years of experience behind it, Bollenti Spiriti in Apulia is a complex, unitary programme that has generated five thematic actions, the results of which are now being verified and measured.

As previously stated, the article essentially examines the three cases through their characterising initiatives, which are seen as part of the design process itself. These are discussed in a dedicated paragraph ('Exploring design actions'), preceded by a brief analysis of the previous activities that characterise their respective contexts.

Previous activities

All the cases have benefited from previous activities that have in some way influenced the creation of contexts favourable to their birth. We now wish to digress briefly to have a look at them.

Bologna, for example, is well-known for its tradition as a democratic, progressive city and its inhabitants are noted for their strong sense of community and cooperation. Among the many activities that have always animated the public life of the city, we want to mention a particularly significant one that is itself a *solution-orientated initiative*: 'Social Streets'. These are Facebook groups created to encourage socialisation among people living in the same street. A simple idea that over the past year has been rapidly gathering endorsement, leading to the creation of 393 Social Streets mainly in Italy, and is beginning to spread internationally. Social Streets are to all intents and purposes real creative communities (Meroni, 2007) able to activate various collaborative services (Jégou and Manzini, 2008) to improve the life of private citizens who thus become users and providers of a series of public-interest services (Selloni, 2014). Not only do these initiatives solve everyday problems, but they also bring new life to the context where they occur and spur collaboration between different actors, raising questions for the Local Administration that develop into a demand for policy.

In Milan, it is possible to observe numerous activities that foreran the Milan Smart City programme, which may be viewed as part of a wider process of change that has been affecting the city in various ways: such as the changing urban landscape of the city with new building projects, the wave of enthusiasm and internationalisation generated by Expo, or an awakening of civic activism partly coinciding with the installation of the new, left-wing administration in 2011.

Many initiatives can be associated with the reactivation of abandoned spaces such as: the agricultural 'cascine' *farm buildings* (through the bid for reutilization projects

for the sixteen Milanese urban farmsteads [Associazione Cascine Milano, 2016]); 'green areas' (through the assignment of spaces for urban vegetable gardens and gardens in the ColtivaMI and Giardini Condivisi – *Shared Gardens* projects [Agricity, 2016]); and ex-industrial plots to be assigned to associations and young start-ups (among the most representative of which are the Fabbrica del Vapore and the Officine Ansaldo [Comune di Milano, 2016]).

Other initiatives are new forms of civic activism that intersect and cross with forms of *participatory design* and *design activism*. Among these we would like to mention 'Cittadini Creativi – Creative Citizens': an action-research project led by one of the authors, in which a group of citizens took part in a course of co-designing sessions to design a group of services for one particular neighbourhood in Milan, located in Zone 4. The initiative, lasting five months, generated six services of public interest based on collaborative practices and resource sharing. However, above all, it experimented a process of citizen *empowerment* (Selloni, 2014) by grouping requests together and developing shared proposals to submit to the institutions, and thus generating a demand for more appropriate policies and inspiring the future publication of local government tenders.

In Apulia, the ten years of action by Bollenti Spiriti have significantly contributed to changing the panorama of activism and youth entrepreneurship. However, in this case too, we can observe plenty of previous activities that certainly contributed to creating a demand and a favourable environment for the creation of relevant policies. The research 'Cosa bolle in pentola' (translating literally as 'What's boiling in the pan?'), which we shall look at more closely later, mapped out as many as 445 such initiatives (for example, a peer-to-peer education service, a programme for supporting entrepreneurship and self-employment, a cultural association for urban regeneration etc.).

The purpose of this brief digression was to highlight the importance of the initial context of the selected policies. These originated in environments that were rich in more or less successful initiatives, which prepared the ground for their development. Undoubtedly this is not the only factor that influences the emergence of such policies. However, we can affirm that the context's characteristics impact both on the birth and the specifics of the policies.

Exploring design actions

As stated, the initiatives specific to each of the three cases chosen are described according to their characterising aims and results (Manzini, 2014b): this is a classification by design actions, starting with the traditional policy action (*regulating*) and moving on to identify other actions that distinguish the entire *policy constellation*.

Regulating

The Bologna Regulation provides a regulatory framework without limiting the creative, proactive freedom of citizens. It is a real *experimental legal tool* (Foster and Iacono, 2016): a facilitating tool by which the Local Administration can decide together with its citizens what needs to be done and what kind of financial support is required to enable them to do it.

Underlying the Regulation are general principles on which the collaborative relationship between private citizens and the Local Administration is based. These are: Mutual trust; Publicity and transparency; Responsibility; Inclusiveness and openness; Sustainability; Proportionality; Adequacy and differentiation; Informality; Civic autonomy. In short, these principles are based on considering the private citizen as a resource and not a problem; as an actor capable of contributing actively to the administration of the city.

It is interesting to note how these principles are in a way *design principles*, showing how even the action of *regulating* in policy constellations has a design character and a strategic role, creating a very special vision of City and Administration. These *design principles* are all innovative within a regulation and are basic to the idea of a more flexible administration open to the contribution of every single local actor.

The 'collaboration agreements' constitute the specific tool by which a proper constellation of initiatives is generated. They vary according to the degree of complexity of the undertakings in question, setting out the aims and objectives to pursue, the shared management actions to carry out and the duration of the collaboration. They anticipate the possible causes for suspension or conclusion and establish the various roles of the subjects involved. The collaboration agreements have generated over 100 initiatives and in this case too we can note some typical characteristics of design actions: the agreements are highly experimental and practical; essentially they are a tool for creating prototypes that can be subsequently modified and replicated. Prototyping, whether rapid, slow or participatory (Coughlan *et al.*, 2007; Blomkvist *et al.*, 2012), is one of the typical actions of design and undoubtedly a tool such as the agreements helps to create the conditions for experimenting by supporting proper institutionalised test environments (Manzini and Meroni, 2013).

Mapping

We have already observed how the cases selected have benefited from contexts already rich in initiatives: it is not by chance that one of the first actions that a policy carries out is to map its surrounding territory to identify promising activities to build on.

In this discussion we consider mapping activities both as 'preparatory studies' for the policy (as in the case of Apulia) and as ongoing, characterising activities in the policy itself (as in the case of Milan).

For instance, right at the beginning, Bollenti Spiriti was able to benefit from research developed by Università degli studi di Bari – Dipartimento Scienze Storiche e Sociali and commissioned by the Apulia Regional Government. This research, entitled 'Cosa bolle in pentola', aimed to map the existing activities relating to youth activism and participation. The Apulian researchers identified numerous initiatives (445), focusing in particular on 90 case studies. They analysed success and failure factors, interviewing the various representatives of these experiences and asking

about needs and desires. In a way, these initiatives prepared the ground for 'Bollenti Spiriti', above all highlighting the urgent need for specific, coordinated interventions from the top-down.

'Milan Smart City' launched various mapping activities including public consultation, as occurred for the experiences relating to a sharing economy within the city. This public consultation classified 75 initiatives into four main clusters (economic development, social inclusion, education, and technological innovation) and aimed to connect all the actors in order to create a sort of civic community associated with the notion of a sharing economy. The main purpose of this mapping activity was to collect insights and information in order to develop an adequate set of rules to govern these activities, as the majority of sharing economy initiatives lack legal and fiscal regulation.

Speaking more generally, in social innovation policies mapping can also be used to optimise resources and avoid wasting energy, as a sort of tool for sustainability: "use what already exists", "reduce need for the new", "share resources" are some of the sustainability principles enounced voiced by Manzini and Jégou (2003, p. 56-57) that are valid for social resources as well as physical resources.

After all, these guidelines should inspire good mapping and at the same time provide indications for building policies appropriate to the context in which they operate.

Empowering

The most significant *empowering* initiatives within the selected case studies are those developed in Apulia, because they are specific projects devoted to transferring knowledge, skills, methods and tools to the younger generations in order to improve their competences and enhance their contribution in future policies. They are: 'Laboratori dal Basso', which supports educational programmes for young entrepreneurs who directly select their teachers, and 'Bollenti Spiriti School', a school specifically addressing local cultural operators, with the aim of educating future youth policy experts for the Apulia region.

Here, the main contribution of expert design was to introduce service design methods and tools. In fact, most of the initiatives run by participants within these educational programmes may be viewed as service activities that need to be re-designed and transformed into actual collaborative services (Jégou and Manzini, 2008), where citizens are both end-users and producers of the service.

A set of short co-design sessions took place as a way to shift from engaging to empowering people (Cantù and Selloni, 2013): some of the ideas provided by participants evolved into real service activities and also contributed to job creation².

Concluding, we argue that the whole programme of 'Bollenti Spiriti' may be viewed as a great collective empowerment process that is currently affecting many young people in Apulia, laying the foundations for the creation of a new ruling class able to develop other innovative policy constellations.

² According to the report 'Tre anni di Laboratori dal Basso' (2015), 77,1% of the participants work together with the associations that promoted the labs through various forms of collaboration.

Envisioning

The initiatives within the *envisioning* cluster are strictly connected with expert design because they aim to feed social conversations and co-design processes with visions and ideas. In the selected case studies there are few *envisioning* initiatives, precisely because design experts are not always included within policy actions and this is why we selected an initiative developed by the Milan Smart City office in partnership with the School of Design at Politecnico di Milano, where many design experts are educated.

'Hacking Public Services' is a design studio run as part of the Master in Product Service System Design in 2015: the aim of the studio was to imagine a new generation of public services within different clusters (housing, education, environment, public space etc.) by co-designing them with citizens and benefiting from the expert advice of members of the Milan Smart City office.

The participants at the studio are in a way representatives of the *emerging design* (Manzini, 2015) previously described: a combination of strategic and service design, with some elements from communication design, resulting in an expertise that goes beyond the traditional boundaries between disciplines. Students developed ten service proposals to be presented to the local Councillor for Labour Policies, Economic Development, University and Research and to other members of the City council.

Developing proposals that are visible is crucial: students were able to apply methods and tools of co-design, offering shared tangible items about which to dialogue and reflect. These visualizations represent a powerful means for sharing, translating and communicating ideas, facilitating and making participation more pleasant (both for citizens and members of the Milan Smart City office). Furthermore, during the co-design session with citizens, students were able to shift from 'visualizations' to 'visions', and this represents a crucial point in describing their role, which moves from 'facilitators with tools' to that of 'proponents with contents' (Selloni, 2014). They brought to the table proposals able to go beyond the imagination of the other participants and, above all, able to open new possibilities and to amplify the conversation. In this regard, Meroni and Sangiorgi (2011, p. 5) point out:

[...] designers can be both facilitator and provoker: the tools they use do not serve only to make ideas co-created by the group more visible and more assessable (visualising) but also stimulate the group by feeding the discussion with original visions and proposals (visioning).

Thinking about how to improve future policies, the positive experience of 'Hacking Public Services' shows the importance of increasing envisioning initiatives because they are able to enhance public imagination and inspire hope (Selloni, 2014), and this thanks also to the power of design, which is essentially a propositional activity (Margolin, 2012).

Amplifying

As stated, *amplifying* is a policy activity that applies different communication tools in order to increase the visibility of the various initiatives in the constellation and thus make them attractive and part of a shared narrative.

It is interesting to note that in the cases selected *amplifying* is no longer considered to be collateral to the more traditional policy actions, but to be a core action that requires careful designing and planning.

The Bologna Regulation has been making use of various *amplifying initiatives*: there was the 'First Festival of Civic Collaboration' on 16th May 2015, to give visibility to all the active citizen protagonists in the collaboration agreements, and the first international conference on Urban Commons on 6th-7th November 2015. It is entitled 'The City as a Commons: Reconceiving Urban Space, Common Goods and City Governance', where Bologna is positioned as an avant-garde city in the research and practice of Urban Commons.

In addition, the Bologna Regulation includes provisions specifically dedicated to communication activities, which it calls 'Collaborative communication' – title VII, article 28, and where it stresses the public function of communication, which seeks to make citizens aware that they are carrying out activities aimed to satisfy the public interest. In this sense it is evident that the City Administration intends to use communication to "administrate by convincing" (Arena, 1997), and therefore act to modify behaviour without resorting to public power. In 'Collaborative communication' the City Administration offers citizens a series of facilitators to participating in the process, making them not only the destination of the communication but also the active actors: (a) a set of tools and instruments to communicate and propose, such as the civic network and the civic medium; (b) open source license for data, infrastructures and digital platform; (c) mentoring program upon the use of collaborative communication channels, also favouring support among groups (Bologna Regulation, 2014, p. 24).

It is interesting to note that in the 'First Festival of Civic Collaboration in Bologna' the citizens who signed the collaboration agreement were also the absolute protagonists and received a public recognition that, though symbolic (handing over the 'keys of the city' in the form of a USB key containing useful information about the city), made them part of the Administration and was, in a way, a testimonial to the collaboration, thus generating emulation and making the collaboration aspirational (Selloni, 2014).

The *amplifying* initiatives in Milan constitute one of the main initiatives, or rather we can say that Milan Smart city aspires to become the soundboard for all the social innovation activities in the city. Among the various initiatives, we can mention the seminars about MilanoIN, in which the City Council seeks to transmit its particular vision of smart city that unites solidarity, innovation and inclusion. In particular, the conference 'Milano (è) IN. Innovate to include' was held on 21st February 2015, where the City Council expressly declared its desire to bring out the 'Milan model', able to unite innovation and inclusion, and it did so in the presence of all the actors involved in its policy: active citizens, researchers, exponents of technological and social enterprises, and subjects associated with the world of the sharing economy. Alongside this great event there have been many others, some targeting specific groups of actors. Here we shall limit ourselves to mentioning the periodic meetings of all the Milanese researchers who deal with social innovation, seen as sub-

jects capable of actively contributing to the development of new public policies.

Conclusions and next steps

As stated, the innovative character of the three policies lies in the fact that they are not merely regulatory interventions, but are an entire constellation of autonomous initiatives that interact with each other and with their environment.

We wish here to highlight three other important aspects of these policy constellations: they are the result of a proper localisation strategy; they are subsystems of a wider socio-technical system; strategic design plays a key role in guiding, feeding and orienting this variety of initiatives.

Lastly, we propose a working hypothesis about the existence of a common '*cultural frame*' shared among the social actors involved in these policy constellations, thus launching a call for further research.

Policy constellations as localisation

We have already observed that the quantity and quality of the initiatives put into action is heavily influenced by the specifics of the context: if there are already a lot of activities and previous experiences in the field of social innovation, the policy can start by acknowledging them (directly, as in Bologna, with its experience of Social Streets, or through a mapping activity, as in Milan and Apulia) and move on to the definition of rules. On the other hand, if there is little previous experience, activities must be set in motion that are able to feed the social conversation with new ideas and indicate possibilities hitherto unimagined (as is happening in cities that would like to adopt the Bologna Regulation but do not have the same context characteristics). In addition, according to the specifics of the context and, in particular, to the specific nature of pre-existent social innovation, the initiatives that make up the policy constellation may also include communication activities (as shown in the case of the Bologna regulation).

In other words, these policies are the result of strategies that allow the regulatory purposes typical of policy-making to be integrated with other local activities that aim to make them not only thinkable in a given context, but also possible, acceptable and ultimately effective.

Policy constellations as open systems

We have seen that the policy constellations as a whole, and many of their constituent initiatives, are promoted in collaboration with actors and activities that may not be institutions (such as the foundations and associations involved in the Bologna Regulation). Alternatively, they may be institutions with no particular calling to this kind of policy-making (e.g. universities and research centres like the Politecnico di Milano or the University of Bari). In other words, they are configured as open systems: subsystems of the wider socio-technical system with which they interact and which they undertake to modify with their action.

In so doing, they are coherent with the ideas of governance we spoke of at the start. The role of poli-

cy-maker here is not only to drop rules, constraints and incentives into the system from above, but it is also and above all to develop activities that directly involve other social actors. The purpose of this is twofold: firstly, to promote an active, propositional role for them in the social processes of change and, secondly, to integrate the skills and expertise these social actors bring into the policy-making process.

Policy-making as strategic design

We have seen that all the policy constellations analysed are the result of a co-design process that has seen the participation of diverse social actors. In addition, we must stress that many of these are the result of the actions, and often of the courage, of certain public actors who have acted as interpreters of pre-existent social innovations, themselves operating as social innovators and designers. They have adopted an approach and practices that can, to all intents and purposes, be considered design activities (in this case: strategic, service and communication design).

Generalising, we can say that policy-making processes of the kind we have been discussing require different design capabilities (from service design and communication design, for example), but they have one important component from strategic design in common: the ability to feed and orientate a social conversation on what to do and how, to make shared visions grow and, finally, to get different actors and initiatives to converge towards achieving common aims.

A common cultural frame for policy constellations

To conclude, we wish to advance a working hypothesis about the existence of another crucial feature that characterizes these policy constellations: what makes so many different initiatives co-evolve, generating actual *virtuous circles*, is the existence of a *cultural frame*, a combination of ideas and visions of worlds that all the social actors involved share (Darton and Kirk, 2011; Dorst, 2015).

On the basis of this hypothesis, it would appear firstly that the existence of this shared frame (which at the start of the process is certainly very different from the one that is most commonly found within and outside the institutions) is the necessary condition for a virtuous circle to take shape and, secondly, that its production is the most original and important result that this virtuous circle can achieve. This all opens new important questions: how can this positive process be started (in situations where this shared cultural frame does not yet exist)? Or, how can it be made to evolve from the small, intrinsically minority, alternative-group culture in which it usually starts, into a new shared frame: that of a new shared sense of a sustainable society?

For the moment these questions remain open and constitute new promising lines of research. However, we believe that we can already say that the answers, whatever they are, will have a lot to do with what design can do, with the specific cultural and operational contribution it can bring.

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