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and perspectives

The *Pla de Barris*: a remarkable case of place-sensitive territorial policy

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Abstract: Spatial injustices are rapidly growing and, in the wake of the so called “revenge of places that don’t matter”, there is urgent need for better territorial policies. Ranging on a wide variety of contexts, territorial policies should implement strategies that are not only place-based, but also coherent, effective and place-sensitive. Aim of the paper is to give a contribution to the debate, shedding light on one lesser-known yet remarkable case of territorial policy for social cohesion. The *Pla de Barris*, Plan of the districts of the Catalan Region implemented between 2004 and 2010, is here investigated. The research followed two main methodologies: on one side, quantitative socio-spatial analysis; on the other side the tools of policy analysis to investigate its implementation. It shows that the measure was efficient and effective in targeting spatial injustices thanks to integrated place-sensitive implementation mechanisms. A fairly balanced combination of centralized analytical apparatus, multi-level governance and involvement of the local administrations explains its success in addressing spatial injustices. There is much to learn from this experience, since this approach can make the difference in providing a coherent framework in which to develop place-sensitive interventions in deeply variable local contexts, that is the crucial point for the endurance of European Union.

Keywords: Urban regeneration; Urban governance; place-sensitive territorial policies; cohesion policies.

Introduction

Territorial inequalities are increasing all over Europe. As shown clearly by Rodriguez-Pose (2018), the more dynamic regions of Europe are leaving behind the less dynamic ones: places that ‘don’t matter’, where there is very little possibility of economic development and where a revenge going on through the ballot box. In the last decade, all over Europe, lower economic performances have turned out into anti-establishment vote, expressing the voice of big parts of the society that feel an increasing distance from where the development concentrates and consequently where the decisions are taken. These communities that don’t matter can be described as ‘peripheries’, indicating a distance from the ‘centre’ that is not only geographical but multi-dimensional (Petrillo, 2013).

In this sense, Regional Studies describe that peripheries exist on a European scale (e.g. the South and East of Europe) but also on national scale (e.g. the South of Italy, all Spain except Catalonia and Castilla, most of France except Paris, etc.). Parallely, Urban Studies focus on peripheries that exist on a metropolitan and urban scale, often referring to the district level. More recently, the importance of peripheries inside the scale of a

region has been acknowledged, for example with the notion of ‘inner areas’ (Barca, 2013) that also became an operative framework of the Italian government.

In this panorama, cohesion policies (not only European) act on different scales and with different mechanisms for targeting inequalities. On a national level, in Italy the territorial cohesion has been promoted through the investments of *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* that, stressing particularly on infrastructures as means to recover the gap between South and North, had often the effect of wasting resources and consume the trust of the people. Since the 1980s, following the importance given to the urban dimension of inequalities, cohesion policies integrated operational frameworks that targeted the cities and the regeneration of the city centres (e.g. Urban, Urban II, etc.) and of some peripheral parts considered more vulnerable, like *Programmi di Recupero Urbano* (PRU).

These regeneration programs aimed at concentrating resources where the vulnerability is concentrated, using the space as a factor that assures more efficiency and effectiveness to the measures activated. Nevertheless, these programs had a weakness: they stressed a lot on the physical restoration of the built environment, often forgetting the urban and social fabric and therefore failing in addressing the multiple dimensions of inequalities. Nowadays, in the wake of the ‘revenge of places that don’t matter’, all the levels of administration call for more efficient and effective ways to invest in the territorial cohesion, particularly regarding the response that those policies can have on the territories (Nello and Gomà, 2018).

Barcelona: a city with strong traditions of Urban Planning

The history of the urban development of Barcelona is very peculiar and is due to an accumulation of trends and events that had no comparable in Europe. During the dictatorship of Franco, the urban development was led by the interests of major real estate companies and developers that pushed for a ‘developmentist’ model. This, together with the lack of democracy and social policies, resulted in evident social and spatial segregation, and consequently to strong social mobilisation. After the death of Franco in 1975 and with the economic recession, the city - together with the entire Spain - required a deep institutional and economic restoration. From the point of view of urban development, the transition from industrial to tertiary economy followed an approach that changed completely from the ‘developmentist’ one and was described as ‘qualitative’, because it tended to target specific areas of the city with projects of requalification of the public spaces instead of savage urban development. Moreover, in the 1980s a season of big investment in the social services was inaugurated.

At the same time, as the city was nominated for the 1992 Olympic Games, a big change was on the run. From the ‘qualitative’ approach that had dominated after the dictatorship, the so called ‘Barcelona Model’ was being settled. This season was dominated by a strong, top-down, strategic planning approach that aimed at an urban development on the global city scale through big interventions: the Olympic facilities, the new downtown areas and new infrastructures – such as the famous *Ronda*, the new city Beltway. If in the previous phases the planning was led by different public bodies, the ‘Barcelona Model’ was heavily based on public-private partnerships in the form of mixed-capital companies with considerable autonomy. Thanks to this, and to the relatively good level of consensus around the measures, the transition of Barcelona from a mainly industrial city towards an important global city was rapidly accelerated.

This ‘new developmentism’ relied a lot on the attraction of capitals and on the interest and collaboration of the economic elites, but also on a completely new idea of administration. New management techniques were adopted by the Public Sector: the figure of the ‘local manager’ was appointed executive control on the administration; mixed-capital companies were created to manage autonomously special urban functions and processes; privatisation and externalisation of activities; spending review and tax reduction. The ‘Barcelona Model’ demonstrated many cracks in the ten years that followed the Olympic Games, such as the failure of the 2004 Universal Cultures’ Forum, and was highly criticized and opposed (Delgado, 2007). At the beginning of

the 2000s, Barcelona had reached a very high status in the European global cities, but it was still affected by social and spatial segregation.

A new generation of planning? The *Pla de Barris de la Generalitat*

Following this period in which Barcelona had grown a lot in terms of economic indicators but also in inequalities, a new approach was released. In 2004 the Parliament of the *Generalitat de Catalunya* [Region of Catalonia] approved the *Llei de Barris* [Law of the Districts], also known as *Pla de Barris* [Plan of the Districts] with the aim of “promoting projects of rehabilitation of those districts where major urban deficiencies are accumulated and where, as a consequence, the population that need more social attention is concentrated” (Nello, 2012) on the scale of the whole region (Figure 1).

The Law 2/2004, for the improvement of districts, villages and urban areas requiring special attention, of June 10th 2004. The norm was the first legislative text carried out and promoted by the government presided over by Pasqual Maragall. In fact, the draft bill was made public on 19 January 2004, by order of the Minister of Territorial Policy and Public Works, Joaquim Nadal, only three weeks after the new government had taken office (Nello, 2003: 25–28).



Figure 1. Map of the interventions that were funded by the Law 2/2004, between 2004 and 2010 . Source: Nello O. (2012), Ordenar el territorio, La experinecia de Barcelona y Cataluña. Elaboration by the author.

As visible in Table 1, the *Llei de Barris* financed between 2004 and 2010 projects in 141 districts, where more than one million people lived (at that time, the 13% of the total population of Catalonia), with a very important investment of 1.330 million Euros, of which: 693 million from European FEDER funds obtained by the Catalan Region; 513,2 million from the involved municipalities. It is based on the creation of a fund for the promotion of the ‘programme for districts and urban areas that require special attention’, provided with budgetary resources

from the government of the *Generalitat*, attached to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning and Public Works.

Number of calls	7
Number of districts	141
Total population in the 141 districts	1.005.214
Total funding	1.330 mln Euro
Funding from the <i>Generalitat</i>	693 mln Euro
Other funding (municipalities, privates, etc.)	513,2 mln Euro

Table 1. Some numbers of the Plan of the Districts. Source: *Generalitat de Catalunya. Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques [Department of Territorial Policies and Public Works]*.

Even if in some ways the Plan of the Districts represents a typical area-based program, a series of characteristics distinguishes this program from the mainstream of the various generations of neighbourhood programs of intervention that were released in Europe and makes it represent a very important step in the Catalan planning history (Scarnato, 2015).

Multi-level governance and inter-administrative cooperation

First of all, a big role was played by the Catalan regional government, that decided not to focus on single urban areas but to maintain the whole regional territory as a scale of intervention. Indeed, the planners acknowledged that segregation is originated also at a big scale, due to the real estate market. As explained by Oriol Nello: « due to the process of metropolitanization [sic] and the growing integration of the territory, the housing market in which the citizens and the economic operators make their decisions is not longer [sic] local, but rather has a much wider scope. Thus, segregation not only appears between districts in the same town but also – and usually, at first, between districts in the same urban area and even throughout the whole of the region» (Nello, 2009). It is here acknowledged that only from the regional scale it would be possible to distribute the necessary resources in an equal way for the districts and municipals that require interventions and services to face the concentration of vulnerability and which, due to the concentration itself, face great difficulties in providing them.

At the same time, in the mind of the planners, proximity to the field of action is essential for the success of urban policies. Their execution by higher institutional bodies (as in the French case), in the mind of the planner, could entail errors of appreciation and action which may lead to failure. The role of the *Generalitat* is therefore to promote, select and evaluate the projects, whilst the responsibility of the execution of the project lays completely on the town council concerned. In other words, the town council is the body responsible for the design and execution of the programme, having direct knowledge of problems and potential of each district, while the *Generalitat* maintained a role of mere funder and supporter, renouncing to be the protagonist. The Plan of the Districts, relying strongly on the potential of local government, fully applies the principle of subsidiarity.

The inter-administrative cooperation was considered of mayor importance and the law was designed in a way in which not only execution of the projects but also the selection process itself is conducted in cooperation. The law established an organism that is responsible for the selection and assignment of the resources: the Commission for the Administration of the Funds for the Promotion of the Districts and Urban Areas that require special attention. It is composed of 30 members, equally of representatives of the different Ministries of the *Generalitat* and municipal entities (Federation of Municipals of Catalonia and the Catalan Association of Municipals), as well as professionals of the Architects and Technical Architects professional bodies. This marked the beginning of a new era in the relationship between the *Generalitat* and local governments.

In conclusion, through the instrument of the competition the Region aimed at building a multi-level governance model. On one side, the leading role of the regional authority guarantees the coherence of the projects with the aim of social cohesion, the multi-institutional “tuning”, certain funding availability and territorial equity in the access to the funding. On the other side, the protagonist role of the municipality in promoting the project guarantees knowledge of the local situation and correspondence with the specific problems; the requirement of conspicuous co-funding ensures the “determination” of the municipality in effectively implementing the proposal.

The localisation of the interventions and resources

The plan aimed at reducing inequalities targeting specific neighbourhoods – *barrios* [districts], representing a precise administrative division of the territory that is nationwide recognized – that fall on the ‘areas of special attention’. A municipality could apply for one or more districts, making one or more applications. The application, in order to be successful, must target a district that belongs to the ‘areas of special attention’. This measure is to assure that resources go where there is actual need of it.

Anyway, there is to say, there is not a general overview of the Catalan districts that fall in the ‘areas of special attention’. The districts where to intervene are proposed by the municipalities and then examined by the same commission that is in charge of the evaluation of the projects. From an operational point of view, the Law of the Districts works in a way that is inspired to by the European programme URBAN. The proposed districts are examined by the commission through a set of quantitative parameters, as in Table 2, with a scale established by the regulations of the Law of Districts. In order to be considered an ‘area of special attention’, a district must obtain a minimum amount of points from all of the indicators in the scale. Then, a score is awarded adding the points given to the project and, based on the resulting score, the resources available in each call are distributed among the participating municipalities.

Criteria (defined by the Law 2/2004	Shortfalles in works, facilities and services	Demographic problems	Presence of economic, social and environmental problems	Social and urban deficits and problems of local development
Objective statistical indicators (defined by the regulation of the Law of the District)	Insufficient level of conservation of buildings	Density of population	Number of people that receive assistance and non- contributory pensions	Lack of public transport
	Buildings without running water or water disposal systems	Decrease and accelerated population growth	High level of unemployment	Lack of parking spaces
	Buildings of four or more floors without a lift, designated mainly to housing	Dependent population	Lack of green areas	Low economic activity
		High percentage of immigration	Low level of education	Percentage of the population at risk of social exclusion

Table 2. The criteria and indicators individuated by the Law 2/2004 and its regulation to verify that the district of application is in the ‘areas of special attention’. Source: Nello O. (2009), *The Law of Districts. A collective commitment to social cohesion*, Generalitat de Catalunya. Elaboration by the author.

The reason for this is to assure that the targeted district is among those that actually deserve it, avoiding that resources go to places that are in a relatively good condition but where certain municipalities would like to intervene with very good projects. However, the notable aspect is that the selection is not only based on statistical evidence of the urban and social deficits of the district. Indeed, the planners thought that establishing and publishing a ranking of those districts which find themselves affected by segregation would cause the stigmatisation of those in worse conditions and, therefore, further worsen the conditions of vulnerability of the district. Therefore, they elaborated an evaluation method that took into consideration the strength of the proposal on the side of the project.

‘A plan for projects, not for problems’

As said, the analysis of the proposed context with 16 statistic parameters is done to indagate the effective state of need of the proposed district and avoid a competition based merely on the efficacy of the projects, while the evaluation of the project means to push the focus from vulnerability to planning, trying to avoid possible effects of stigmatization.

Therefore, after the initial analysis of the districts with objective indicators, there is a second stage of evaluation based on the projects presented by the municipalities. The evaluation is done through four criteria: the level of comprehensiveness of the proposed proposal; its general coherence; the level of economic commitment of the town council; the parallel execution of complementary actions. Those two evaluation criteria have the same weight in the score, aiming to generate a combined evaluation method (as in Figure 2).

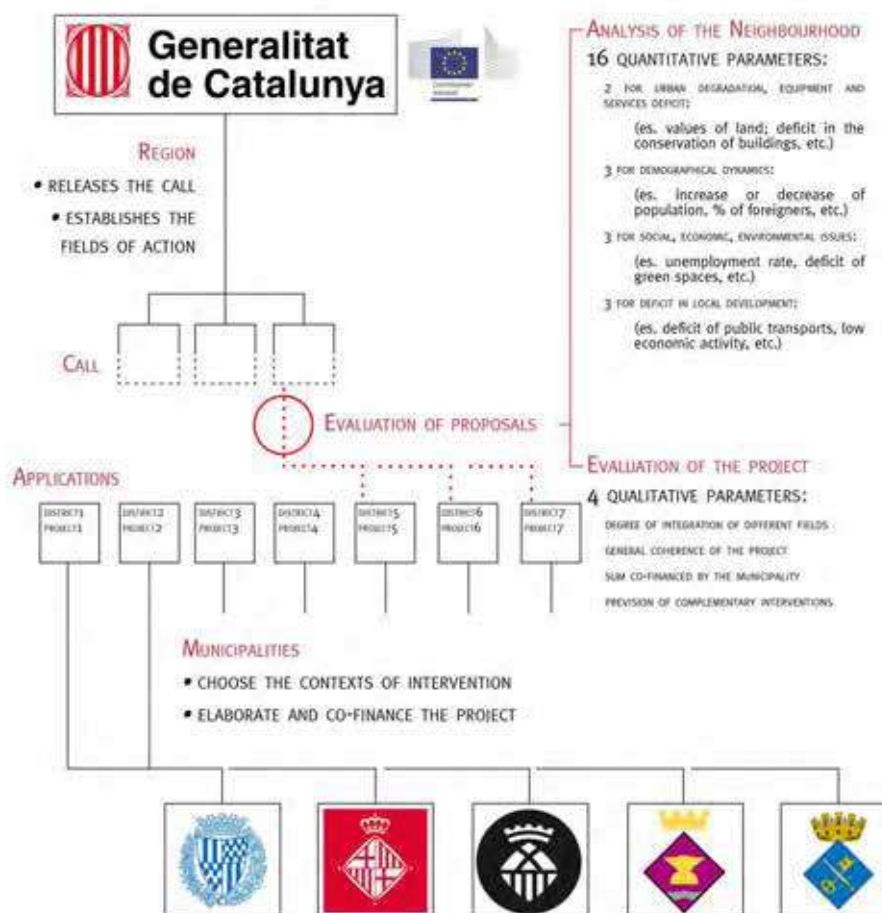


Figure 2. The governance scheme and the evaluation criteria established by the regulation of the Law 2/2004. Source: Nello O. (2009), *The Law of Districts. A collective commitment to social cohesion, Generalitat de Catalunya. Elaboration by the author.*

One of the main factors for the evaluation of the process is the degree of integration of the actions included in the proposal, assumed as a fundamental device to assure the success of the project on the district. The Law establishes 8 different fields where the projects of the municipalities should intervene in the same project, for each district. The fields regard mainly 3 areas: urban design and equipment; improvement of energy, environmental and communication infrastructures; social actions that support the population. Looking at Table 3 it is possible to see that, even though the far largest part of the funding were dedicated to strictly physical interventions like public spaces, green areas, installations for collective use and accessibility (with about 2/3 of the budget), an important role has been played by the involvement of the population through social programmes (with 1/10 of the budget) and with the refurbishment of the common elements of private building (another 1/10).

Improvement of the public space and provision of green areas (paving of streets, planting of trees, lighting, creation of gardens)	44,24%
Refurbishment of the common elements of buildings (facades, drainpipes, lifts, roofing)	9,96%
Provision of installations for collective use (civic centres, centres for the elderly)	21,83%
Incorporation of communication technologies (wiring of building, establishing of wi-fi areas)	1,28%
Introduction and improvement of energy and environmental infrastructures (collection of residues, putting rubbish containers underground, establishment of recycling centres, promotion of renewable energies, water saving mechanisms)	4,74%
Promotion of gender equality in the use or urban spaces and installations (premises for women's associations, specific training activities, interventions for the improvement of women's safety);	2,13%
Development of programmes that entail social, town planning and economic improvement of the districts (actions for the support of collectives that are facing social exclusion, training programmes, dynamise commerce)	9,39%
Improvement of access and removal of architectural barriers (widening of pavement, building of ramps, putting in escalators, elimination of obstacles).	6,26%

Table 3. Fields of intervention required by the law with examples, and the weight that each field had on the fundings. Source: Generalitat de Catalunya. Departament the Política Territorial i Obres Públiques [Department of Territorial Policies and Public Works].

In addition, the law required that the applications of the municipalities should consider two collateral actions that aim at strengthening the plan:

- the creation of complementary programmes by the different Ministries of the Generalitat;
- the constitution of comprehensive follow-up mechanisms.

Regarding the first action, the complementary actions established by the Ministries of the *Generalitat* in the districts included in the programme have been of great importance. The program 'Jobs in the Districts', created by the Ministry of Employment, has led to the establishing of 81 agreements in 92 districts included under the law in order to set up training and school-work transition programmes, with a total investment of 30 million euros. Similarly: the Ministry of Health has carried out studies on public health and health care in the districts participating in the programme; the Ministry of the Environment and Housing has established specific lines of aid in the refurbishment of common elements of buildings for the 37 districts of the programme; the Ministry of the Home Affairs, Institutional Relations and Participation has contributed to the financing of the process of citizen participation in a special way in a further 14; the *Incasòl* (Catalan Land Institute) has signed agreements in order to carry out urban remodelling actions (especially the replacement of obsolete housing with new housing) in 24 districts of the programme, with an investment of about 200 Million Euros. In the effort to cover all of the substantial aspects of the life of all of the areas of intervention

The Evaluation and Follow-up Committees (one per district) include the mayor of the municipality, representatives of different areas of the town council (directly involved in the management of the district), representatives of seven ministries of the *Generalitat*: Town and Country Planning and Public Works, Environment and Housing, Governance, Social Action, Economy and Finance, Health and Employment, as well

as a representation of the Delegation of the Government in each territory. These Committees are configured to bring together all of the services of the *Generalitat* and the Municipality that are concerned with the district. The Committees are held approximately once a year per district and are not meant to substitute the daily action of the administrations, but to maintain a coordination on the action on every district and to create the basis for integrated and transversal action.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this analysis shows how this plan has represented a very important step and pioneering application of some of the precepts of the place-sensitive approach. Of course, the place-based approach with the space as a means to understand the vulnerability of the society, and the neighbourhood as a unit of investigation of the territory and of concrete intervention. But also: the importance posed on the project and its strongly integrated character; the fact that the proposal (both of the neighbourhood and of the project) has to come from the local administration, with a pro-active role of the municipality; the devices to assure the communication and coordination among different levels (vertical) and sectors (horizontal) of governance and the implementation and follow-up of the actions.

Even if, it has been admitted, the process of adaptation of the administrations to act in a more area based and less sectorial manner (in the districts of special attention and in many other fields) required a long process of adaptation, it was a very important turning point in the innovation of the governance of this kinds of plans of intervention. Concerning Barcelona, that has had a very central role (approximately one tenth of the interventions of the Law fell on the Metropolitan Area), in comparison with what had happened before in the history of the physical transformation of the city of Barcelona, a shift was made from the top-down, architecturally hard and punctual intervention of the era 1979-2004, to a softer, more integrated and co-designed intervention that has a dimension of plan. This was very important, in the wake of the huge protests and critiques that previous plans (e.g. the one related to the Culture Forum 2004) had faced.

Not all the aspects of the plan have been investigated in this paper, even though some of them are very important and would require further investigation. The first regards the housing market: even if the Law of the Districts did not include any direct measure in that field, it was very clear in the mind of the planners that bettering the conditions of those neighbourhoods, especially those that are in the city centres, would increase the value of the land and the housing prices, with possible effects of residential exclusion or expulsion. For this reason, a combined plan was designed with the *Pla d'Habitatge 2004-2010* [Housing Plan 2004-2010] that was assigned the role of avoiding speculation effects, providing measures that promoted the social role of housing. Since the value of the lands has actually increased after the interventions of the Law of the Districts, it would be very important to examine whether the Housing Plan was able to contrast possible negative effects on the side of housing.

Considering possible replications of such a pioneering experience presents some complications related to the specificity of this case. It is important to underline that the Law of the Districts was made possible in very peculiar conditions: in a national administrative system, that of Spain, that leaves heavy financial autonomy to the regional level; in the richest and more economically advanced region of Spain; after the accumulation of many experiences in urban regeneration; in a relatively stable political situation and before the financial crisis of 2007-08. Nowadays, it would be very hard to imagine such an alignment. Nevertheless, it brings a quantity of lessons that were learnt and that could be adapted to other cases and situations, wherever there are 'geographies of discontent', in order to give concrete answers to the questions posed by the 'places that don't matter'.

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