

New roles for Administrations, Planners and Citizens in the Self-organization view

Chiara Belingardi¹

¹DICEA, Sapienza Università di Roma, chiara.belingardi@uniroma1.it

Abstract: In contemporary debate about citizens self-organization it emerge the ambiguous role of practices, and policies in response. These can create a new way to intending the city trough the creation of new institutions, or commodifies and privatize social services. Some of these practices can be de facto an enclosure to a close community of people, while others can provide public services as or more effective than the institutional ones (Cellamare, 2012). Using the category of spatial justice as a framework to read the practices of self-organization and the policies linked with them can provide some tools. Spatial justice can provide some questions regarding openness and fairness (Soja, 2010; Falco, 1978). About the right to the city, it is possible to use it as a category for trying to understand how citizens are involved in the design of the city as a whole (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2012). Both of them can generate a number of singles groups of citizens and singles spaces or can create synergies with effects among every part of the city. Citizens self-organization left some questions un-answered: about the role of public administration, especially if practices step over legal / illegal border and recall the concept of justice.

Keywords: citizens self-organization, spatial justice, right to the city, new institutions

Introduction

The paper compare two municipal policies, aiming to regulate citizens self-organization: the law n. 446/2016 of the city of Naples *Identification of spaces of civic relevance to be inscribed in the category of Commons* and the *Guidelines for the cooperation among citizens and administration for care and regeneration of Commons* approved by the city of Bologna in 2014.

These deliberations are interesting to be compared as they are an attempt to regulate citizens participation and self-organization, but produces different results, in terms of freedom for the citizens in acting / self-regulating / organize themselves, in terms of the role they design for citizens and public administrations, in terms of promotion of the right to the city and generation of spatial justice. The two policies result from different social contexts, political interactions and historical moments.

The *Guidelines for the cooperation among citizens and administration for care and regeneration of Commons*, approved by the city of Bologna in 2014, aim to create a legal framework to let citizens take care and manage public places (both buildings and open air). This civic spaces are here named Commons. The Guidelines are the result of a participatory process. In the process, taken as case study, four groups of citizens asked and obtained spaces to take care of. LABSUS (an association of professionals with the aim of promoting citizens participation) followed the process to help in solving problems faced by citizens and administration. Another objective of the Guidelines is to ease the cleaning of the historical porticoes that characterize the city's historical centre: as the porticoes are protected as historical goods, normal people couldn't make any interventions, even for their maintenance.

The law 446/2016 of the city of Naples is the last of seven public acts that the city of Naples produced to recognize and safeguard the Commons (intended here as the output of social interactions) from privatisation. The laws are the results of a long participatory process carried out especially with people involved in the creation and government of the commons (the community), and other citizens. The laws aim to design new regulations to recognize the plurality and the mutability of the community governing of commons.

The paper compare the two policies, through the framework provided by the concepts of spatial justice and right to the city. This is a theoretical paper, so it won't deal with case-studies. The aim of the paper is to compare the municipal laws and to define if right to the city and spatial justice could be tools to evaluate policies. Case studies are intended as the most important part in the evaluation of policies. On the other hand, it is useful to have some tools to evaluate policies before their approval.

Spatial Justice is intended here as the social wellbeing produced through the set of spatial elements that influence everyday life. Space is not an unmodifiable element in the human experience, but as an element which can improve or worsen life conditions by its modifications. In this sense Spatial Justice is strictly connected with the *Right to the City*, intended as the right of people to manipulate the urban space in function of the society they want to live in (Harvey, 2008).

The contribution is organized as follow: the first part will describe the concepts of Right to the City and Spatial Justice. The second part will describes the two policies, their conditions and context and their outputs. The third part will compare the policies, in terms of consequences, power and distribution of responsibility among citizens and institutions. The conclusion will put what emerges through the comparison in relationship with the concepts of spatial justice and right to the city, to see how the policies generates or go against the two.

Spatial Justice and Right to the city

Spatial Justice and Right to the City are political concepts: it is not possible to give a definition of both without explicit a standpoint (Fainstein, 2010). In particular the Right to the City can have different definitions, more or less radical.

Spatial Justice regards the spatial and environmental items that contribute to or generate social justice (Soja, 2010). In this field it is possible to remember the human factor, as pointed out by Harvey in *Social justice and the city* (1973): people with higher incomes or higher instructions have more chance of enjoy amenities. On the other hand the perception of the value of facilities and public services can change depending on the everyday life. The creation of amenities is strictly connected with the use of the buildings. In this paper social and Spatial Justice is intended as a responsibility of Public Institutions, in a political arena.

The Right to the City can have different meanings. Since its formulation, in 1968 (Lefebvre, 1968) the concept had two possible interpretations: a radical one, meaning the right to change the city to reach an environment more just, pleasant and democratic. This should be achieved through the direct action of citizens, supposed as equally participant in the building of a new city and a new society (Lefebvre, 1968; Stanek, 2011; Mayer, 2012). The second interpretation is less radical, meaning the right of citizens to access the services a city can offer. Both way are a claim toward a more just society. The difference is in the deepening of the changes that are intended to be needed to achieve a just society in a just city: for the last interpretation, citizens are intended as users, while for the first one they are intended as builders/creators. In this paper the Right to the City is intended as the right to build the city as the society people want to live in, giving the city as the physical image of the society (Harvey, 2008).

People often take the urban environment as a backdrop. Since it hardly changes with the same fluidity as other elements of daily life, it is perceived as fixed. Narratives about urban development and changes often are around great projects. The consequence is that people have little regard for spatial justice and it is an unusual category

in the demands of social justice. Notwithstanding public space is perceived in general as a main part of the public sphere. So its privatization, or the denial of access and free use of it to groups of people can be intended as an impoverishment of the democratic life in general (Bollier, 2014), and an act of injustice.

Yet there are many space-dependent factors that affect daily lives (Soja, 2010): paths people have to do to reach points of interest, accessibility of spaces and their use for collective purposes, quality and quantity of urban amenities and services people have near their houses. All of these factors contribute to form part of what can be defined as indirect income (the possibility of people to have a good quality of life using public services instead of personal incomes), especially when it comes to the quality and quantity of public services available near home. However, with regard equipments, it should be noted that their presence is not enough: to be able to enjoy certain conditions are necessary. David Harvey in *Social Justice and the City* (1973) call them *amenities* and says that they are individuals who have a higher income or more capacity can more easily enjoy them. Luigi Falco in *Gli standard urbanistici* (1978) points out how important the equal distribution of public services on the city territory is, as it is difficult for people of popular classes to reach them. Therefore, the distribution of high quality public services within urban areas contributes to the rebalancing (or imbalance) of the quality of urban life – the quality of everyday life among citizens. The same can be said about accessing and using public spaces (both in the open and in the buildings) to spend leisure time, organize collective activities, recreate or do political activity.

Due to the diffusion of neoliberal policies and the welfare state crisis, there is a progressive reduction in public services in terms of quality and quantity. As a result, people are increasingly forced to use their own resources to satisfy their needs. These resources can be both economical or social ones. The results can be very different. On the one hand, for example, there is the creation of public policies from the bottom (Paba, 2010), which have a positive impact on the society as a whole. On the other hand there can be created practices of closures, dependency, privatization. The main problem in both cases is the exclusion of people who don't have resources, neither economical, nor social ones. The very excluded are to remain excluded.

To give an example of the difference among the different practices, it is possible to refer to the practices about the recovering of urban spaces. Facing the erosion of the public care of spaces and gardens (as public administration can use less resources in hiring people for these kinds of job), we see the flourishing of re-appropriation practices such as those of community gardens, or phenomena like *Retakers*, or *Angeli del Bello*. These groups mainly organize themselves around the necessity of cleanness of the urban environment. So they organize days in which invite citizens to clean streets, walls, gardens, and public spaces in general. In their cleaning desire, they include also wall paintings and street art. And urban populations that create disorder, like homeless, mendicants, hawkers, and so on.

But where creative space-sharing practices are established, which actually produce an increase in the quality of life for the neighbourhood, it is possible to talk about the creation of commons. According to Harvey in *Rebel Cities* (2012): *The common is not, therefore, something that existed once upon a time that has since been lost, but something that is, like the urban commons, continuously being produced. The problem is that it is just a continuously being enclosed and appropriated by capital in its commodified and monetized form, even as it is being continuously produced by collective labour.* (ivi, p. 77).

Comparing these two examples of ways in which citizens intervene in urban spaces, it is possible to see some ambiguities in people interventions and involvements. For this reason, in this paper it is proposed to use some tools or framework as guidelines to see the practices. Also it is important to explicit the point from which the practices are observed.

Bologna: “Guidelines for the cooperation among citizens and administration for care and regenerations of commons” (2014)

These Guidelines were approved by the city of Bologna in 2014. They were written in cooperation between the Public Administration of Bologna and LabSus, an association created to promote the idea of subsidiarity, intended as cooperation between citizens and Administration in the management of urban spaces and public services. The core of the Guidelines are the Collaboration Agreements, which are subscribed between Active Citizens and Public Administration. These agreements are conceived as a tool to give citizens more possibilities of acting in line with the general interest, but are not really innovative in the distribution of power or responsibility among the actors. In general, Active Citizens have the responsibility of taking care of a civic good (a building, a garden, ...): they have the responsibility of management, cleaning and little maintenances. To make changes or going over these boundaries (e.g. self-building of furniture, adaptation of the space, self-representation in the space – Pasquali, 2008) they have to ask permission, following the same rules of public spaces (professional design, buying furnitures, security controls). In some cases citizens have to insure their activities with a private company, using their own money. In a case of conflict between Active Citizens and Municipality, the second will have the final word.

The agreements signed among citizens and administration contain:

- a) the objectives of the collaboration;
- b) the duration of the collaboration;
- c) the modes of the collaboration, the roles of the subjects, the reciprocal commitments and the limits;
- d) the modality of the collective fruition of the common;
- e) the consequences of eventual damages and the insurance;
- f) the guarantees against damage;
- g) supports given by the City to active citizens (including the eventual coverage of the insurance costs);
- h-m) other things as the supports of communal employees, the publicity of the agreement, the property of the furnitures and other objects.

From the spatial point of view it is important to note that the changes that active citizens can make to the space, as well as furnitures they want to put in, to use it best or to adapt the space to their exigences or to express themselves, are subject to the same rules as the ones to make in the classic public spaces. There is the need of a professional design even for minor changes. Active citizens cannot self-build, but they can find the money by fundraising. In case of damages, the responsibility is in charge of citizens.

Moreover the document indicates that the city promote the social innovation and the creation of collaborative social services. The public administration considers its buildings and spaces as resources for collaborative services and urban creativity.

Naples: “individuation of spaces of civic relevance to be inscribed in the category of Commons” (2016)

The four Deliberations of the City of Naples are the result of a long participatory process: a dialogue between the Municipality and the people involved in the care and government of abandoned places, which were recognized as common and appropriate by the community. In particular the City recognize the existence of some places which are characterized by frequent and lively social interactions, intergenerational solidarity, innovation, common elaboration of thinking and deep roots in the territory.

The fourth Deliberation (the last one), approved in 2016, says: *In the municipal territory, certain buildings and / or areas owned by the Municipality of Naples that are currently used by groups and / or committees of citizens according to logic of experimentation of the direct management of public spaces, thereby demonstrating in such a way that they perceive them goods as places that can be used collectively for the benefit of the local community, experiences that in their factual expression have been configured as "Houses of the People", places*

of strong sociality, elaboration of thought, intergenerational solidarity and deep roots in the territory. Thus the law identifies two paths for the management of these buildings: the first one is the entrustment of the building/space to a well-defined legal entity following an agreed management plan; the second one is based on the recognition of that good as civic and collective use (a sort of renewal of a traditional Italian institute for collective properties and commons).

The second institute appears more interesting. It can be classified as a retro-innovation: the renewal of an ancient use in a contemporary framework. In Italy (as in other parts of the World) the “civic uses” are an historical institute in which are formalized the collective properties and the collective rules of management (and use) of common goods. Most of the civic uses that are currently still existing are localized in the countryside, but there are many traces of commons even in the urban spaces (urban spaces used as commons. See Belingardi, 2015; Rao, 2008; Kelly, 2011). The innovation of the Naples’s deliberation is the fact that this policies distribute the responsibility of management and care of a civic to an informal group of people, recognizing that they have the interest in take care of it (as demonstrated by Elinor Ostrom, 1990), commons are the best way to preserve a good, by using it).

While the Guidelines of Bologna are criticized for not taking in account of the existing practices, because their design was based on new experiences, a limit of these policies can be found in the opposite. The dialogue is among the city’s administration and existing practices already stables (as they can be). The deliberations consist in the recognition of commons already created by a community, without taking in account practices that are at the beginning, or commons that are still to be recognized, but have the potentiality.

Anyway the publicness of commons, their connections in the social tissue of the city, can inspire more communities in taking action. One of the characteristics listed by Paba in his description of the *public policies from the bottom* (Paba, 2010), is: “*si diffondono (e mutano nella diffusione) per disseminazione, gemmazione, contagio, imitazione - adattamento, proliferazione orizzontale*” (ivi, p. 108). Moreover in some cases the absence of rules, even if is perceived like the absence of a guidance, can be a help for a community to find its own way of self-organizing.

Comparing the policies

After this brief description of the two policies, here is presented a comparison of the both, based on three different items: the decision (meaning who decide that a place is a common), the resources (meaning how are found the resource for its management), the govern (meaning who decide about the rules for governing the common).

1. The decision: who decide that a place is a common?

Answering this question means to answer a more general question about the power of self-determination of a practice and the power inhabitants have in the general plan of the city, or in the decision about urban spaces.

In the Bologna's Guidelines the decision is in charge of the public administration: there is a City Committee that periodically identifies among the assets of the City some places (buildings or open air) in partial or total disuse or deterioration which are liable for care and regeneration interventions to be realized through partnerships between citizens and the municipality. The liability is based on location, structural and functional destination. The Guidelines indicate the possibility for active citizens to choose the building or space to take care of, but it is not clear under which conditions the public administration will accept.

The policies of Naples indicate as “commons” building or areas used by citizens accordingly: is the use, the “experimentation” made by groups of citizens that gives the status to the space. So the City recognize the practices as they exists, and don't determinate the citizens actions before. The policies descend by the current

debate about commons at international level. In particular the debate is about the essence of commons. This is due to the fact that different authors and disciplines have different definitions (Belingardi, 2015). Currently most of the theorists agree in saying that is the community action of government to give to an asset the status of “common” (Giardini, 2010; Mattei, 2011; Dardot and Laval, 2015). In particular Dardot and Laval (2015) in their definitions of “common goods” (biens communs in french) wrote that the use of a good (communs) is so much important that the lemma can easily loose the “good”. As already said this can represent a problem in the moment of creating a common, because the process of creation can imply the illegal appropriation of a building (as it is demonstrate by the stories of the ones already declared commons by the Administration). On the other hand, if the community has the duty of the recognition by acting accordingly, this cannot be assumed by the public administration.

From a general point of view, the Guidelines started with four cases, but since 2014 have been signed more than 110 agreements between the public administration and active citizens. Some of them are already finished, and some other were about cultural actions (performance, readings,...) or one-day actions of cleaning which doesn't concern recovering or maintaining specific areas or buildings.

The Naples' policy recognize seven building as commons. It is not clear if there will be other deliberations to recognize other practices, that can start in the future or are already running but are not included in the list. Surely there are some other practices which strive to be recognize as common.

2. Money and work: who gives resources for caring a common?

The Bologna's Guidelines indicate that the Municipality can contribute to covering the costs incurred in carrying out the care or regeneration actions of urban commons. Among these costs can be included the design, the fee of professionals, the (private) insurance (in some cases) and other costs that cannot be covered through the municipal assets (tools, workers, or other). One of the objectives of the Guidelines is maintaining a good urban environment with a minor cost for the public administration, so they encourage active citizens' fundraising. The municipality facilitates citizens' initiatives to raise funds for the care or regeneration of urban commons, guaranteeing transparency on the destination of the money collected and on their timely use. In the agreement it can be planned a variable commitment mechanism of municipal resources, increasing with the growth of resources earned by active citizens.

The Municipal policies of Naples poses the question of the economical valorization in a wider framework: the aim of governing a commons is not in the practices itself but in the general repercussion in term of social and cultural services the governments generates. The policy therefore says that the public administration is committed in finding through participative procedures way to generate income to sustain economically the recover and the government of the commons. To be precise, the policy indicate the activities as commons, and the building as the civic environment that host the development of the common. For this purpose it is possible to search and find new way of innovative financing (e.g. crowdfunding, fundraising, ...).

3. who govern the common and take the decisions / what commoners – active citizens can do

The Bologna Guidelines indicate that the management of the commons will be planned in the agreement. Active citizens are allowed to do what is contained in the agreement. Differences and changes in the management or in the care of the space could generate the interruption of the agreement by the administration. Also active citizens are not allowed to make any change in the space without authorization. All the actions of care are decided in the agreement and it is not clear how active citizens or public administration can talk about any changes that is needed. The absence of such a space is quite important: as the whole policy is based on citizens volunteering, the actions of caring and managing can be guaranteed only in presence of time and competences of people, that can change (while can change the everyday life conditions of active citizens).

The institute of civic use of the Naples' policies gives the control on the space to the commoners: people who use it, care about it, and govern it. This kind of control is not like the absolute property right conceived in the age of the Enlightenment: commoners don't have the right to destroy, damage, dismiss or sale the common. In this framework, they can act as they collectively decide, also basing of availability and competences and life conditions of the commoners.

The comparison here is only roughly outlined. For a deeper analysis of the two policies more items and characteristics should be compared. Overall it would be necessary to study the effects of the policies, the practices that generate, and for this a deeper analysis is needed. However the purpose of the paper is a theoretical comparison.

For a final comparison the two policies are analysed in terms of generation of Spatial Justice and Right to the City.

Using the category of spatial justice as a framework to read the practices of self-organization and the policies linked with them can provide some tools. Spatial Justice can provide some questions regarding openness and fairness. These questions could be: are people increasing or reducing the spaces they can freely use? Are people increasing or reducing the places in which they can create community (as these spaces can be both public spaces, or collective/commons spaces)? Are people increasing or reducing the time to travel from their home to points of interest (including public services, cultural services, recreational and common places, public spaces,...)? The two policies take in account the spatial distribution of the practices?

Both the policies here presented point to the recovery and sharing of abandoned or unused spaces (and in this sense can facilitate the access to the spaces for citizens). The openness of the spaces will mostly depend by the practices. The Bologna Guidelines tends to individuate a defined group of people to care the commons, while the Naples policies tend to spread to an undefined community the action of *commoning*. On the other hand Naples' policies explicitly talk about strong and lively social interactions, intergenerational solidarity and so on, as characteristics for a practice to be recognized as common. In this sense it is possible to say that the last one is a policy that guarantees more Spatial Justice than the first one. Spatial distribution of the commons is not taken in account by the policies, even if it is possible to say that in general the increasing of places that can be used by citizens foster Spatial Justice.

About the Right to the City, it is possible to use it as a category for trying to understand how commoners and/or active citizens are involved in the design of the city as a whole. Both of them (citizens and commoners) can generate a number of singles practices and singles spaces or can create synergies with effects among every part of the city. The questions emerging from the Right to the City issue could be: how many practices and how many people are involved both as protagonists or user of the spaces? Which is the role citizens have in the modelling of the rules to govern/take care of the common? Are active citizens/commoners intended as privileged actors in the design of the city as a whole? Which is the role citizens, active citizens and commoners have in the govern of public spaces and in the planning of the city in general?

The answers to such numerous questions can vary quite a lot depending on the openness of the city administration and its objectives and policies; also they can vary depending on the strength of the practices and their ability to build network.

About the two policies here presented, it is possible to note that the number of Agreements of Bologna is higher than the number of Commons of Naples. But it has to be taken in account that the Agreements can have a short duration (even only a day), while the Neapolitan Commons are intended to last for a long time. About the design of the city in general, it is not mentioned in the two policies, but the Neapolitan one was designed through a dialogue between citizens and administration, while the one of Bologna was the result of a participatory process,

that involved only four practices. The results of both in terms of spreading the practices and the management of public spaces in general should be seen in the future.

Conclusion

In the paper are compared two municipal policies about self-organization of citizen. The comparison evidences some difference in the philosophy of the policies and in the conception of the action of citizens. To evaluate the policies in deepen it is necessary to compare the effect they will have and the practices they allowed and created. Finally the comparison of the two policies is interesting in how they understand the role of (active) citizens and public administration, and the self-organizing practices.

In the Bologna Guidelines active citizens self-organize themselves in order to help the public administration in the management of public spaces. So their role don't go beyond the help needed, nor in the sense of choosing and commoning the space, neither in the sense of a broader participation in the design of the whole city.

In the Neapolitan laws citizens are intended as the ones who recognize a place as a common and act in consequence, so they have the responsibility of the action. The policy doesn't go beyond the singles practices, to a wider view.

In the contemporary debate about citizens self-organization it emerge the ambiguous role of the practices, and policies in response. They can create a new way to intending the city trough the creation of new institution, or they can commodifies and privatize social services, even if there are gift relationships among people involved in the practices. Some of these practices can be de facto an enclosure to a close community of people, while others can provide public services as or more effective than the public ones (Cellamare, 2012).

Spatial Justice and Right to the City may provide some tool, mainly as questions, as guidance in order to critically read practices and policies of self-organization.

References

- Belingardi C., 2015, *Comunanze Urbane. Autogestione e cura dei luoghi*, (Firenze: FUP).
- Bollier D., 2014, *Think like a Commoner. A Short Introduction to the Life of the Commons* (Gabriola Island: New Society Publisher).
- Cellamare C. 2012, *Progettualità d' ll'agire urbano. Processi e pratiche urbane* (Roma: Carocci).
- Dardot P., Laval C., 2015, *Del Comune, o della Rivoluzione del XXI secolo* (Roma: DeriveApprodi).
- Falco L. ,1978, *Gli standard urbanistici* (Roma: edizioni delle autonomie)
- Fainstein S., 2010, *The Just City*, (Cornell University Press).
- Giardini F., 2010, Beni comuni, una materia viva. In *Dire fare pensare il presente*, edited by Verlan (Macerata: Quodlibet) pp. 77-88.
- Lefebvre H., 1968, *Le droit à a ville*, (Paris: éditions anthropos).
- Kelly J. 2011, The Kennington Common, the occupy movement and the freedom of assembly. In *History Workshop*, 3 novembre 2011, www.historyworkshop.org.uk
- Harvey D. 2012, *Rebel cities. From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, (London, New York: Verso).
- Harvey D. 2008, The right to the city, *New Left review*, sept oct 2008.
- Harvey D. 1973, *Social justice and the city* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press).
- Mattei U. 2011, *Beni comuni. Un manifesto*, (Roma – Bari: Laterza).

- Mayer M. 2012, The “right to the city” in urban social movements. In: *Cities for people, not for profit. Critical urban theory and the right to the city*, edited by Brenner N., Marcuse P., Mayer M. (Londra – New York: Routledge).
- Ostrom E. 1990, *Governing the Commons: the evolution of institutions for Collective action*, (Cambridge University Press).
- Paba G. 2010, *Corpi urbani. Differenze, interazioni, politiche* (Milano: Francoangeli).
- Pasquali M. 2008, *I giardini di Manhattan. Storie di guerrilla gardens*, (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri).
- Rao R. 2008, *Comunia. Le risorse collettive nel Piemonte comunale*, (Milano: Led).
- Soja E. 2010, *Seeking spatial justice*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).
- Stanek L. 2011, *Henry Lefebvre on Space. Architecture, Urban Research and the production of theory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

