

Section 6 – Partecipazione e Movimenti Sociali

Chairs: Gianni Piazza, Massimiliano Andretta

Panel 6.7 Social Innovation. Theories, Practices, and Conflicts

The theme of Urban Social Innovation (USI) is today pivotal to rethink forms and contents of the urban governance of social services, integrating in a unitary framework the debate on the transformation of democracy and the Social State, the relations between State, Market and the Third Sector, finally the relationship between institutional vs bottom-up action on the territories (Moulaert 2013, Polizzi et al., 2013). Social Innovation refers both to innovation in services and at the same time in the restructuration of the relationship among cities' inhabitants, through a promotion of their activation and participation as recipients. By this way, Social Innovation is defined as an answer to the erosion of social capital, and as a instrument for building a new urban welfare that focuses on the activation of civil society, but also as a framework for the expression of new forms of grassroots participation and as the experimentation of direct democracy and self-organization practices, in response to the crisis of traditional forms of representation.

Indeed, under the umbrella of Social Innovation we can identify also practices that act "legitimizing" neoliberalism by "softening" it, and activating individuals in order to compensate the weakening of public intervention. According to this point of view, the main European documents on the subject (BEPA 2014) identify in the USI an instrument that seeks responses to emerging social needs in society and in the market, faced with the withdrawal of the public actor due to austerity policies. Activation of individual and strengthening of civil society seems to conform to a sort of "caring neoliberalism" (Peck 2012), in which the inclusion of civil society serves to partially balance the retreat of the State, offering cheaper services. The risk is that systems and practices that respond to the needs and interests of specific groups of the population are systematically privileged, "at the expense of others who are experiencing new ways of oppression, for example of cultural minorities, and who pursue 'principles' of universality, democracy and social justice" (Mingione, Vicari Haddock 2017, p.17).

Against the afore-mentioned definition of Social Innovation, a plurality of bottom-up experiences innovate the theme by developing new social relations – grounded on the territory – building cooperative communities, and revitalising urban spaces under the lines of a shared, horizontal and open management of services.

Thus, Social Innovation turns to sum up an amount of practices aiming at the re-politicization of society by a community self-understood as the genius loci of social development, a search for "enabling social rights in social life", and for the "research of a State democracy that guarantees the basic rights, on the one hand, and the continuous reinvention of social life on the other" (Moulaert 2009).

The panel on "Social Innovation. Theories, Practices, and Conflicts" is thought as in strong continuity with the 2018 SISP Conference on "The Resilient City. Actors, Practices, and Problems", which recollected thirteen contributions. At that time, the discussion was focused on different practices, actors, and strategies brought together by the common reference to the "resilience" label. The concept of resilience is intrinsically ambiguous and ambivalent, in terms of its effects on

the urban governance strategies, economic restructuring, inequalities and power relations. It refers both to grassroots mobilization and community self-organization, practiced by the subalterns, as a strategy of bottom-up re-politicization and to grassroots mobilization against privatization and commodification. And, on the contrary, it refers also to strategy strongly imbued by neoliberal values and orientations, reinforcing urban privation and marketization of urban spaces, urban inequalities and gentrification, till to provide the ideological and practical instruments to strengthen upper class's power.

Also Social Innovation runs the risk to become a *passé-partout* concept, ambiguous and ambivalent. It can refer:

- 1) to new urban and territorial movements, generating alternative discourses, performing new practices, and rethinking new types of relationship with the local state in seeking to answer social demands that neither the market nor the State have responded. In particular, these new mobilizations, claiming the right both "to the city" and "to the commons", oppose the continuous commodification of urban and rural areas, the devastation of the territories and the dismantling of the welfare State system;
- 2) to a renewed equilibrium between the "institutional" and the "not-institutional field", as the public actor engages itself in promoting citizen's activism, with the result of widening public institutions' sphere, and of inverting the privatization of public sector (Subirats, García Bernardos 2015);
- 3) to fall into a *laissez-faire* strategy, rather than being part of a new season of collaborative governance (Polizzi, Vitale 2017), with the effect of exacerbate, rather than reducing, the gap between those who have the resources to take action and those who are deprived of it, and thus end up being increasingly placed in conditions of marginality. As a consequence, Social Innovation can turn in an instrument of gentrification.

The panel recollects contributions that critically analyse the theory and practice of Social Innovation, with particular reference to those acting on the urban field.

We look for papers devoted to analyse Social Innovation in the following approaches:

- Social policies and local welfare.
- Urban governance.
- "New volunteerism" and Social enterprise.
- Platform economy and collaborative networks.
- Commons management and production.
- Resilient communities.

In all these fields we are particularly interested on contributions that critically analyse the changing relation between citizens, collective actors, private and Third Sector organizations, and institutions, and that explore how these players likely change the urban governance within Social Innovation's regime.

Both case studies and comparative studies are welcome.

Contributions can be submitted in Italian and in English.

References

BEPA, Bureau of European Policy Advisors (2014), *Social Innovation: A Decade of Changes*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Mingione E., Vicari Haddock S. (2017), "Innovazione sociale e città", in *Sociologia Urbana e Rurale*, 113: 13-29.

Moulaert F. (2009), *Social Innovation: Institutionally Embedded, Territorially (Re)Produced*, in MacCallum D., Hillier J., Moulaert F., Vicari Haddock S. (eds.), *Social Innovation and Territorial Development*, Ashgate.

Moulaert F., MacCallum D., Mehmood A., Hamdouch A. (2013, eds.), *International handbook of social innovation: Collective action, social learning and transdisciplinary research*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Peck J. (2012), "Austerity urbanism", *City*, 16(6): 626–655.

Polizzi E., Tajani C., Vitale T. (2013), *Programmare i territori del welfare*. Attori, meccanismi ed

effetti, Roma, Carocci.

Polizzi E., Vitale T. (2017), "Governo collaborativo e catene relazionali di innovazione, Sunti a partire dal caso di Milano", Quaderni di Rassegna Sindacale, 18(2).

Subirats J., García Bernardos A. (2015, eds.), Innovacion social y politica urbanas en Espana. Experiencias significativas en la grandes ciudades, IcariaEditorial, Barcelona.

Chairs: Luca Alteri, Adriano Cirulli, Luca Raffini