
Cities and the European Union

Mechanisms and Modes of Europeanisation

Samuele Dossi

*To Lorena, Sergio and Maria Elena,
for their endless love and understanding.*



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Chapter Two

Territorial Governance and Regulation in Europe

2.1 Introduction

Typically, European cities have been analysed according to the tenets of urban politics. Accordingly, the focus has been on the institutional structure of local governments, and the power relations amongst formal actors, including resource dependencies between formal institutional structures and private actors. However, the role of the EU is seldom examined in the field of urban politics. In urban sociology and territorial regulation, the tendency is to think about the EU as a political and geographical context within which several dynamics affecting cities occur. The studies explicitly assessing the role of cities within the European Union policy making have fallen short of offering a satisfactory wide picture of the mutual relationship between urban systems and the EU. Instead, these have mainly focused on the involvement of local government in the structural programmes promoted by the EU within its regional policy, thus neglecting other relevant dimensions.

However, we need to widen our horizon, by considering formal and informal channels of Europeanisation, connected to the policy instruments of the structural funds but also other sources of EU-induced change.

2.2 Contextualising *governance* within urban systems

Governance has become a very popular concept in the EU, mainly with regard to European Studies. It is impossible to review the large literature on this concept (Kooiman, 1993; Schultze, 2003). For us, it is sufficient to observe that governance refers to a 'new way' of governing that goes beyond solely formal institutions. Thus, governance signifies 'a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing, or a changed condition of ordered rules; or the new method by which society is governed' (Rhodes, 1996: 652–653). Thinking of the EU, governance can be seen as 'the production of authoritative decisions, which are not produced by a single hierarchical structure...but instead arise from the interaction of a plethora of public and private, collective and individual actors' (Christiansen and Piattoni, 2004: 6).

The European Union has progressively emerged as part of a reconfigured pattern of European governance characterised by the evolution of institutional arrangements and processes implying a shift towards the greater role of more

autonomous or semi-autonomous agencies, and forms of ‘self-regulation’ underpinning partnership models (Wallace and Wallace, 2000). The EU policy process has often been described as *multi-level governance*. This picture, we argue, applies more within some policy areas than within others (i.e. EU-financed programmes) and during certain phases of the ‘policy cycle’ (i.e. implementation). The multi-level governance approach conceives of the European Union policy making as no longer monopolised by national states, and policy decision no longer as the aggregate outcome of several national preferences to a lowest common denominator.

The increasing involvement of sub-national authorities in the EU-wide policy making that followed the further completion of the single market and the reform of structural funds in 1988 inspired multi-level governance thinking in European Studies. The key idea is that decision-making competences are, though to varying degrees, shared by multiple actors at different levels and the nature of decision making into the boundaries of the states is now ‘collective’ (Hooghe, 1996; Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Marks, 1992; Marks, *et al.*, 1996).

Particularly in the policy area of structural funds, the governance approach emphasises the emergence of networks, whereby sub-national governments interact both with the EU and cross-nationally. Further, it points to the dialogue of the Commission with sub-national authorities and their interaction with the supranational level (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 12).

Within the picture offered by multi-level governance in relation with city and urban systems, Europeanisation would occur because of the greater awareness of local authorities and other organisations of the importance of EU policies and funding opportunities. From the ‘bottom-up’ perspective of the process, this array of activities reinforces the trend to governance because of their potential to foster new or stronger partnership arrangements across local organisations. In relation to that, the governance approach facilitates investigations of the whole policy process – throughout all its phases. It points out the importance of variation by sectors and to the role of a wide range of actors in policy making. By endorsing a governance approach to Europeanisation, especially at the urban-city level, it is possible to assess the top-down, bottom-up, vertical and horizontal channels of relations, rather than exclusively focusing on hierarchically channelled relationships.

So-called new modes of governance have widened the EU approach to governance, with a focus on ‘benchmarking, the dissemination of best practices, mutual learning and peer pressures, intended...not only to deliver policy outcomes, but also to act as a process for improving policy formation’ (Hodson and Maher, 2001: 375). Due to a lack of knowledge, ‘the centre’ has to concede room for manoeuvre to regions and localities. One group of stakeholders explicitly targeted over the last decade by the European Commission is *cities*. Cities, ‘instead of being mere policy takers are increasingly qualifying as *policy makers*, which is clearly sign for more *participative governance* in the EU’ (Schultze, 2003: 123).

2.3 The ‘urban policy’ of the EU

What is the urban policy of the EU, exactly? Let us start from two important documents: *Towards an Urban Agenda in the European Union* (European Commission, 1997b) and *Sustainable Urban Development in the European Union: a Framework for Action* (European Commission, 1998). Through these two documents, the European Commission recognised the existence of a specific ‘urban dimension’.

Four main reasons were pointed out to justify why the ‘city-dimension’ requires special attention within the overall EU system. Urban areas in Europe deserve specific consideration due to the high percentage of people currently living therein – almost 80 per cent of the total European population – and are considered as the dynamo of the European economy. Besides that, initiatives were to be undertaken in consideration of the growing rate of social exclusion in urban areas and the fact that cities have traditionally been centres of social and cultural life (European Commission, 1997b: 4–6; 1998: 2–5). By taking into account the large-scale problems affecting cities within the EU, the Commission claimed that ‘whilst urban authorities cannot be the sole agencies to act on these large issues, they should be fully involved in the policies related to these matters, as there can be no effective solution on the ground without their active participation’ (European Commission, 1997b).

Despite the strong emphasis put on problems affecting cities and on the need to tackle them through the promotion of specific initiatives, the Commission specified in turn that ‘it does not intend to ask for additional power at the European level, merely to assess the extent to which existing policies affect urban areas and to examine the...possibilities for improving urban development and for increasing the effectiveness of existing community interventions in urban areas’ (European Commission, 1997b).

The ‘policy objectives’ outlined in the 1997 communication were later integrated into wider ‘policy ideas’ in the 1998 action framework. These are named in terms of strengthening the economic prosperity and employment in towns and cities, the promotion of equality, social inclusion and regeneration in urban areas, the protection and improvement of the urban environment, contributing to good governance and local empowerment (European Commission, 1998: 5–6). In 1997 the Commission argued for the promotion of services of public interest and urban development. It envisaged a change towards strengthening the contribution of structural funds and the participation of cities in the preparation and implementation of regional development programmes. The Commission also argued for the promotion of the exchange of experiences between cities, throughout the creation of urban and city networks (European Commission, 1997b: 13–14).

For the programming period 2007–13 the Commission – through its *Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion* – expressed the formal intention to strengthen the place of urban issues by fully integrating actions in this field into the overarching structure of the renewed objective of the structural funds (European Commission 2006b). Within the new structure, urban-related programmes became part of the

Table 2.1: Stages of EU regional policy and its urban dimension

	EU regional policy	Urban dimension in the EU policy
Stage 1 1975–1988	Regional policy as a tool to reach economic integration.	Not existing, neither implicitly nor explicitly.
Stage 2 1989–1993	First reform of the structural funds and creation of the cohesion fund.	The urban pilot projects represent the first attempt of the EC to have an explicit urban policy.
Stage 3 1994–1999	Second reform of the structural funds and doubling of their financial allocation.	The EC pushes towards the development of an urban policy, but the divergence existing between the actors still prevented its institutionalisation. Two programmes specifically targeted to cities are financed by the structural funds: UPP II and the CI URBAN.
Stage 4 2000–2006	Third reform of the structural funds and reduction of the priority objectives from seven to three.	Besides URBAN II and the Urban Audit II, also a relevant part of the Objectives 1 and 2 of the SF is meant for cities.
Stage 5 2007–2013	Further simplification of the cohesion policy which now counts three main priorities and three financial instruments.	Community initiatives are not renewed and urban-related programmes are embedded in the mainstream regional programmes
Stage 6 2014–2020	Further harmonisation of funding mechanisms and stronger focus on result orientation	Urban areas are addressed within mainstream programmes through mechanisms of community-led local development and integrated territorial investments.

Source: elaboration from Euricur (2004): 47.

mainstream regional programmes under the new objectives 1 and 2. Consequently, regional authorities were responsible for the programming and management of ‘urban programmes’. Similar prominence on the potentials of urban-focused action was sketched in the *Communication from the Commission on cohesion policy and cities* (European Commission, 2006a). The communication laid down recommendations on a broad set of fields, ranging from transport services, environment and culture, territorial partnerships, employability, governance, exchange of experiences and the development of financial engineering.

Similar emphasis on the potential of urban-focused action is sketched in the *Communication from the Commission on cohesion policy and cities* (European Commission, 2006b). Besides proposing the strengthening of the urban dimension and concentrating resources to avoid them being spread too thinly, the communication laid down concrete recommendations to the cities and the actors involved in urban development, covering transport services, environment

and culture, to territorial partnerships, employability, governance, exchange of experiences and the development of financial engineering.

At the same time, the European Commission argued that cities, as relevant partners, should be consulted and participate in the ‘preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the operational programmes in accordance with national rules and practices’ (European Commission, 2006b). Actions relating to sustainable urban development – the document added – may be part of the thematic and territorial priorities identified in the National Strategic Reference Frameworks, to be presented by member states to ensure the coherence of the funds intervention with the Commission Strategic Guidelines.

Nonetheless, the mainstreaming of community initiatives in 2007–13 led to stronger sectoral focus, perhaps partly weakening the community involvement compared to the context of the previous URBAN Community Initiative (European Commission, 2008). In turn, as established by Art. 11 of the regulation laying down general provisions, relevant partners – local, regional and urban authorities as well as economic and social partners – must be consulted and participate in the ‘preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the operational programmes in accordance with national rules and practice’¹.

Within the provisions of the European Regional Development Funds – whose financial assistance will cover part of all three objectives – the thematic priorities associated with urban issues mostly deal with supporting sustainable integrated regional and local economic development and employment – *convergence objective* – where priority for assistance is addressed towards research and technological development, promoting innovation society, aid for structures providing local services to create new jobs, environmental issues including the rehabilitation of the physical environment, integrated strategies for clean transport, the improvement of energy efficiency, education and the fostering of social infrastructures. Under the *regional competitiveness and employment objective*, assistance spaces out between multiple ‘policy areas’, with a particular focus on supporting initiatives aimed at boosting innovation and the knowledge economy, promoting investments for the environmental ameliorations and access to transport and telecommunications services of general economic interest. In particular, Art. 8 of the ERDF regulation, allows regions to support integrated urban development projects based on participative strategies in urban areas.

The *European territorial cooperation objective*, albeit endowed with the smallest financial provision (2.52 per cent of the funds), offers most of the potential for the action of cities. Previously covered by the INTERREG Community Initiative, it aims in particular to forge the link between the projects drawn up under territorial cooperation and those supported within operational programmes.

Several programmes with potential urban focus are foreseen within the three programmatic parts through which the objective is organised – cross border

1. Council regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Funds, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing regulation (EC) No 1260/1999, OJ L 210/25 of 31.7.2006.

cooperation, transnational cooperation and interregional cooperation. In particular, the interregional cooperation component provides for four additional programmes. URBACT II urban network support programme, which follows the URBACT programme carried out during the 2000–06 period, is designed to support cities in developing innovative and sustainable solutions to integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. This is pursued through exchanging and sharing good practices and learning dynamics. URBACT, in particular is structured in a way that involves all parties having a stake in the city, namely policy professionals, policy makers and representatives of both different domains of the society. For the 2007–13 period, URBACT comprised forty-four projects, involving 255 cities and more than 5000 participants in twenty-nine countries².

The INTERREG IVC interregional cooperation programme on the other hand aims to support cooperation between regional and local authorities in order to facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practices. The programme, in particular, focuses on the priority axis of innovation and knowledge society and environment and risk prevention. The ESPON 2013 (European Spatial Observatory Network) study programme supports policy development and intends to set up a European scientific community in the field of territorial development by boosting general knowledge about territorial structures, trends and policy impacts across the European Union. Besides that, the INTERACT II programme provides expertise for the management of all territorial cooperation programmes to improve on their implementation. In turn, URBACT II and INTERREG IVC programmes are part of the ‘Regions for Economic Change’ initiative, which aims to strengthen networking and exchange of experience, mainly owing to the further extension of the scope of eligibility for the URBACT II programme³.

As regards the financial engineering of programmes, the managing authorities in each member state are enabled to finance public-private partnership thereby ensuring a more flexible management of the allocated funds; contextually financial expenditures are foreseen to support financial instruments for enterprises, such as venture capital funds, guarantee funds and loan funds. To support the organisation and the appropriate functioning of these instruments, the Commission, together with the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Council of Europe Development Bank, launched the JASPERS, JEREMIE and JESSICA Initiatives⁴.

Such priorities are further integrated by those allowed by the European Social Fund under both the ‘convergence’ and the ‘competitiveness and employment’ objectives; these are designed to support the enhancement of conditions for workers

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2. For a more detailed overview on the activities and projects managed within URBACT programme, reference is made to www.urbact.eu (accessed 10 November 2016).
 3. For a complete analysis of the operational programmes co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (2007–13) see European Commission (2008) ‘Fostering the Urban dimension. Analysis of the Operational programmes co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (2007–13)’, Brussels, Commission of the European Communities.
 4. JASPERS: Joint Assistance in Supporting Projects in European Regions; JEREMIE: Joint European Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises; JESSICA: Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas.

and enterprises, strengthening the access to employability and reinforcing social inclusion and human capital. The Cohesion Fund, planned to finance programmes for convergence, provides assistance as regards the environment and the trans-European Networks, where clean urban transport is the leading investment priority.

Quite differently from other programming periods though, there was an urban dimension in the 2007–13 period. Within the Lisbon Strategy, initiatives and regulatory devices addressed to cities are explicitly delineated. Furthermore, other initiatives underpin policy instruments with an indirect impact for urban areas (European Commission 2006b). Under the Lisbon growth and jobs strategy, we find the application of internal market and competitions policy, the European employment and social policy, the urban dimension of the environmental policy, the European R&D and the transport policy, energy policy and information and communication policy.

The urban dimension is to a lesser extent touched upon by initiatives carried out within other policy areas, whose instruments remain predominantly national. In spite of that, *urban components* are at stake in some parts of the justice, freedom and security policy, in particular as regards migration control and crime prevention, in the European rural development policy, where small towns fall in the definition of rural areas and finally in some of the provisions of the EU external policy where this calls for transnational cooperation between urban areas.

To the former group we may ascribe the application of internal market and competitions policy, the European employment and social policy, the urban dimension of the environmental policy, the European R&D and the transport policy, energy policy and information and communication policy as to the part concerned by the Seventh Framework for Research, technological development and demonstration activities (FP7).

In particular, it is worth mentioning the regulatory framework of the internal market and competition policy, which conform the provision of certain Services of General Interest (SGI) by urban authorities and the regulation of public procurement⁵ and public private-partnerships⁶ for the supply of certain SGI as well as the (informal) regulation of state aid for regeneration purposes in urban areas. As regards the employment policy, the ESF supports reforms to strengthen urban governance and management through the promotion initiatives in the context of the European Employment Strategy (and its related Social Agenda 2005–10) and operationalised via the Open Method of Coordination. In particular, actions are possible under the financing of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund⁷ within the framework of the PROGRESS programme for Employment and

5. Directive 2004/17/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 31 March 2004 coordinating the procurement procedures of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors; Directive 2004/18/CE on the coordination of procedures for the award of public works contracts, public supply contracts and public service contracts.

6. COM (2004) 327; Communication from the Commission on Public-Private Partnerships and Community Law on Public Procurement and Concessions, COM (2005) 569 final.

7. Regulation (EC) No 1927/2006.

Social Solidarity aimed at boosting mutual learning, exchange of information and the diffusion of good practices. Within the 6th Environmental Action Programme, a Thematic Strategy on Urban Environment provides guidance for an integrated and focused approach using existing policy instruments and initiatives, by mostly building on the LIFE + programme whose thematic priorities related to urban areas deal with combating climate change, favouring environment and health safety in urban areas and fostering the sustainable use of resources.

Within the Seventh Framework Programme for Research, development and demonstration activities are envisaged so as to crosscut several policy areas such as ICT, energy, environment, transport and socio-economic sciences and humanities. In particular, under the CIVITAS plus Initiative, the Commission is co-financing projects, which address energy and transport issues, whilst the CONCERTO Initiative in the field of renewable energy sources is thought to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas and experiences. Other actions with an urban target are carried out within the EU policy for enterprises (mainly addressed to SMEs), the culture policy, the European youth policy, the education and training policy and the EU policy for active European citizenship, all widely interested by programmes and initiatives implemented in the context of the employment and social policy.

2.4 From government to *governance* within urban systems?

Theories of urban governance emphasise outcomes over formal political processes and stress public-private interaction over formal policy implementation. Despite persisting national differences (Jordan *et al.*, 2005), the shift from urban government to urban governance (Rhodes, 1996) seems fit to portray the overall situation of many European countries, especially those that are members of the European Union.

In this connection, the *partnership approach* to governance (Stoker, 1998, Pierre, 1998a) captures the character of the changing urban landscape, underpinning dynamics of economic urban regeneration and social cohesion. Over the last two decades, the European Commission has promoted partnership arrangements, both vertically – between different tiers of government – and horizontally – between different types of actors. The implementation of this approach has nonetheless varied considerably according to different urban and national contexts (Cento Bull and Jones, 2006). Especially at the urban level, ‘if we are speaking of *governance* it’s precisely because the government, whether centralised or local, is no longer capable of governing alone and now has to come to terms with and co-produce with other stakeholders and participants’ (Jaquier, 2005: 374).

In cities across European countries, the EU action takes place alongside a background of multiple domestic institutional constraints. Local actors have to carry out their ‘policy action’ by dealing with pre-existing domestic institutional arrangements and constraints, while simultaneously reacting and accomplishing European programmes (Cento Bull and Jones, 2006, Marshall, 2005). The increasing participation of cities in EU programmes has proceeded alongside with the development of a wide array of *local regeneration partnerships*, which, often