

Chapter 8

Regional Integration Through Locality: EU Cohesion and Urban Regeneration Practices

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ABSTRACT

Multi-level governance suggests that there should be no hierarchical dependency relationship between policy actors of different policy levels. In fact, the model hinges on the independent interaction of local and regional governments at national and supra-national levels without the mediating role and status of national governments. This development in fact parallels the acceptance of cities and local governments as policy actors. MLG is not a magic cure to heal every illness, but it is a method and an action plan for tackling problems. It is being used in various areas by the EU to realize European cohesion. The first and foremost among these areas is urban policies and urban regeneration practices. The EU has adopted the integrated urban regeneration approach to decrease the problems associated with social exclusions and the regeneration of problematic urban areas. Together with the enlargement process, cohesion efforts have increased, and urban programs subsidized by the EU have been implemented intensively in central, eastern, and southern European states.

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INTRODUCTION

Cities and urban centers are becoming increasingly important to sustainable development of and between all levels of governance. Cities are the driving force for culture, business, education, research and development, knowledge-intensive services and the financial sector. They are points of passage and concentration for the regional and international movement of goods and people and contribute substantially to the integration of peoples of all races, sexes, religions and ethnicities (European Union, 2010, p.2). Urban regeneration attempts seem to be among the key instruments for sustainable urban development and EU cohesion. Having said that, it can be argued that the main objectives of urban regeneration are improvement of physical and social environment, demographic and economic revitalisation of cities and settlements, strengthening of cultural and spatial identity and achievement of better living standards for citizens.

The change in the urban regeneration notions and policies in the 1990s were indeed an extension of the political attitudes related to the EU's extension process. The idea of an Integrated Europe existed even before the institutionalization/founding of EU and EU emerged into the global political scene as a regional power to restore Europe destroyed through the World wars and to provide a lasting peace.

EU played an important role in the member states' urban policies and urban regeneration projects through the standards established and European Commission's increasing interest in urban policy. After the 1990s, EU has adopted "integrated area based urban regeneration" approach that accepts the multilevel governance as the basis and takes into account the social, economic, physical and environmental conditions in an integrative fashion in the regeneration of cities as a method for European cohesion. The approach was not new to countries such as Britain, France and Netherlands but it was a totally new experience for Southern countries like Spain as well as for the new member states. These countries had similar urban problems such as environmental problems, deteriorating housing conditions, and the lack of socially inclusive/encompassing networks and social exclusion. Due to the experience of a centralized socialist state, there did not emerge integrative and cooperative networks between different levels of government in the formulation of urban policies and their application in the new member countries. Consequently, participatory strategies for the sustainable development of cities were quite limited. To reduce the differences in the urban quality of life and participatory practices among the EU member states, and to realize European integration and sustainable urban development, EU tried to implement policies by providing funds for local governments, supporting project development, and developing networks to enable sharing of information and experience (Bradford, 2004, pp.11-13).

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