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## First ULG Meeting - 10/09/2021, 14.30 - 16.30

Torino Urban Lab, Piazza Palazzo di Città, 8/f, 10122 Torino TO

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CO4CITIES is an opportunity to disseminate the CO-CITY methodology and to imagine new perspectives for collaborative practices in Turin. They will flow into a text called “Springboard Plan”. Therefore, the ULG will focus on two key issues: the guidelines for establishing a commons foundation and those for setting up new Neighborhood Houses in Turin.

The Transfer Network not only foresees that the four ULGs (one for each partner city) work in parallel on specific themes, but also that they communicate with each other, sharing reflections and experiences, since many themes are common.

### Commons Foundation

This case is included in the new Regulation on governing the urban commons in the city of Turin. It provides for both an **entrustment of assets** by the City and for guarantees such as to ensure that the assets remain within the scope of commons. It is in fact a typical instrument of private law, applied to a good that must remain public. What tools shall we use and how shall we interpret the Regulation in order not to lose sight of this purpose?



Another key element for the creation of a Commons Foundation is the presence of a **community of reference**. We must think of it as a new, third subject, which is neither public nor private, and we must question ourselves about its composition, self-recognition and self-organization. Furthermore, we need to demonstrate that its objectives correspond to those of the public sector, as foreseen by the art. 43 of the Italian Constitution, just like it happens for the Neighborhood Houses.

These reflections are the starting point for understanding the difference between a commons foundation and a foundation *tout court*.

The problems connected to the tools of representative democracy emerge in close connection with the community of reference. Those who wrote the Regulation were also referring to existing communities (for example the one born around the Cavallerizza), which however contain conflicts and fragmentation within them. How to manage the presence of asymmetries of power among the members of the community? How to involve socially marginalized subjects who have difficulty in getting aboard, perhaps because of their poor network of relationships?

The feasibility study on the commons foundation should hold together both the search for a statute that provides for the widest possible participation, and the mechanisms proper to communities, which change, produce and reproduce over time. Finding a truly participatory governance mechanism, and creating a place where social conflicts can emerge and be addressed will ensure that the foundation does not become a privatization tool. The problem is that the more sophisticated the governance mechanisms are, the more difficult it is for people to understand them (see the case of the Community Land Trust in Brussels<sup>1</sup>).

### **Neighborhood house**

One of the objectives of Turin Neighborhood Houses Network (NHN) is to expand its model on the territory. Which model is it? These neighborhood houses are structures with a strong public imprint and they work on the community of proximity. This community is made up of formal subjects and informal ones, coming from the active citizenship networks. They both solicit the activation of third-party groups, which in turn provide content to the actions of the Neighborhood houses. There is a very strong interest at local and national level in the dissemination of this model, which is why last year the NHN held a training course addressed to operators already active in this area. Even at a national level, there was a large adhesion to the general training, which provided methodological, administrative and material tools. This first part has been completed by giving support to develop specific cases. In Turin two subjects undertook this second stage: Comala, a youth center that would like to expand and incorporate associations addressing different audiences, and Beeozanam, which is working hard to take root in its neighborhood. That said, setting up a new neighborhood house is not easy, despite everyone's good intentions.

Another feature that makes Turin neighborhood houses a strong and interesting model to transfer is the presence of a NHN, which is available to the City and is very useful when it comes to implementing public policies. It works as a homogeneous cooperative entity made up of autonomous entities. Its importance emerged very clearly during the lockdown, when

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cltb.be/>  
<https://cooperativecity.org/2017/11/02/community-land-trust-bruxelles/>



the NHN was able to quickly deploy actions and root them in the territory through the different neighborhood houses.

The importance of a social / territorial infrastructure also emerges from other European cases, for example in the implementation of the UIA B-MINCOME project in Barcelona<sup>2</sup>.

Beeozanam could be the first neighborhood house born from a Pact of Collaboration.

It is an interesting case because many innovative elements coexist: it is a complex space, with an evolving community of reference, where new subjects emerge gradually and may change the assets. It is a very varied environment, capable of giving birth to initiatives that enrich it.

Also in this case, it is useful to reflect on who the community of reference is: compared to other Pacts of Collaboration, it is a larger community, which does not pursue the interests of a small group but tries to involve a large base. In this context, **the physical venue is a tool, not a purpose**. This pact has also a strong collaboration with the Circumscription.

The obstacles it has to face are many: economic sustainability, the presence of different subjects (including the City) who sometimes operate without an overall vision, and the presence of entrepreneurs, who shall integrate their private objectives with those of the project. All the City Departments should be aware of the project carried out here, so that they can support it. The ULG can be the right place to look for a sustainability model, and to get the institutional actors together.

## Concluding remarks

### About inclusive and participatory governance:

The frailties that affect a part of the population are a social product, they are not inherent in the essence of individuals. We must not make the mistake of attributing to people an intrinsic weakness. It is more useful to ask ourselves if and how relational poverty worsens the vicious circle of social exclusion, which includes economic poverty and low education. How can this vicious circle be broken? It is not enough to organize cultural activities and to create neighborhood houses: active participation is crucial, otherwise these people remain spectators.

The governance model chosen for these projects will determine their degree of openness and inclusiveness towards the territory. The debate on governance is now taking place in many contexts, for example in the choice between two models introduced by the reform of the third sector, namely the association for social promotion and the social enterprise.

Behind this specific debate, there is a broader reflection on how we can create active democratic participation, how we shall compare different experiences so that the whole is something more than their sum, and where bottom-up processes and institutional action can meet and integrate.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/bmincome/en/>  
<https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/barcelona>



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### **Find resources, create resources**

Very large structural funds will arrive, but they are not the best tool for innovation, because there are many restrictions when it comes to co-design, despite topics like participation, collaboration and economy of proximity are all much discussed in this field. Involving the private sector can result in more effective actions on the issues of governance, participation and responsibility, for instance when it comes to intervening on vacant housing and abandoned assets, given the extent and the distribution of private assets.

It is easier to fund public works than participatory and collaborative practices. We must try to communicate the value of the latter, also by imagining how they can create job opportunities. How could the commons or the commons foundation create employment, in a similar way to the neighborhood houses?

Thanks to CO-CITY, the City has experimented a lot on Pacts for the care of public space, but it has also laid the foundations for experimenting on complex and shared management tools.

The NHN will make the training course materials available to the ULG.