Fostering collaborative practices: the governance of sharing economy

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Abstract

Collaborative practices and the social phenomenon usually labelled as sharing economy have emerged as one of the most important waves of social innovation in recent years. These practices deal with different dimensions of social life, such as working, housing as well as caring for children or aged people. The public and scientific debate around these practices mainly focuses on its positive and negative aspects, such as fostering mutual help, sociability and welfare cost reductions on the positive sides, as well as the exploitation of low-paid workers and the dominant role of traditional profit companies in this economy as the negative ones. What is still lacking in the debate on the sharing economy is the role that local municipalities may play in trying to promote these practices to build a collaborative way of governing cities. In this paper, we try to shed light on this issue by exploring two cases of Italian municipalities that have built programs to foster collaborative practices in different ways: Mantua and Milan.

Introduction

When we talk about sharing economy within the current public debate, we usually refer to practices in which citizens collaborate in producing or using the same goods or services. Different kinds of goods and services can be shared in these practices and different kinds of collaborations are connected with these practices, as some scholars have already highlighted (Botsman 2013, Bauwen & Kostakis 2014, Pais & Provasi 2015, Arena & Iaione 2015). In this paper, we will focus on a very particular type of good produced through a collaborative practice, namely the policy-making process. The way in which citizens can be involved in making public policies is not actually a new issue for social and political scientists; indeed, a long debate has developed over the last twenty years in the field of political science and sociology. While the policy-making process has always been acknowledged as a plural process, in recent decades the attention of policy-makers and scholars has been oriented towards the institutional and formal way of involving citizens and their organisations in this process (Baccaro & Papadakis 2009, Bobbio 2010). The core arguments is that the knowledge an administration requires during a policy-process is dispersed and fragmented, only the sector’s actors have it and therefore they are a crucial component for the building effective and sound policies over time.

The wave of participatory policy-making has had a particular diffusion in different fields of public policies in Italy in the last twenty years, including social policies. Since the mid-1990s, with the law 285/1997 on policies for children and subsequently more extensively with the law 328/2000 on the whole system of social services, there have been strong experience of citizens’ involvement in the welfare policies across the country. The research on these experiences applied to social policies finds that these practices have produced very different outcomes in terms of the effectiveness of this idea of citizen involvement (Gori et al. 2014, Costa 2009 Bifulco 2015).

In the late-2000s, the participatory wave in the policy-making of welfare seemed to be deeply weakened, owing to the retrenchment that social policies at national and local levels suffered with the economic crisis that began in 2008, as well as the subsequent austerity policy (Paci 2008,
Ciarini 2013) Moreover, the frequent poor effectiveness of many participatory arenas has produced widespread disappointment in their participants (Tajani Polizzi and Vitale, 2013).

With the emergence of sharing practices - including those in the field of welfare - the idea of a form of citizen involvement in public policy seems to be reborn. However, unlike what happened in the 1990s, the focus seems to be less devoted to the planning of such policies and more on the production of goods and services. In this kind of involvement, citizens are not only seen as recipients of services but as also co-producers and users together. One advantage of these new forms of involvement is the possibility that it provides to have positive effects in terms of increased sociability and strengthening territorial links between citizens. In addition, it represents a way of saving time and economic resources for public administrations, as it reduces the work for direct providers of services.

However, we cannot say that these outcomes are indeed destined to occur. There are already several debates about this issue (Gorenflo 2015, Pais & Provasi 2015). To investigate this question, it is important to consider the way in which cities are responding to this challenge and how they are managing the relationship with their citizens. In this context, local governments are in fact an important player in addressing the development of the sharing economy. In this paper, we focus on two case studies of local governments that have fielded policies to promote collaborative practices, focusing on the similarities, differences and outcomes to which this policy led. Before presenting the case studies, we now focus now on one of the factors that seems to have played an important role in these two experiences, namely the political investment that local governments have made in such policies.

This subject is introduced by presenting some elements of the scholarly debate on the relationship between local government and civil society in the last twenty years, namely the same debate that was at the core of the challenges faced by policy-makers in Italy and Europe at various institutional levels. In the first part, we will highlight the political role framed as an investment for the success (or failure) of local policy programs.

In the second part, we will closely explore the cases of Milan and Mantua, particularly from the perspective of how to manage the relationship between the local government, civil society and economic actors dealing with collaborative practices. Finally, we will put forward the considerations linked to the empirical analysis and highlight the importance of the classical divide between top-down and bottom-up approaches. We will thus conclude on the specific tools, resources and intensity of the political investment set out at the local level to regulate, foster and govern collaborative practices.

**Political exchange, political investment and sharing practices**

Despite not being collaborative in its nature, the governance is per se a co-managed tool, blurring the boundaries between the private and public sector (Bassoli 2011, Bassoli and Polizzi 2011). Considering the need for a partnership to manage the governance practice, we move down the road towards what was previously known as “steering board” (@@@). By partnership, we consider a formalised cooperation mode among public and private actors that involves co-regulation

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1 Part of this chapter was developed in the project NewGov (2007) and later published in Bassoli (2010) and Vesan and Sparano (2009a, 2009b). We are thus indebted to Paolo Graziano, Patrik Vesan and Valeria Sparano for their valuable contributions to the first draft and the constant crafting of our understanding of the way in which governance arrangements work.
processes, i.e. the co-management of the policy-making process and the creation of one or more ad-hoc administrative structures. While the first part is quite common in its generality, the stress on the administrative structure is important to provide some sort of institutionalisation. While some implicit governance of the collaborative experiences is in place, the presence of a more or less formalised collaborative governance structure is rarer but also more fruitful in regulating societal and political processes (Vesan and Sparano 2009a). Indeed, in the governance literature, scholars have dwelled at length on the issue of partnering and its consolidation. Given the debate surrounding the term partnership (Teisman and Klijn 2002), we may also introduce a more general term - namely that of network governance arrangements (NGAs) (Bassoli 2010; 2011) - which does not require the administrative structure (as an independent legal entity) but implies the presence of a formalised governance structure. Indeed, NGAs are based upon a concertative approach involving a more or less close and codified interaction between public and non-public actors, including social partners. According to Bassoli (2010), NGAs feature a focus on the output/product, a clear selection of (few) stakeholders and an emphasis on the negotiation. Overall, the structure is closed since the selection is made ex-ante, although changes may occur at a later stage.

In particular, according to some scholars (Vesan and Sparano 2009b) one of the main aims of a partnership (as a specific form of NGA) should be to produce so-called local collective competition goods, namely those goods and services that may provide competitive advantages to a local community in terms of adequate infrastructure, business services or specialised know-how (Crouch et al. 2001). The basic assumption is that without achieving a certain amount of material and immaterial resources through the participation of different local actors, the production of these goods will be hardly viable. The parallelism with the sharing approach is astonishing, above all in the idea of Iaione (2016) of having five actors to produce “collaborative governance”: social innovators, the third sector, knowledge institutions, public institutions and private enterprises. Therefore, we can perceive “sharing practices” as a local competition good, a “local added value” that the local partnership can put forward. Nonetheless, the creation and maintenance of a NGA also implies specific participation costs. Indeed, the actors involved are called to invest several resources in the cooperation, such as time and dedication financial resources for the co-funding of programmes and a partial delegation of some rights due to sharing of responsibilities for the use of the resources involved. It follows that the active participation in a NGA will only be considered convenient if local stakeholders can profit from it. Nonetheless, what are the main advantages and the underlying rationale that can guarantee the support of such cooperation practices?

According to Vesan and Sparano (2009b), a partnership is a form of a “political exchange” in which the actors involved invest some of their resources (material or immaterial) to obtain specific gains. In further detail, they distinguish between two main groups of actors - namely public authorities and the representatives of socio-economic interests - while in the NGA framework (Bassoli 2010) civil society organisations and experts (sharing experts, social innovators and knowledge institutions in our case) play a greater role. However, their active involvement will be dependent on some specific incentives.

Starting from the role of local authorities in NGAs, it seems clear that their central interest in a partnership concerns its capacity to provide new opportunities to maintain and increase political consensus. In other words, the active involvement of public authorities in a collaborative experience will be guaranteed if it is considered a “politically remunerative” investment. In particular, three types of political advantages seem crucial to build, preserve and increase consensus, namely political visibility, problem-solving capacities and economic resources availability.

The first one concerns the “political visibility” potential of the partnership. Political actors with an electoral mandate must increase their political attractiveness to maintain their role. Thus, if the existence and promotion of a cooperative framework supports the perception among local key
actors, local media and voters that public authorities are “politically productive and successful”, there will be strong incentives for NGAs to be institutionalised. The second possible advantage deals with the contribution to the solution of specific problems of territorial governance that can be provided by the partnership. Sharing practices are a new challenge and threat to the status quo: if the partnership arrangement is considered a strategic device to face legal weaknesses and coordination problems, enhancing the institutional capacity of local administration, there will be a common (i.e. public and private) interest in promoting and preserving it. The third main political advantage is linked to the fact that a governance arrangement can serve as a useful tool for access to new funding opportunities. From this standpoint, if a partnership proves a profitable strategy for such a goal, it will be considered a politically remunerative activity. Since building new and ad-hoc cooperative arrangements may involve high transaction costs, local authorities may have an interest in preserving the ongoing cooperation, especially when it is regarded as a suitable starting point for the collection of new resources. It is thus clear that local authorities have to weigh the cost of the political investment against the remuneration of the investment itself. This process is far from being publically acknowledged by the political actors or being a fully conscious one. Nonetheless, both Vesan and Sparano (2009a, 2009b) and Bassoli (2010) find evidence that the underling mechanism of the public intervention is that of political investment in the specific cases that they analysed, namely territorial pacts in the Turin area and development agencies in the Milan area.

Beyond the “political remunerativeness” for the local authorities, a second decisive aspect that characterises the political exchange model connected to partnership deals with the capacity of a partnership to provide particular “goods” for the socio-economic actors involved. Assuming that a partnership should be supported by a sufficient amount of resources to deliver the expected services and projects, a crucial question is why do socio-economic actors have an interest in the active participation in such a partnership? One of the most important incentives is probably due to its “selective socio-economic remunerativeness”, i.e. the possibility that such actors have to affect the decisions regarding the distribution of costs and benefits produced by the partnership itself. Choices related to - for example - the construction of a FabLab, the creation of a specific service for start-ups or the supply of a financial support for local innovators may hold great importance for the local actors involved in cooperation practices.

Therefore, the ideal-typical logic of the “political exchange” underlying partnership cooperation can be considered as a first step towards a full understanding of the setup of a network governance arrangement for sharing practices. On the one hand, public authorities provide time resources, administrative, financial support and political impetus as well as a quota of their decisional power to the partnership in exchange for “political gains”, i.e. the acquisition or increase in political consensus. On the other hand, the socio-economic actors exchange political support with local authorities and sometimes supply financial or logistical assets, with the purpose of achieving favourable decisions regarding the benefits connected to the implementation of partnership arrangements.
Nevertheless, if considered per se, neither the “political remunerativeness” nor the “selective socio-economic remunerativeness” connected to a partnership can fully explain the success of the governance arrangements. Detecting the specific interests in the emergence and preservation of the partnership experience is not sufficient to account for the institutionalisation process, since such a cooperative experience can be challenged by exogenous or endogenous pressures, which may inhibit its reinforcement and hinder its duration. As a matter of fact, several empirical research studies (on Italian territorial pacts) have shown that many partnerships find it difficult to offer selective incentives beyond the initial phase (Piselli 2005; Cersosimo and Wolleb 2006). This can be understood if we consider that consolidating a partnership experience relies upon a continuous process of consensus and coalition-building and the promotion of internal and external interests in its maintenance. According to Vesan and Sparano (2009b), four conditions should be considered: the availability of economic resources (Mackintosh 1992), the presence of a “policy entrepreneur (Vangen and Huxam 2003; Purdue 2005; Cersosimo and Wolleb 2006), the presence of a “technical unit” and the “political homogeneity” of the public administrations involved (for a different account, see Barbera 2001, Magnatti et al 2005).

Moving this framework of analysis to the collaborative effort of the new wave of civil society participation seems not only possible but also convenient. However, in this case it seems even more relevant to look at the political investment per se, not only as a political exchange (resources, time and dedication vs. visibility, consensus and resources) but as a truly political act in which - going back to David Easton (1965) - the local authority exercise its power to provide a new (non)authoritative allocation of (collaborative) resources. In this specific case, the political investment is rather a formalised endorsement of the collaborative practice managing the regulative process, as well as a political endorsement of the sharing practices per se. As a matter of fact, the ongoing political debate about the role of sharing economy in our cities (@@@@) is resolved at the local level given the specific choice that each public administration makes regarding which practices deserve to be promoted, which actors are to be included, etc.
The Milan case

The case of Milan is an interesting story of an institutional action specifically oriented towards fostering collaborative practices in many policy fields, such as mobility, internet access, self-employment and digital craft workers, welfare and social activities, participatory budgeting and fundraising for social projects.

In this analysis, we will mainly focus on two core issues of the Milanese sharing practices, namely labor policies and welfare policies. Regarding the former, the municipality targeted youth, investing in the support of shared services for self-employed and digital craft workers. In particular, the municipality allocated funds for adapting spaces and workstations and created a voucher system for co-workers. The aid measure was applied to 49 co-working spaces and reached 364 co-workers overall in @@@ months. A similar policy has been implemented for the digital craft workers by funding maker-spaces and providing incubators for start-ups set up by youth.

Regarding welfare services, an interesting experience in this field promoted by the municipality is the Fondazione Welfare Ambrosiano (Milanese Welfare Foundation) (Catalano et al. 2015). This foundation is run by a board of delegates of the municipality, local trade unions and the chamber of commerce. It provides microcredit services, economic counselling and a mutual form of support for social and health services for unemployed persons by using a network of volunteers from civil society associations, as well as providing a mutual form of support for social and health services. The municipality has also promoted “Open Care”, a platform to develop prototypes of community-driven social and health care services, exploring both social implications and their scalability. Moreover, the municipality has fostered mutual support activities among neighbours, promoting a pilot project to implement a system of care-giving services shared by citizens living in the same building or block and facilitate social interactions among neighbours, such as the Social Streets2.

This process of initiating collaborative practices gained momentum when the municipality decided to issue a framework act-up to offer coherence and legitimacy to the ongoing policy processes in November 2014. After a month of collective debate with stakeholders and experts, the municipality approved a framework resolution that outlined a set of objectives and working methods to establish policies related to the collaborative economy and set up a sharing economy roster of operators and experts, which now lists 104 entries.

In the last years of its mandate, the municipality politically endorsed the process with greater investment of the leading figures of the local government. It also publicly acknowledged the process by opening it to the public debate through a series of public meetings. The mayor’s delegate for labour and economic development, Cristina Tajani, promoted many public events on this issue under the label of Milano In’. Other important events such as the public festival Collaborative Week took place in the city under the aegis of the municipality and the direct intervention of many local actors of the sharing economy. The last act of this process was the opening of Co-Hub in March 2016, as the first public space for promoting and training the sharing economy subject.

The activities described here are the core elements of the sharing practices of the Milan case. What are the background political dynamics? The initiatives presented above are the result of a basic idea that oriented the policy of at least some members of the Milan government. The idea is that to promote the city’s social and economic development, the municipality should design and implement its measures by involving the stakeholders directly in the policy-making process. While

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2 Social Streets are groups of citizens who have reactivated neighbourly relations by using social networks and organising social and mutual aid activities. They were born in 2012 in Bologna and have grown in many Italian cities, particularly in Milan (Pasqualini 2016). In May 2016, the municipality also produced a specific act promoting them.

3 Milano In is an acronym for “Innovation and Inclusion”.

not all of the measures outlined above have been deployed through a process of collaboration, what is relevant here is to observe what happened when this kind of involvement was able to unfold. Some of the most important policies in this field were preceded by a listening phase conducted through meetings and visits with experts and stakeholders. A collaborative approach was taken to design the Milan Sharing City document, the official guidelines for the sharing economy policies. The draft of this document prepared by the municipality was presented to operators and experts in a public event, before being subjected to a collaborative review process by sharing it on a website for over a month, giving operators and experts the opportunity to comment and amend it while simultaneously providing them a questionnaire that asked to assess it. This collaboration process was engaged by more than 200 people (including operators of established companies or start-ups, researchers, community groups, shared service users and citizens interested in the subject)⁴. As Richard Sennett (2012) highlights, this kind of collaboration tool can enhance mutual trust among the actors involved, which seems to be the case in the Milan experience. As a matter of fact, after these shared guidelines were approved, the municipality decided to create a register of operators and experts in Milan dealing with the sharing economy to “map, enhance, connect and adjust those territorial initiatives related to the economy of sharing and collaboration” (Comune di Milano 2015). This roster has created a record of 104 actors divided into two types, namely economic stakeholders and sharing experts. Choosing to include a category of experts in the roster and not only stakeholders in the sector has made it possible to build not only an interest group but also a group for reflection upon the good policies to handle this phenomenon.

Another important element of this process was the regulation approach taken by the municipality. Regulating sharing economy practices is a quite controversial action of the local government. On the one hand, many operators asked not to regulate the sector, expressing concern that a heavy set of rules could reduce their innovative power. On the other hand, observers, experts and many operators denounced the risks that without regulation this sector may be dominated by the largest market players at the expenses of the small-sized and locally-rooted actors. The cases of commercial success of companies like Airbnb in the hospitality market and Uber in the local mobility market are increasingly identified as the most obvious examples of these risks. This tension reflects a debate in which many scholars have engaged in recent years (Gorenflo 2015, Scholz 2014). It is also a matter that could hardly be regulated only at the municipal level, given the limited powers that local government can have on these sectors in the Italian legislation.

Compared to such tensions, it is interesting to observe how they have been addressed by the city of Milan in this path. The city has adopted an approach primarily based upon the co-design of the rules rather than imposing new rules to the local stakeholders. Furthermore, its regulative policy was based upon incentives rather than on prohibitions, as the measures for co-workers and maker-spaces show. Moreover, it chose not to rule out any actor but using extreme caution in cases of very controversial actors, as was the case with Uber. As in many other cities across the world, strong animosity has grown in Milan in recent years between taxi drivers who accuse Uber of operating an unfair competition based upon unskilled labour and not being adequately paid and the supporters of Uber, who instead highlight its benefits for consumers in terms of prices of mobility and the efficiency of the service reduction. Regarding this situation, the Milan municipality has made the choice to prevent these tensions, leaving this dispute aside from the sharing city process and managing this controversy in a specific table on mobility issues.

The good outcomes of this case do not mean the absence of problems and critical questions. Moreover, the nature of these practices remains very ambiguous and open to very different players by size and vocation. However, in this case we can detect the strategy and political investment from

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⁴ It is remarkable number of people compared to a similar experiment conducted by the British government a few months previously to draft its guidelines on the sharing economy, in which 2,000 people participated.
the administration to create the institutional conditions to foster collaboration among the actors of the sharing economy in the city context.

**The Mantua case**

The Mantua case is an interesting example of an institutional action specifically oriented towards fostering of collaborative practices in a single policy field (the cultural one). Moreover, it features the chamber of commerce (CCIAA) as the political entrepreneur of the process. This later aspect is probably what makes the Mantua case unique among the increasingly numerous experiences of collaborative governance of shared practices. The process is twofold: on the one hand, there is the governance of the experience under the label Co-Mantova, while the other there is the promotion of specific sharing practices. The governance process lasted only two years (2013-2015), with the chamber of commerce playing a leading role, while the sharing practices both precede and follow the political process. In the later phase, these practices continued on their own without a clear political leadership but under the tight coordination of the chamber of commerce. Among the most interesting results are the provincial registry of co-working places (CCIAA 2016a, 2016b), the continued activities put forward under the Co-Mantova label (Co-Mantova 2015), the 2015 “Fatti di Cultura” festival (Pantacon 2015) and a recognised trademark. An additional aspect of Co-Mantova is the specific narrative of the experience and understanding that it provides. As a matter of fact, the Mantua chamber of commerce not only decided to promote the sharing economy in its territory but also asked for technical support by LabSus (2016). This technical support framed the activities according to specific lines of intervention and understanding.

“Co-Mantova is a prototype of an institutionalizing process to run cities as a collaborative commons […] and therefore as “co-cities”. Co-cities should be based on collaborative governance of the commons […] whereby urban, environmental, cultural, knowledge and digital commons are co-managed by the five actors of the collaborative governance – social innovators […], public authorities, businesses, civil society organizations, knowledge institutions (i.e. schools, universities, cultural academies, etc.) – through an institutionalized public-private-people/community partnership. This partnership will give birth to a local p2p physical, digital and institutional platform with three main aims: living together (collaborative services), growing together (co-ventures), making together (co-production)” (Iaione 2014).

As is clear from Iaione’s brief description, Co-Mantova is one of the most innovative projects that tries to govern the sharing economy at the local level. The project closely resembles what later produced the Bologna Chart (Comune di Bologna 2014a). It is thus completely different from the Milan experience, despite having some common features (weak institutionalisation, centrality of the public actors, narrative prominence over practices). First of all, the regulative and triggering environment was developed by the chamber of commerce in close cooperation with a set of local actors, with technical support of LabSus (2016). Moreover, while it has some grass-roots elements it features a strong institutional involvement, but the lack of the local municipality as pivotal player. Finally, the project mainly deals with cultural life in its different conceptualisation, including co-working sites, tourism, events, etc.
In order to understand the scope and aim of the “Co-Mantova” project, we shall briefly describe its development, stressing the inclusive strategies adopted to build the network along with the topics covered as time passes. The first seed of collaboration among local stakeholders blossomed within the chamber of commerce (CCIAA). Quite surprisingly, the Mantua CCIAA established the so-called Civil Economy and Cooperation Table (CECT) in 2005, as a meeting place to promote cooperation in the classical Rochdale meaning (Walton 2015). Indeed, social cooperatives are part of the CCIAA, being major economic players in Mantua. The table is an open space, although it also features permanent deputies, including a member of Confcooperative (Catholic cooperatives), one of Legacoop (former Communist cooperatives), two representatives of the Province, a member of the local social pact (Consorzio Solidarietà) and four representatives of specific cooperatives. The table already foresaw an internal equilibrium between the political dimension (the province) and the economic dimension (cooperatives), as well as between the Catholic and the Leftist political sub-cultures that remain strong in Italy (Bassoli 2016; Bassoli and Theiss 2014).

CECT faced the problem of legitimacy within the CCIAA since the rhetoric and language deployed in the cooperative world (Interview 1) profoundly differ from the standards of the SMEs, which are the bulk of the Mantua CCIAA. Nonetheless, CECT was able to promote a series of important events and projects (CCIAA 2016c) ranging from promoting a shared corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices for local cooperatives to implementing a cooperation festival for a wider audience in the city of Mantua. CECT was very active and in 2013 promoted the idea of a “Subsidiarity Laboratory: Enterprises and the Commons”. The Subsidiarity Laboratory was organised in close cooperation with the association “Labsus-Laboratorio per la Sussidiarietà” (2016). The association - which works in close cooperation with the “LABoratory for the GOVernance of Commons” (LabGov) – is directly related to the University Luiss of Rome. The association has been an active player in the Italian social innovation scene, promoting with LabGov a wider application of the subsidiarity principle. The principle was incorporated in the Italian Constitution in 2001 (art. 118, Title V) together with increased regional and local autonomy, stating that public administrations should favour initiatives by individuals and civil society organisations aimed at addressing public needs. Of course, this is a more definitive meaning than the original one put forward by the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church (Pius XI 1931).

Regarding the Mantua experience, LabSus stressed the importance of involving enterprises, citizens and public administration in answering the tragedy of the commons (Lloyd 1833). At the same time, the Subsidiarity Laboratory pointed to the co-production practices already implemented in the city regarding projects (Il tempo dei giovani, Cittadino steward, Bottega di mestiere nel gusto mantovano), policies (Il distretto culturale Le regge dei Gonzaga, Mantova 2019) and competences (Master in cooperative management, Master in valorisation of the territorial assets and cultural-touristic hospitality). Overall, LabSus proposed four steps later adopted by CECT: 1) validation of the approach, 2) assessment of the actors to be involved, 3) definition of the programme and 4) final presentation. According to the interviewees (Interview 1, Interview 2), the general aim was to promote something closer to what later became the “Bologna Chart” or “Regulation on collaboration between citizens and the city for the care and regeneration of urban commons” (Comune di Bologna 2014b), as a general agreement concerning how to tackle the issue of commons exploiting a shared and collaborative approach between the public administration, civil society, citizens and all possible stakeholders.

However, the process developed according to different lines, since the laboratory worked on previous experiences such as the “Culture as a Common Good” call for ideas launched by the province of Mantova, Cariplo Foundation and the chamber of commerce. Therefore, the focus was placed upon three sets of action, following the precious experience:
• the establishment of a FabLab for the shared production of cultural goods and activities;

• the elaboration and implementation of instruments, including digital and communications to facilitate place-making cooperatives of goods and cultural spaces; and

• a cultural enterprise start-up centre (or incubator).

For this purpose, along with LabSus CECT co-organised the living laboratory, as a co-design process pivoting around LabSus training from June to November 2014. At the end of the workshop, the dissemination was put forward by the Festival of Cooperation (Labsus 2014), which featured the presence of key speakers - Michel Bauwens (P2P Foundation), Sheila Foster (Fordham University, LabGov) e Neal Gorenflo (Shareable). Notably the organisers not only included CECT (as part of the Chamber of Commerce), the province, the municipality and LabSus, but also the Association RUM - Mantua Urban Regeneration. The latter was created in 2014 as direct production of the call for the “Culture as a Common Good” ideas.

At the end of this lengthy process, local actors – or the quintuple ellipse (Iaione 2016) – promoted an agreement called “CO-MANTOVA” Patto di Governance Collaborativa per uno Sviluppo Economico Locale a partire dai Beni Comuni (Collaborative Governance Pact for Local Development from the Commons). The pact was issue around February 2015 under the best auspices. Regarding the level of inclusion, the pact was initiated by the chamber of commerce and promoted by two informal groups (RUM - Mantua Urban Regeneration and OURS 2.0), the province of Mantua, the municipality of Mantua, two consortia of cooperatives (Solco and Pantacon), the foundation promoting the local university (Fondazione Università di Mantova) and a set of associations (ARCI and CSVM). However, it never entered into effect since it was not signed.

On the one hand, the municipal administration was finishing its mandate (May 2015), the province was on the verge of shutting down (Ã‡Ã‡) while other actors were waiting for the new local administration to be elected. Notably, the new municipal administration decided not to invest in this tool, which survived on its own. Indeed, the new elected mayor decided to create a new “councillor for the legality, local police, digital agenda, smart city, civil protection”. This created momentum for smart city-related affairs only and not those concerning the sharing economy (Interview 3), whereby implicitly this choice cornered the ongoing “Co-Mantova” process. As a matter of fact, the (rather sectorial) projects dealing with the sharing economy fall under the responsibility of a second “councillor for welfare, third sector, creativity and youth participation, immigration”. The latter has a specific delegation to the Cultural Creative Hubs (in the formal announcement) (Comune di Mantova 2015). Notwithstanding this division, which provides further insights into the weak links between the sharing economy and smart cities (Sadoway and Shekhar 2014; Saunders and Baek 2015), it is important to stress that Smart City Mantua mainly relates to the concept of mobility, inter-operational mobile app and the internalisation of the data processing centre. By contrast, the Co-Mantova project deals with cultural life only, as is clear from the activities put forward and the documents produced (Co-Mantova 2015).

The internal dynamics

The two cases presented above show interesting dynamics that we can focus on to understand whether and how the new wave of social innovation represented by the sharing economy and collaborative practices can also become an occasion to re-launch the issue of involving citizens in the policy-making process. In the Milan case, we can detect two main dynamics of collaboration produced in the policy-making process. A first dynamic deals with the creation of trust among the
actors involved. In Milan, we can detect a gradual creation of a climate of trust in both senses of the relationship: the local government, by investing resources in the collaborative process in terms of time, structures and people and opening it to all contributions and critics; and the social actors by taking seriously the involvement proposed by the administration and participating in it in a collaborative way, raising specific needs and concerns as well as providing suggestions for improvement. This allowed making at least the majority of the actors in the field confident, despite significant differences among them. The soft regulation approach helped to maintain an inclusive climate among the actors and fostered reciprocal trust. A second dynamic of collaboration detectable in this process is the integration between the actors. The collaborative activities not only fostered a dialogue between civil society and local government but also created many opportunities for social actors to know each other, exchange ideas and create collaborative projects, as occurred in the case of the consortium created to manage the new collaborative hub of the municipality (the Co-Hub space). In other words, as we have seen in other experiences of local governance arrangements, when a government organises institutional arenas for cooperation it provides an opportunity for social actors to interact, reduces the costs of coordination between them and increases the capacity to cooperate with other actors (Bassoli & Polizzi 2011).

Similar dynamics can also be found in the Mantua case, where the chamber of commerce played a major role vis-à-vis the municipality. Nonetheless, the public institution was able to gather key players around a specific issue (cultural life of the city) and trigger a sense of belonging to the process. In this case, the public institution not only provided time and resources, but also technical support and expertise (as is clear by the presence of LabSus). Trust flourished as a direct consequence of the true open nature of the process. The collaborative attitude was not only put forward as a practice to be diffused but also as a working method. As a matter of fact, LabSus Living Workshop was collaborative in nature and not only a “collaborative practice”. What the chamber of commerce could not provide was a political endorsement and the visibility that only the local administration can grant NGAs (Bassoli 2010). Regarding the second dynamic, the integration is much more difficult to empirically assess. Nevertheless, the CECT showed a clear attitude of inclusiveness for the partnership. It fostered the integration deploying existing experiences such as the “call for ideas” of the province or the Festival of Cooperation. Accordingly, local actors could gather without the burden of additional participatory effort since the sharing practices were built upon existing projects or venues. Moreover, the fact that newly-born associations (such as RUM) could enter the political arena on the same footing as well-established cooperative or pivotal actors showed the level of participation promoted by the collaborative arena. At the same time, it is interesting to observe the role of experts in crafting a specific understanding of sharing practices as being deeply connected to those of commons (Iaione 2016; Arena & Iaione 2015). In this respect, the existing dynamics studied in the field of participatory governance arrangements (Cataldi 2011) can also be found in this new wave of societal activation. This aspect is particularly evident in the case of Mantua, where the presence of LabSus (along with LabGov) produced a narrative much closer to that of Bologna (Comune di Bologna 2014b) and Battipaglia (Comune di Battipaglia 2016) than the one developed elsewhere on similar issues such as Milan, Seoul or Amsterdam.

Moving to the conclusions, we can try to pose a more general question: are sharing practices introducing a new path for innovating welfare policies? The promise of the “sharing economy” is to tackle two major problems of the traditional welfare systems: 1) the dependent and passive position of recipients when welfare services are provided by the state or any of its (private) sub-contractors; and 2) the lack of economic sustainability of a system mainly based upon resources coming from public institutions. Thanks to their grassroots-driven dynamics, sharing practices can enhance the autonomous capacity of people, organisations and local communities to be actively involved in creating and implementing their welfare services and finding dispersed resources on their own (Fosti 2016). We cannot say if the collaborative practices we are focusing on have the real capacity to fulfil these promises. What we can already say by looking at our cases is that the sharing
economy wave does not imply that civil society can become autonomous in providing services, as suggested by the neo-liberal and the Big Society rhetoric of the past few years. Sharing practices do not call for a marginal role of the public but rather a different role, which can only be played by public institutions (both local and national). Some traditional welfare services still need a strong intervention from the State and cannot be provided through a mutual support within the citizens’ organisations. However, some other services, namely those with a higher relational dimension, can be fostered by sharing and collaborative practices coming from the mutual organisation of citizens. To support these practices, the State can play the important role of framing - of promoting societal activation - via facilitating the matching between needs and social resources. It is a regulatory role, stimulating private resources to be used for social purposes.

We can also pose a second question to conclude this paper: are sharing practices the seed of a new spring for citizens’ participation in policy-making? A single analysis of two case studies cannot provide a full answer to this complex question and only a larger and deeper spectrum of empirical research can lead us to more accurate conclusions on this point. However, these cases allow us to provide an overly-due framework of analysis to study these questions for the time being. The dynamics of sharing, trust and integration detected in our cases show the potential of sharing practices to contaminate the policy-makers in their own collaborative approach. The political investment in the Milan case is the ingredient to activate a new season of collaboration, not only for its concreteness but rather for its capacity to create a narrative of sharing economy, a narrative for Milano In, a narrative for the under-developed potential of the city. However, the municipal role is insufficient without the presence of an active civil society and the presence of social innovators. Moreover, the Mantua experience teaches us the difference between short-term investment and medium-range activities. Sharing practices (probably) cannot blossom in the void, the presence of a rich soil is important but they can also survive in the absence of rather than with the retrenchment of the public investment. What are the other factors at play in this context?

The final set of reflections concerns the external and internal validity of the results issued by this paper. As in most qualitative research, the level of idiosyncrasy connected to the cases is quite large and thus caution should be employed in generalising our findings to the overall practices in Italy. On this note, we believe that the context plays a major role, such as other external factors or the specific moment in which we studied our cases; however, the fact that the framework of analysis used to study and understand local governance practices is also capable of providing coherent findings in this field is already a general result per se.

To conclude, this paper also aimed to assess the capacity of sharing practices to tackle social inclusion and close the gap between social strata. This challenge still lays in front of us. The ongoing debates concerning the exploitation of citizens by profit-making sharing companies (Formenti 2011), the blurring boundaries between public commons and privatised commons and the growing size of the economic share of sharing practices (Belk 2014) are far from conclusive. We believe that looking at the role played by public institutions may offer us the possibility to achieve a better understanding of these practices, as well as providing some answers to the societal challenges that the sharing economy is placing in front of our societies.
References


