



Role of “Urban Centers” for Participatory (and Deliberative?) Democracy Scenarios in Urban Regeneration Strategies



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“Urban Center” & CLUDs

what nexus? what questions ?

«Urban Center» is an intriguing interpretation key to face a complex issue: **participation in urban policies**.

Nexus with CLUDs is cogent, almost physiological: **the imperative of implementing a “fair” participation in urban regeneration policies, equalising power among participants** (“Communicative action”, J. Habermas 1981)

What about **qualitative degree of participation** ?

- Can we involve pro-actively weak stakeholders?
- Can we shorten the distance between “formal” participation and “actual” deliberative democracy ?
- Can we interpret participation through « empowerment » and « advocacy » actions ?

“Urban Center” & CLUDs what nexus? what questions ?

“Advocacy”

where the planner takes responsibility for the choices made about political, economic, environmental and social issues

“Empowerment”

where those the planner works with and or represents, are encouraged to exert their democratic rights and to actively participate in the decisions that affect them

Ronald Shiffman, PICCED (Pratt Center), NY Brooklyn

“Urban Center”: a general definition

«Urban Center is a term used to describe any institution whose core mission is **to inform and engage the citizens** in urban planning and public policy.

Around the world these kinds of institutions are fast becoming the most effective way cities can **facilitate community involvement**.

Because they are supposed to offer a non-partisan, centralized location for all urban planning and design policy, **UCs should be the perfect neutral ground for city officials and community members** to hold discussions and debates on proposed changes to public policy and the built environment.»

San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR)

“Urban Center”: cultural prodromes

DEMOCRACY & ASSOCIATIONS

The democratic principles imply for individuals “an ideal equality despite the actual inequality of their condition”

Alexis de Toqueville



The connection between two main pillars of democracy (equality and liberty) is **the richness of associations** (civic, political, corporate) leading to the **enhancement of social relationships** and allowing **single citizens to be closer to the power**

First UCs in America are rooted to prodromal civic associations (New York MAS 1893, S.Francisco SPUR 1910)

“Urban Center”: the context

Complexity of participation issue is deeply connected to “migration” from the “authoritative model” to the “negotiation-consensual approach” in urban planning.

Nowadays, the traditional dichotomous-dialectic public/private pattern can be considered obsolete, due to the increasing involvement of emerging stakeholders

“Urban Center”: the context

That’s the reason why “Urban Center issue” is deeply related to **participatory democracy** in planning.

“Community planning” ➡ public participation has become increasingly accepted as means for **balancing multiple stakeholder interests** and **pursuing a shared consensus for a new urban vision**.

Participation is thus considered as a community action intended to increase the institutionalised democratic process.

“Urban Center”: cultural roots & inspirers

UC interpretation styles are derived from classic models of juridical culture: “Civil law” and “Common law”

In the “Civil law” domain (Latin culture - *Roman Corpus Juris Civilis* - and later the *Napoleonic Code*), UC “inspirer” and engine is generally the local administration (City Council), exclusively or together with other institutions pursuing the public interest.

Prevalent rationale: top-down

“Urban Center”: cultural roots & inspirers

In the “**Common law**” system (Anglo-Saxon culture), UCs are usually created and supported by a heterogeneous panel of **actors representing the civil society** (universities, non-profit associations, citizens committees) and **lobbies** (professionals, private foundations, real estate promoters, financial groups), **without direct involvement of local administration.**

Prevalent rationale: **bottom-up**

- Of course today we have **infinite hybridization UC styles, related to specific cultural identities**

“Urban Center”: missions and activities

Basic level: UC conceived to **inform** and **communicate** the urban transformation process to the local community;

A “data-base” of urban issues dealing with “different times”:

- * **historical time** (the “Museum of the City”);
- * **real time** (the “City in progress”);
- * **future time** (the “Urban Vision”)

“Urban Center”: missions and activities

Advanced level: UCs hosting different cultural, social, economical and political ideas looking for a convergence space.

UCs can host:

- ✓ self-knowledge incubators
- ✓ advocacy planning services
- ✓ creativity think-tanks
- ✓ social nodes
- ✓ “Polis Theatre”

“Urban Center” tool: what scenarios ?

UC self-centred on public administration
(City Council)

Strengths & Opportunities

physiologic approach towards a “**illuminated government**” **dimension**, managing different stake/stockholders interests in a supposed balanced arena

Weaknesses & Threats

temptation of using UC as a **tool for legitimization and marketing** of city government, presenting “locked”, “black box” projects, negotiated “ex-ante” with “privileged actors” only

“Urban Center” tool: what scenarios ?

UC supported and animated by a wide mix of actors
(except the public administration)

Strengths & Opportunities

“diversity of voices”, qualified interaction with the public administration through research products (studies, reports), declared independence from any political pressure

Weaknesses & Threats

risk of using UC as a tool for enhancing lobby visions (business community, financial groups, professionals, economical specific interests, emerging politicians.....)

“Urban Center” tool: what identity?



Loudspeaker

UC as an amplifier for legitimating
“locked” policies



Aerial

UC as a smart receiver of stakeholders’
viewpoints



Arena

UC as privileged, centralised place for
open pro-active discussion with an
inclusive, cooperative approach

“Urban Center” in USA: what identity ?

Consolidated tradition in USA for UCs;
styles and good practices:

1. **Research :**

SPUR (San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association)
since 1959 [ancient roots since 1910] www.spur.org

2. **Advocacy planning :**

PICCED (Pratt Institute Center for Community & Environmental
Development, NY–Brooklyn) www.picced.org
since 1963

3. **Architecture and urban design promotion :**

CAF (Chicago Architecture Foundation) <http://caf.architecture.org>
since 1966

“Urban Center” phenomenon: what about Europe ?

Historical European experiences

Barcelona



Berlin



Paris



“Urban Centers” in Italy: significant examples

Information & high
quality “two way”
communication

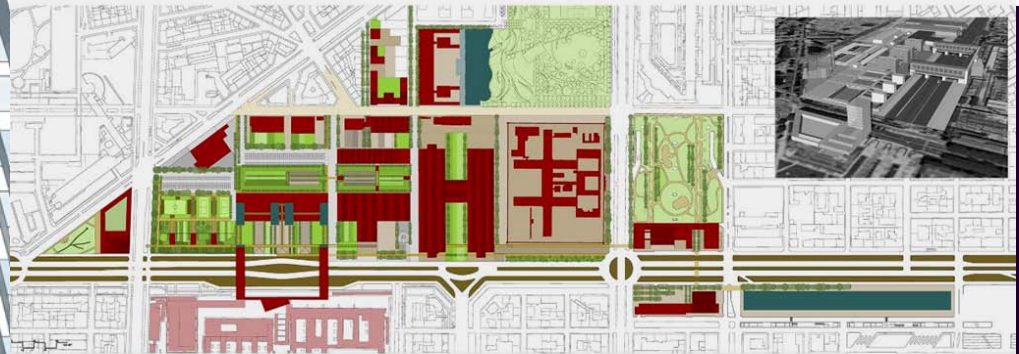
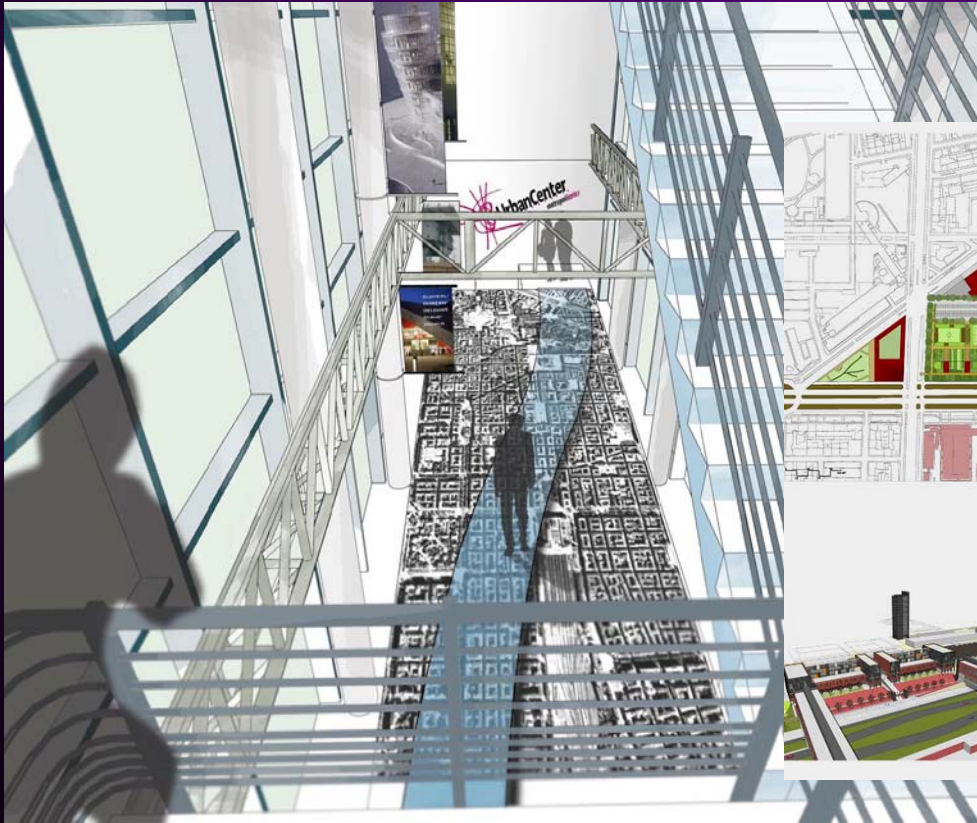
UC Bologna



“Urban Centers” in Italy:

Creativity for shared urban vision
& support for projects quality

*“Associazione Urban Center
Metropolitano” - Torino*



“Urban Centers” in Italy: widespreading in small-medium towns



Information & citizens support
“Sportello Città”
Colle di Val d'Elsa (Siena)

Complexity of UC phenomenon deserves to be studied...

urban-center.org
osservatorio di ricerca sugli urban center



Benvenuti

Il tema dei livelli di condivisione delle politiche urbane è oggetto da tempo di autorevoli riflessioni teoretiche, alimentate da continui riscontri applicati. In particolar modo negli ultimi anni è stata riaffermata con forza la necessità di favorire l'avvio di una nuova stagione di democrazia partecipativa e deliberativa nei processi di trasformazione della città. Al riguardo in Italia, si staglia il ruolo di strutture, Urban Center (UC) o "Case della Città", quali strumenti per favorire la costruzione di politiche urbane autenticamente condivise giocando sulla valorizzazione del ruolo proattivo dei soggetti portatori di interessi diffusi.



Negli ultimi anni, a seguito dell'accelerata evoluzione del fenomeno anche in Italia, un gruppo di ricercatori della "Sapienza" Università di Roma ha rilanciato una serie di attività di riflessione e approfondimento scientifico sul tema, intensificando le occasioni di incontro e scambio di esperienze già avviate dai rappresentanti dei più attivi Urban Center nazionali. Tra le varie iniziative, il gruppo di lavoro ha promosso i convegni internazionali del 2006 ("*Urban Center: una casa di vetro per le politiche urbane*") e 2007 ("*Forme evolutive d'interazione sociale e tecnologie dell'immateriale per l'urban visioning*") nell'ambito della Rassegna "Urbanpromo" a Venezia (Urbis srl) nei quali si è riflettuto su genesi, modelli culturali e forme evolutive del

fenomeno delineando le prospettive attraverso il confronto tra le più consolidate esperienze internazionali e le più recenti strutture in Italia. Successivamente, nell'ambito del FORUM PA 2008, con il convegno *Urban Center in Italia: percorsi teorici, applicazioni pratiche, nuove sinergie*, è stata promossa l'idea della costituzione di un "Osservatorio di ricerca" per lo studio del fenomeno degli Urban Center, con riferimenti alle esperienze più significative in Italia e all'estero.

Missioni principali dell'Osservatorio sono:

- monitorare il panorama degli Urban Center nazionali, ricostruendo una mappa dinamica per modelli culturali e favorendo lo scambio di esperienze attraverso un contatto "real time" con le più consolidate strutture in Europa e nel Nord America;

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Contatti

info@urban-center.org

Collaborazioni



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA



“Sapienza” Università di Roma - Urbit

www.urban-center.org

“Research Observatory on Urban Centers”

Web 2.0

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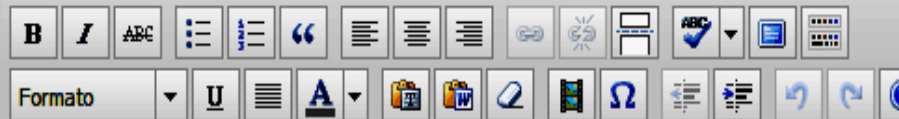
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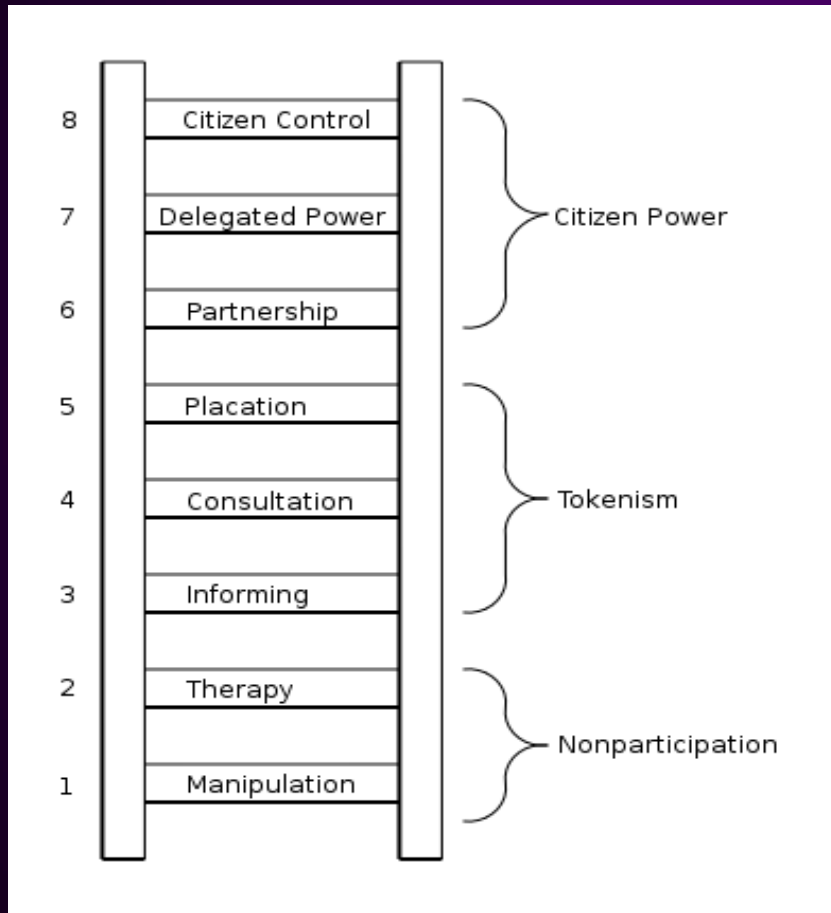
“Urban Center” tool: what type of participation ?

Table 1 – Typologies of participation

Basis of typology	Example
Typology based on different degrees of participation on a continuum. Numerous alternative terms suggested for different rungs of the ladder (e.g. Biggs, 1989; Pretty, 1995a,b; Farrington, 1998; Goetz and Gaventa, 2001; Lawrence, 2006).	Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation. Sometimes presented as a wheel of participation Davidson (1998).
Typology based on nature of participation according to the direction of communication flows	Rowe and Frewer (2000)
Typology based on theoretical basis, essentially distinguishing between normative and/or pragmatic participation.	Thomas (1993), Beierle (2002)
Typology based on the objectives for which participation is used.	Okali et al. (1994), Michener (1998), Warner (1997), Lynam et al. (2007), Tippet et al. (2007)

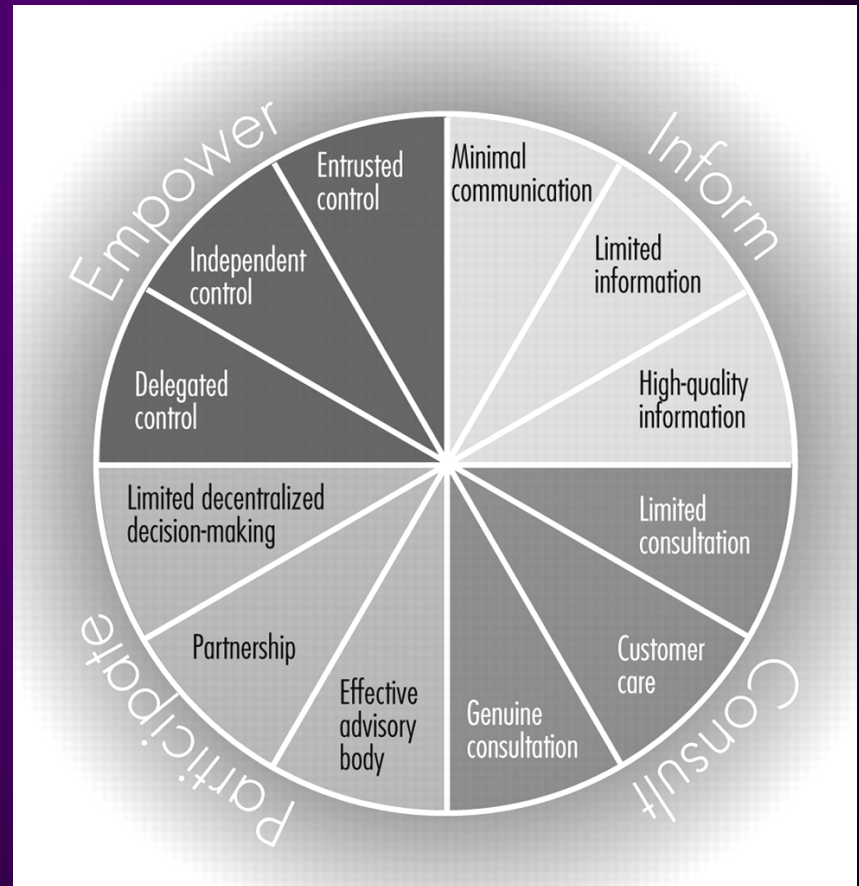
Source: M. Reed, 2008

“Urban Center” tool: quality degree of participation



The ladder of citizenship participation
Sherry R. Arnstein (1969)

The wheel of participation & empowerment
S. Donaldson (1998)

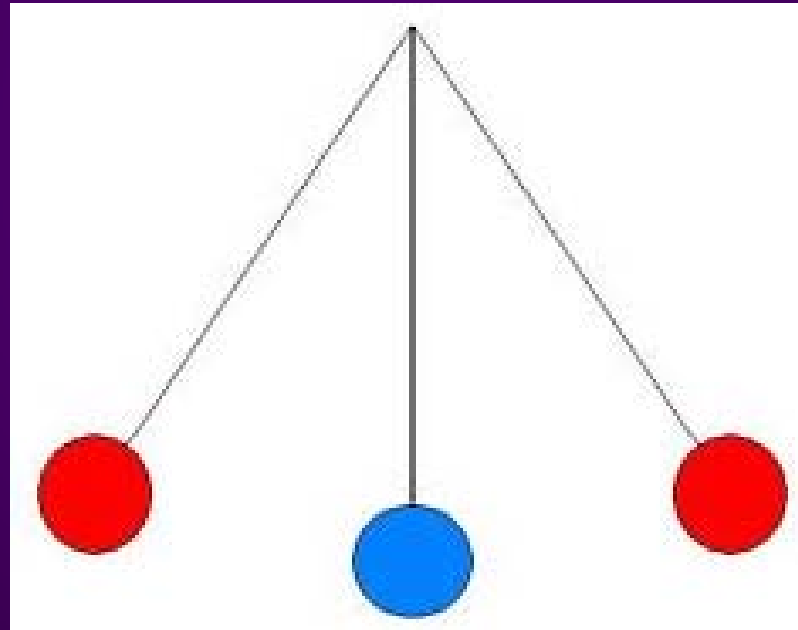


“Urban Center”: open problems

Searching for the «ideal choice» in between
“historical” extremes of “pendulum”



UC “driver”



UC “referee”

“Urban Center”: open problems

Are Urban Centers supposed to become authentic catalysers and privileged tools for enhancing participatory and over all deliberative democracy processes towards shared urban policies ?

Current trend is about “stop and go” (a sort of “Penelope canvas”) but the “Gordian knot” of transparency and neutrality from particular interests and hidden lobbies pressures is still waiting to be undone.

More than “sophisticated formulas” or “alchemies”, only ethics, responsibility, intellectual honesty can save us!