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The Implementation of the URBAN Community Initiative: A Transformative Driver towards Collaborative Urban Regeneration? Answers from Spain

Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado

1. Introduction¹

At the end of the 80s and during the 90s, different theoretical and practical contributions (e.g. Davidoff, Friedmann, Forester, Healey, Innes) developed an approach to urban matters that was characterized by participative/communicative practices. During that period this approach pushed for the adoption of certain policy instruments in the United States and the United Kingdom. In the context of the European Community, the experience developed in the United Kingdom exerted a relevant influence on the construction of the communitarian approach to the urban domain. In fact, the British experience would make an important contribution to the policy instruments for urban regeneration to be launched by the European Community in 1994: The URBAN Community Initiative.

The development of the theoretical and practical contributions mentioned above took place in a complex context in which questions of the legitimacy of traditional planning processes became central. The situations of injustice and conflict, in which local communities could not have their say on urban transformation processes that affected directly their neighborhoods, were increasing as a result of the presence of a number of different social groups sharing the same urban spaces, and in respect to their growing capacity to organize themselves to express their disagreement. Urban planning processes, which had hitherto avoided the issue of participation and diversity,

started to take local communities into account. In this context, the above-mentioned contributions served as a source of intellectual input. Although each of those is characterized by the ideology and the professional activity of the authors, all of them developed alternatives to the “traditional” planning processes (those in use in the period following the Second War World in Europe and the United States) which proposed the representation of all the relevant stakeholders in the decision-making processes through the development of a communicative and inclusive approach.

In 1997, Patsy Healey published *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*. The book argues that the involvement of all relevant actors in a planning process can lead to the transformation of governance (the ways or processes through which matters of common interest are managed by political communities), resulting in the construction of institutional capacity of those places. The author assigns to the planning process a role in the transformation of places towards collaborative governance models. For her, planning becomes part of a process that has the capacity to build up relations and discourses through which links between networks are constructed in order to address matters of shared concern at different scales (neighborhoods, towns and urban regions). Through this alternative approach in urban planning it is possible to overcome conflicts that characterize urban decision-making in which divergent interests and expectations come together. These processes are developed through the construction of forums for dialogue, where active discussion takes place. One of the strengths of this approach is the potential to develop a transformative work able to establish new ways of organizing and new relational networks (61).

In the framework of this work, the concept of *Collaborative Planning* is applied in the context of instruments for urban regeneration. Through the implementation of participatory regeneration processes, that involve devolution of power to the local community and their responsibility in urban decision making and implementation (empowerment), it is possible to develop institutional capacity. It also entails the evolution towards collaborative models of governance that, apart from making possible the dialogue between different stakeholders, leads to the transformation of local and multi-level governance. The inclusion of the collaborative dimension in planning involves the consideration of the knowledge of the local community (not expert knowledge) as well as expert knowledge, and therefore the use of both in order to better identify the causes of urban deprivation and define more effective regeneration strategies. Finally, the collaborative approach involves encompassing a strategic planning vision in the inclusive understanding of the problem and the design and implementation of action measures.

The proposal developed by Healey has been set as conceptual framework for the analysis undertaken in this work because in *Collaborative Planning* the participation of the different stakeholders takes place within the institutional structures that constitute the planning framework. From this perspective, the regeneration programs implemented under the two rounds of the URBAN Community initiative are considered to be the instruments that could not only transform local governance through dialogue but alter urban policy governance systems. This study reviews the collaborative approach assumed by the programs of urban regeneration implemented under the URBAN and URBAN II in Spain in order to understand how the theoretical assumptions and the practical objectives that were adopted by this Community Initiative were

transposed to the Spanish urban scenario. The objectives are to identify if the programs could transform local governance in the urban areas where they were implemented, encouraging local capacity. The outcomes are proposed as a contribution to the urban agenda that is being discussed in the framework of the EU at the moment.

2. Method

The methodology that has been used to achieve the above-mentioned objectives is based on the next steps and tasks:

- 7 a) Review of the urban policy of the EU (its background and theoretical contributions) from the beginning of the 80s to the present, and characterization of the URBAN and URBAN II Community Initiatives as collaborative tools for urban regeneration.
- 8 b) Study of the development of the collaborative dimension of the URBAN Community Initiative in Spain. This part undertakes an analysis of the 29 programs implemented in the country.
- 9 c) Study of the development of the collaborative dimension of the URBAN II Community Initiative in Spain. This part undertakes an analysis of the 10 URBAN II programs of urban regeneration implemented in the country. In order to achieve an in-depth knowledge on how the collaborative dimension was developed, the study examines the URBAN II program according to which the collaborative approach was implemented in a more sustained and coherent way (Pamplona), applying the guidelines provided by the European Commission regarding collaborative regeneration processes.
- 10 d) Analysis of results of b) and c) under the light of the tradition of urban regeneration in Spain. This part presents the aspects that have fostered or hindered the transformation of local governance in the Spanish cities where the URBAN II programs of urban regeneration developed.
- 11 e) Identification of conclusions and recommendations to be considered in the actions to be taken for the continuation of the URBAN II Community Initiative in the country under the urban policy of the EU. The recommendations are relevant as well for a consideration of the urban agenda that is taking place at a EU level.

3. The construction and launching of a collaborative tool for urban regeneration (URBAN) in the context of the European Union

In the early 90s the European Commission accepted the request presented by certain cities, some institutions, and agencies for direct intervention of the Structural Funds in deprived urban areas of the European Community through the development of a new and specific instrument of urban regeneration. This demand was based on the awareness regarding the structural crisis faced by many cities in Europe and the specificity of urban problems. Based on the experience gained through the

development of the Regional Policy during the 80s, the European Commission, The European Parliament and the governments of the Member States began to embrace gradually a framework for urban development in the European Community. This work, together with the previous experience of the Urban Pilot Projects (PPU) launched in 1989 by the European Commission, led in 1994 to the presentation of the URBAN Community Initiative.

URBAN was influenced by the urban regeneration policies that had been developed previously by different Member States of the European Union and particularly by the United Kingdom, in whose national context had begun to operate the City Challenge program in 1991. The URBAN Community Initiative adopted many of the methodological issues of this tool. City Challenge was a result of the process of consideration that took place in the British framework in the end of the 80s on the limited outcomes of the initiatives that had been put in place during the previous years in the field of urban revitalization (i.e. Urban Development Corporations, Inner City Enterprises, City Grant). The new program aimed to overcome the main difficulties faced by those tools through the adoption of an integrated approach in which local authorities and other local stakeholders had to play a significant role in the regeneration processes. The integrated approach to tackling social inclusion at the local level constituted a turning point in the British scenario and corresponded to what, in the early 90s, M. Stewart called “new localism,” that amounted to a review of the British urban policy towards the devolution of power to the local level, thus seeking to achieve desired policy objectives. The communicative and collaborative contribution influenced the search for alternatives at that moment. In fact, Mark Tewdwr-Jones and Philip Allmendinger point out that the concept of Collaborative Planning seems to have evolved as a reaction to the planning experience developed during the 80s, and particularly from the debates that took place at the end of the 20th century as a response to the neoliberal puzzle of anti-planning regulations in the 1980s.

During the same period (early 90s) the European Commission (through its Directorate General for Regional Policy) requested Michael Parkinson (from the European Institute for Urban Affairs of Liverpool) to design a draft for a Community Initiative aimed to regenerate urban areas. Parkinson counted on a deep knowledge of the tradition of urban programs that had been launched during the 80s in his country and on the ongoing discussion on urban revitalization. On this basis, he prepared and presented to the Directorate General for Regional Policy a proposal for a Community Initiative to face urban decline that was highly influenced by City Challenge (De Gregorio, 2012). After a quite complex process,² the Community Initiative was officially launched by the European Commission in 1994 under the name of URBAN.

4. The collaborative method for urban regeneration in URBAN

URBAN integrated in its methodology many of the elements of City Challenge, but assuming a more social approach, as a result of the integration of the British experience and other urban traditions present in the European Context (mainly the urban social tradition of France and the participatory experiences that had been developed in Northern countries). By launching URBAN, the European Commission aimed to introduce innovation in the field of rehabilitation of degraded neighborhoods

and to promote the transformation of the governance structures of the planning systems of EU's Member States (Reiter). These goals would be achieved through the implementation of the URBAN regeneration programs based on a collaborative approach. URBAN was one of the 13 Community Initiatives of the EU during the period 1994-1999. The Community Initiative was used by the European Commission as an instrument to act in policy areas where it was considered that direct action at Community level was more effective than action through the Community Support Frameworks agreed by the Commission and the Member States (highly influenced and limited by national priorities). The European Commission understood URBAN as a bridge between innovative small-scale urban projects and wider actions funded under the Structural Funds. It should create synergies between them in order to initiate a multiplier effect in the long term that could result in the mainstreaming of the URBAN approach.

The main elements of the URBAN methodology to regenerate urban areas were the following:

- Area-based approach that focused on concentrating financial and technical resources in a limited deprived urban area during a period of 6-8 years.
- Strategic approach based on a vision of urban development integrated with the local and regional strategies of urban and territorial development.
- Integrated approach through the inclusion of measures of economic, social, environmental and management nature, able to give a holistic answer to the problems of degradation.
- Involvement of all actors with interests in the area of the regeneration process with the aim of building local capacity. This collaborative approach included the involvement of the different levels of government (local, regional, national and communitarian) and interdepartmental collaboration at a horizontal level.
- Competitive selection process based on the quality of the proposal, co-financing capacity, innovative vision adopted, etc. (De Gregorio, "Iniciativa Comunitar").

The URBAN Community Initiative was launched by the European Commission officially through the *Communication to the Member States laying down guidelines for operational programmes under the Community initiative concerning urban areas (URBAN)* (European Commission, 1994a). This communication set out the scope, objectives, eligible areas, measures to be implemented, and conditions for funding of the programs. Each of the programs had to be structured along a number of axes that were instrumental to the implementation of the strategy of urban regeneration. The axes contained different measures and, in turn, the measures contained a set of individual actions that had to be developed during the period 1994-1999. As established in the Communication of the European Commission and in the official documents, the urban regeneration programs implemented under URBAN aimed at involving the local community in the development of a strategy of urban regeneration, giving place to an integrated approach through the collaboration of all the relevant departments of the Municipalities through a holistic vision (acting in the environmental, economic and social dimensions of urban decline).

The collaborative vision of the instrument was not familiar to many of the Member States of the EU. At that moment, only few had developed urban policies at a national level and many had no previous experience in the implementation of a collaborative approach in the context of urban policies. This explains why the Communication by the Commission advised the integration of the collaborative

approach but, neither it, nor any of the other documents that established the normative guidelines, pointed it out as compulsory. As a result, the Initiative was transformed in each national context, influenced by the urban regeneration practice traditionally implemented. Consequently, the potential of transformation of the collaborative methodological elements of URBAN in the Member States was limited by the inertia of their urban planning systems.

5. URBAN in the Spanish scenario: introducing innovation and dealing with inertia

Initiatives on urban regeneration in Spain have been developed mainly during the last two decades. In fact, when in 1994 the European Commission launched URBAN, some Member States of the EU had a consolidated experience on urban rehabilitation of deprived neighborhoods, implemented through specific legislative and policy frameworks, while in Spain the experience was shorter and there was no comparable initiative on a national scale. The main reasons that explain this situation are historical: The isolation and conservative ideology that characterized the dictatorial period left the country outside the debates on urban renewal that had taken place at a European level. The profound State reform that was implemented since the Constitution of 1978 influenced the way in which urban policies would evolve in the next decades: the responsibility on planning issues, that so far had been in the hands of the Central Government, were transferred to the regions (Autonomous Communities) and the cities. From then on, institutional action on urban issues evolved towards a fragmented institutional scenario, where collaboration between different levels of government became difficult. At the same time, the social and institutional transformation that took place during the next decades resulted in the consolidation of an urban planning tradition in which local communities were almost excluded from the decision-making processes. Institutions adopted a paternalistic vision while, after a participatory momentum under the *Urban Social Movements* during the late 70s and the early 80s, the request for participation by citizens and associations was greatly reduced. As a result, in general, urban transformation was implemented in the country on the basis of instrumental rationality, limiting the participation of local communities. It is worth pointing out as well that, by the arrival of URBAN in 1994, urban regeneration in the country was characterized by a sectoral approach in which the transformation of public space prevailed over the transformation of the social and economic dimensions of decline.

The afore-mentioned situation, together with the lack of experience in the implementation of collaborative instruments in the field of urban policies, resulted in that major goals were not attained and URBAN programs in Spain³ did not succeed in transforming governance in the context of the urban regeneration strategies (De Gregorio, 2012). In fact, during the first round of the URBAN Community Initiative (1994-1999) the programs reproduced the traditional approach to urban transformation, showing a lack of integration of non-institutional actors in the definition and implementation of the strategies with the continuation of the sectoral approach (where the focus on environmental transformation still prevailed). Within this general scenario, just a few programs managed to implement the integrated and participatory methodological dimensions of the URBAN Initiative. In these cases,

program limitations led to strategies that slightly improved urban environments but were not successful in achieving major transformative results. None of the programs was able to implement a wide and consistent participative process. Only the program of Huelva partially reached its goal toward an inclusive process of urban transformation, while most of the programs developed processes of “participation” that consisted only in spreading information in the local community. However, one should not underestimate what was achieved in the first round of URBAN in Spain which translated mainly in the knowledge and experience gained by both practitioners and institutions. An understanding of the novelty of the methodology proposed by URBAN was eventually introduced in the academic circles (even if it exerted less influence than in other countries of the EU). All this resulted in a penetration of the URBAN methodology at a theoretical level, which, in turn, contributed to essential practical outcomes in the next round of the Initiative (URBAN II 2000-2006) (De Gregorio, 2012).

6. URBAN II in Spain: achieving concrete results and trying to overcome persisting inertia

The second round of URBAN was launched by the *Communication from the European Commission to the Member States laying down guidelines for a Community Initiative concerning economic and social regeneration of cities and of neighborhoods in crisis in order to promote sustainable urban development (URBAN II)* in 2000 (European Commission, 2000). It maintained the approach and objectives of the first round, focusing on the promotion of innovation and the dissemination of best practices.

²²In Spain 10 programs were integrated in the URBAN II Community Initiative.⁴ The way in which the collaborative dimension was embraced and implemented in some of these programs shows a relevant evolution if compared with those developed during 1994-1999, but at the same time it demonstrates how local tradition and inertia continued hindering the implementation of “real” collaborative strategies. It is worth pointing out that, even if the outcomes of the programs run under URBAN (1994-1999) highlighted the problems the municipalities had faced in order to implement the collaborative approach, there was no initiative process at the national level. As a result, the programs continued to face problems in implementing this methodological dimension in the Spanish context. Only those municipalities with more resources, experience and political will were able to overcome limitations.

The lack of experience of Spanish municipalities in implementing collaborative visions in urban policies explains why, in most cases, the URBAN II programs equated the participatory processes with dissemination of information to citizens and consultation processes (in the context of strategies already defined by local institutions). Nevertheless, the analysis identifies two cases (Pamplona and Gijón) where the URBAN II programs were able to launch processes in which an interaction between stakeholders took place (De Gregorio, 2012). The URBAN II program of Pamplona constitutes the example in which the collaborative vision was implemented in a more consistent way. The strategy of urban regeneration designed by the Municipality included a structured process of participation organized with the support of facilitators (experts from the University of Navarra) in which all the stakeholders were invited to participate in the design of the strategy, the implementation of some of

its actions and the monitoring of the process. The next part of this essay focuses on the case of Pamplona, in order to examine the conditions on which the city developed the participatory process and the limitations that had to be faced as the process evolved.

a. The case of URBAN II in Pamplona

The URBAN program developed in Pamplona acted on the historic center of the city and the neighborhood of Rochapea, a mixed-use area with small industrial activities and residential blocks (Fig. 01). The total surface area was 1.7 km² and the resident population approximately 30,000 (16% of the total population in 2000). Since the 70s, both neighborhoods had suffered depopulation, poor housing conditions, lack of public facilities and public space, and problems of social integration. In addition, they were characterized by the decline of economic activity and urban environmental deterioration. A reversal of the depopulation trend started by the late 90s. In order to counteract the degradation, the Municipality started in the case of Rochapea the construction of public housing projects in 1988. At the time of the implementation of URBAN, the area was being reconverted from a mixed-use to a residential one.

Figure 1



Area of the URBAN II program in Pamplona (Rochapea area: North to River Arga; Historic center: South to River Arga) (source: developed by the author on a base of Google Maps)

- 25 The Municipality of Pamplona chose the historic center and Rochapea to implement URBAN II after an analysis of the situation of the different districts of the city. The main reasons that entailed the decision were:

- The poor socio-economic indicators.

- The problems of urban functionality posed by the physical barriers between the historic center and the Rochapea area (wall and river).
- The need to promote commercial activity.
- The need of more public facilities and public spaces.
- The urgency from the part of institutions to address the sustained efforts of citizens, social actors and local agencies to revitalize the area.

26 The URBAN program of Pamplona adopted from the beginning a collaborative and integrated vision. In fact, from the beginning the Municipality considered the existence of a social participative substrate as an important basis on which “[to] build new and deeper ways of participation” able to increase the solidness and strength of the program and improve its dissemination at a local level (Ministerio de Hacienda, 2001). This vision enabled the Municipality to understand the collaborative approach of URBAN as an opportunity for the city, making it an essential part of the strategy. As a significant component of the program and taking advantage of its transformative potential, the collaborative approach was introduced to reinforce urban regeneration strategies: “To create enduring structures of participation and management based on consensus-building and able to undertake and make possible the change and the regeneration that the URBAN area needs” (ibid.). The analysis of how the collaborative vision was encoded in the program’s documents of 2001 shows that it aimed to construct effective institutional capacity through participation-learning, resulting in citizen input into agency decision-making and management. In order to facilitate the participation of all the relevant and interested actors in the regeneration program, the Municipality published an invitation in the newspapers. Afterwards, a protocol was signed with the stakeholders in order to start a process of social participation able to monitor the project and integrate proposals by social actors and individuals. The protocol set the procedures for participation as well as its deadlines, and anticipated the creation of the Management Committee, a body which would coordinate the different arenas of participation (URBAN Forums) and would guarantee the smooth evolution of the process.

The Management Committee was composed of various local and institutional actors (City Council, technicians of the URBAN program, representatives of organizations of the historic centre and Rochapea, etc.). It represented the core of the participative process, as it engaged all stakeholders as equal contributors in dialogue and negotiation. The participative process counted on the technical assistance and expertise of INSONA (Institute of Social Studies of the University of Navarra).

Discussions of the measures to be implemented took place in the context of the URBAN Forums. During 2001, eight Forums were created, in which different measures were discussed. At first, the Forums played an informative role on the rules of URBAN, giving participants the opportunity to become familiar with this method of urban regeneration. INSONA acted as a facilitator when conflicts arose in the course of discussions, in order to make different positions converge into an acceptable proposal for all. The participation process lasted three years. Once defined and agreed, the measures moved to a body called Mesa URBAN which was chaired by the Mayor and was comprised of stakeholders, technicians from the City Hall (particularly the technicians involved in the development of the URBAN program) and representatives of all the political parties with representation in the Municipality Plenary Sessions. The Mesa URBAN studied the proposals of the Forums. It had the authority of

accepting or rejecting them. Nevertheless, it exercised its decision-making authority respecting what had been decided in the Forums, proposing changes in the case of the measures that were considered very complex from a technical point of view. Some of the measures selected were: Improvement of sports facilities; connection of the Paseo de Ronda to surrounding streets and improvement of adjacent streets; refurbishment of Palacio del Condestable; construction of centre for local associations and NGOs; access to the Internet available to all; improvement of accessibility; low emissions public transport; installation of solar panels; services for entrepreneurs; tools and services for the creation of SMEs; creation of Environmental Education Center; promotion of crafts and arts incubator; integration of immigrants; support for older people. The participative nature of the URBAN program of Pamplona diminished as the implementation progressed, when the Municipality started developing measures differently from what had been agreed in the participative process.⁵ This circumstance led to frustration and dissatisfaction of citizens who were engaged in the policy making process. Despite the discomfort born around the final realization of some activities and the recognition that the process of participation lost strength over time, the stakeholders contacted⁶ considered that the process was very positive, not only because it allowed the introduction of particular measures in the final strategy that otherwise would not be carried out by the Municipality, but because the path initiated by URBAN led to the transformation of local governance through the inclusion of the local community in the regeneration of the city.

b. Results of the participative process

- 29 The development of the described process resulted in measures that improved significantly the strategy of the program. All stakeholders who were interested in getting involved were integrated in the participatory Forums. In particular, citizens and associations of the area (historic center and Rochapea) were well represented. The participatory process led to a high degree of consensus regarding the strategy to be implemented to revitalize holistically the historic center and the Rochapea area. The actual participation in the Forums allowed a large number of citizens and other actors to familiarize themselves with the URBAN method and acknowledge the EU interest toward urban regeneration. It provided them experience on more democratic decision making processes in the field of urban matters at a local level. Despite the difficulties, it should be noted that the participative approach was considered positive by local associations, the Municipality and other stakeholders. It was also assessed positively by the European Commission in 2003.⁷ This shows that the inertia and traditional limitations that characterized the Spanish context of urban regeneration at that moment could be overcome with political and technical commitment. In the case of Pamplona, the commitment of the technicians of the Municipality responsible for the implementation of the URBAN program with the participative process was a key factor in order to overcome the problems that arose before and during the implementation. Nevertheless, with the decrease of political commitment the participative process declined and the results achieved so far were only partially preserved.

7. Lessons from the experience of URBAN and URBAN II in Spain

The observation of the collaborative dimension in the URBAN and URBAN II programs shows that it was only partially introduced in the Spanish case, which reduced the transformative capacity of the processes of urban regeneration put in practice. This is explained by the tendency to reproduce traditional practices and the hesitancy to introduce new methodological elements in the domain of urban regeneration. The experience reviewed in this work, and particularly the case of Pamplona, shows that these limitations can be overcome when technical and political commitment supports the collaborative and integrated approach, and when the collaborative dimension is understood as an opportunity to improve the local management of urban issues and the development of local capacity. Political will and commitment emerge as crucial factors to sustain a process of participation aimed to develop local capacity. In addition, the Spanish experience shows the fragility of participative processes when they are still at an early stage and not fully implemented.

The difficulties involved in implementing the collaborative potential of the URBAN method in Spain highlights once again the necessity of fostering this methodological aspect in the programs for urban regeneration launched in the context of EU's urban policy.⁸ The analysis shows that municipalities need more support and knowledge to understand the potential of participation in order to construct effective and sustained collaborative frameworks for urban regeneration. Member States are defining at the moment the instruments through which they will implement the Cohesion Policy of the EU during the current budget period (2014-2020). In this context, it is particularly important to reinforce the participative approach for urban regeneration, so that it can effectively contribute to the transformation of local governance, the empowerment of local communities and the consideration of the real needs and demands of local citizens.

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NOTES

1. Post Doctoral Research Fellow in Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. The article is related to the research work developed by the author in the context of her PhD Thesis (De Gregorio, 2012) and in the line of research on integrated urban regeneration in the European Union that she is currently developing.

2. See (De Gregorio, 2014; Tortola, 2013; Parkinson, 2005).

3. 29 programs were developed in Spain under URBAN: Albacete, Avilés-Corvera, Badajoz, Badalona, Barakaldo, Cádiz, Cartagena, Castellón, Córdoba, Huelva, La Coruña, Langreo, León, Madrid, Málaga, Murcia, Palma de Mallorca, Pontevedra, Sabadell, Salamanca, Santa Coloma de Gramanet, Santander, Sevilla, Toledo, Telde, Valencia, Valladolid, Vigo and Zaragoza.

4. Cáceres, Gijón, Granada, Jaén, Orense, Pamplona, San Adriá de Besós, San Sebastián-Pasaia, San Cristóbal de la Laguna and Teruel.

5. In particular, the Municipality changed the use of the refurbished Palacio del Condestable and the location of the centre for local associations and NGOs, devoting both buildings to activities that were not considered of social interest by the local community.

6. In the context of the research were contacted: the Municipality of Pamplona; the Asociación Gaztelán; the Asociación Alter Nativas; and INSONA.

7. It was included in the document "Cooperation with Cities: The URBAN Community Initiative" (European Commission, 2003: 17) as an example of urban participatory processes together with those of the URBAN II programs of Rotterdam, Clyde Waterfront and Graz.

8. URBAN has not been launched from 2007 as a Community Initiative, but its lessons and its method are to be mainstreamed in the context of the EU policy, particularly in the initiatives and programs funded under the Structural Funds.

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Keywords: collaborative approach, innovation, Pamplona, participative process, planning, Spanish experience, URBAN and URBAN II, urban regeneration

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