

## **Describing and treating marginality in the Italian peripheries. Some advice from a UK case study**

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### *ABSTRACT*

*Even though they have been considered out of fashion for years in the mainstream public debate, research practices and urban policies, the peripheries of the big cities are still a problem in Italy. Due to the economic crises and its effects at the urban scale, especially in terms of urban poverty and social exclusion,*

*the problems of these areas are clearly increased without appropriate tools. Moreover, the spatial effects of the spread of urban marginality have not been sufficiently included in urban planning practices, neither in the deprived areas of the inner city nor in the outskirts. Nonetheless, the claim for “policies for the peripheries” does not indicate the intention to develop a sector of specific policies, but the need to identify and integrate more effective actions and strategies for these fragile urban environments. In this framework, the paper presents and discusses, first, the deficiencies of the Italian debate and the consequent inadequacy of public urban policies, and second, some relevant approaches coming from the British context that could be useful for better intervene on our territories.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Italian planning theorists and practitioners who are concerned with ‘peripheries’ generally agreed on three definite points, even though they not always list them in the same order: a) peripheries are central theme to urban issues; b) there is not an exact definition of ‘periphery’; c) not enough is being done for them.

As it has been recently observed, in Italy, the discussion on this subject is therefore “badly settled” (Ombuen et al., 2017), while clarifying, at the same time, that peripheries is not a geographical concept, but a social one and cultural; and they are inside the outskirts, suburbs, widespread urban areas, and historical centres (ibidem).

Some years ago, G. Paba (1998, p.73) observed: “the old periphery has been transformed and the further expansion of the city has produced something else, which is no longer the periphery in good terms or bad”. E. Salzano (2000, p.355) dates the turning point to an earlier time, after which the peripheries lost their identity: “things changed, violently and dramatically, on the cusp of 1950”, determining the structural conditions of the transformation as well as the “degradation of the city in its entirety”, and C. Bianchetti (2002, p. 39) said that it was only “until the end of the 1980s that there was a sufficiently clear idea of what the periphery might be, of what the centre might be, of what was valuable and what was not”.

However, Italian debate has always been ambiguous because a number of inadequate descriptions prevailed during long periods of inattentive silence, whereas frequently, public opinions and media have just named peripheries by agreeing to a set of problems such as degradation, hardship, marginalization, insecurity. Currently, recent definitions include the observers' points of view although clearly no one definition has been agreed upon. So, today, there is still a need to change how peripheries are defined and described, especially, since the phenomenon has in itself changed a lot.

We can speak about 'peripherality' as one of the most prevalent features of the contemporary 'urban'. In the era of global suburbanization, actually, it is going to increase in intensity not only in its spatial aspects, but also in its socio-economic ones. In other words, together with the expansion of the urban surface (the urbanization of green-fields sites), there is also the growth of social polarization and economic inequality.

In order to consider together the spatial and functional dimension with the socio-economic one, the research presented here, can be placed within an interdisciplinary debate which deals, rather, with the theme of 'marginality', as a complex experience, spatial and not, caused – according to the widely accepted explanation – by the combination of globalization with information technologies and the formation of a new economy.

From this point of view, we look at marginality as something that is among the poor (individuals), in the deprived areas (places: areas of marginality, marginal areas...) and in the dynamics (processes) of social exclusion and/or spatial segregation having effects (including formal or informal, intentional or accidental effects) on society and on space in general (De Leo 2015). For these reasons, the first part of the paper reconstructs the main features of the ‘peripheral question’ by considering some useful interpretations from the past, which define a field of what has been considered ‘periphery’, and by proposing a shift in perspective with the purpose of underlining the linkage with the sphere of actions. In fact, emphasis is laid on the overall lack of adequate and ordinary urban policies considering that new, “special” or temporary measures could consolidate difficulties rather than solving them.

In this context, assuming that the inadequacy of theories around what we can call ‘marginality’ – as a nomadic condition widespread and few spatially confining except for hotspots – has been able to influence the ineffectiveness of the measures designed to combat it, in a scenario that received insufficient attention, the second part of the paper aims at presenting a different framework from which we can deduce a set of alternative approaches. So, with the aim of changing the current Italian ways of analysing and studying the multidimensional issues linked to peripheries and acting on them, the articulated concept of “deprivation” and the

established idea of “regeneration” coming from the United Kingdom are useful to discuss about the consequences of the degrading of focus over the last years even where a solid theoretical (and practical) background exists. Thus, by considering the new challenges and old failings in an environment with a wide history in urban planning for deprived areas, the recent experiences known under the name of “Localism” offer the opportunity to look at the weak points that can be find in the empowerment of communities. In this regard, the city of Bristol represents an interesting exception; therefore, it is a valiant case study, presented in the last section, through which is possible understand how we can tackle marginality at the lowest level of the local government – in absence of a more structured policy at a national level – with a smart use of all the analytical available tools (to find it) and the support of an experienced LPA-Local Planning Authority (to deal with it).

### **THE ITALIAN PERIPHERIES: DIFFERENT FRAMINGS FOR PLACES AND POLICIES**

Peripheries are still seen as an ambiguous *tertium* between city and countryside or as an area of conquest and experimentation: this approach has determined a singular and differentiated production of standards, regulations, projects and plans. In fact, as Bianchetti (2002) has put forward, periphery has been a place full of

metropolitan effervescence – connected to the Catholic thinking on the subject of poverty (starting from the 1950s) – and a sort of gymnasium for creating and building a tradition in the sectors of architecture and town planning”. In this sense, on the basis of the relationship to urban planning regulations or procedure, Salzano (2000) identified five different types:

- “Public city” or “local housing estates peripheries”, the result of socially orientated programmes, in areas pre-purchased by the public authorities, according to a well-defined, clear project.
- Peripheries which are the result of the 1960s speculations, which were built according to the layout of town planning projects like those of the cities in previous decades, but over an area a hundred times the size and with ten times the housing density.
- Peripheries which have been created by more modern property developers, according to the rules of the funded parcelling introduced by the ‘interim legislation’ (Legge Ponte), with better quality, but cut off from the rest of the city.
- Peripheries which have been developed without planning authorisation: they are examples, both of the arrogant and wretched absence of, and of contempt for, the common rules of civilisation (e.g. the informal settlements born on the outskirts of Rome – and in the cities of the Southern Italy as well – later subjected to government amnesties (called “condoniedilizi”) for the infringement of planning regulations);

- “Diffusive city” peripheries, the peri-urban clusters houses, cottages, villas, little villas and terraced houses resulting from lax regional legislation, or from the interpretation of its implementation so that they can be bent to “develop agricultural areas” and urban sprawl.

To sum, a convincing synthesis has been offered by Paba (1998) with the combination of two kinds of descriptions: “conventional” and “unconventional”. The “conventional description” corresponds to “a world of distance and separation, a long way from the centre: maybe from the physical centre of the city, but above all from its symbolic and cultural centre. The periphery is the abstract world of uniformity and rationalisation: the quantitative universe of everything that is standard, the banal geometry of buildings, a horizontal vision of a city which is divided into different zones and spaces, (...) constructed on the basis of presumptions about the average social and biological status of its inhabitants, of functional stereotypes, of an abstract idea of what is normal and necessary” (ibidem, p.73). The “unconventional description” describes peripheries as: “(...) materially and morphologically stratified, with a relatively profound recognisable architectural history, which contains natural or semi-natural areas, free spaces which are available for change or for common use. They are socially differentiated and demographically articulate, attached to minor historical centres which are not yet fossilised, although they might



be weak, and sunk into an undifferentiated architectural landscape; characterised by an evolutionary dynamic regarding the diversification of activities and functions, the background for an experiment into the new solidarities of the networks of social interaction, as well as the formation of a new emotional structure, of localised territorial affections, of new identities” (ibidem, p. 79). However, these interpretations are belonging to the relatively out of date production of books and essays on the topic. Nowadays, the general limited recognition the scientific community gives to the subject is confirmed by the inadequacy of the existing descriptions due to the fact that the peripheries have grown and become geographically differentiated and clearly affected by the economic crises.

The processes linked to globalisation and the economy have ended up by modifying the “dimensions” of the problems to a great extent, their limits, the definitions of in and out, of what is included and what is excluded, thus increasing distance and disparity although seemingly reducing them. In this regard, the category of ‘marginality’ seems useful to analyse the multidimensional nature of what we can call ‘pockets of marginality’: areas where the phenomenon can have five forms related to three different dimensions that are commonly used to study the “urban question”.

In the physical and structural dimension:

- Geographical marginality’ provoked by the geographical distance from the new and old polarities;
- ‘Functional and relational marginality’ caused by habitat degradation (in terms of: poor public space and facilities, poor infrastructures and transit networks, etc...);
- ‘Morphological marginality’ produced by the presence of urban margins that can prevent the access, the crossing and the communication among urban areas;

In the economical dimension:

- ‘Economical marginality’ caused by the economic differentiation processes. It means that an area can be marginalised if it is excluded by the economic interests, or it is far from transformation processes, or if the investments are disastrous.

In the social dimension:

- ‘Social marginality’ produced by the alienation of the populations. Here, marginality means inequality – due to lack of opportunities – and in some case, it means social exclusion.

The combination of the above-mentioned typologies and dimensions of marginality generates other composite configurations of marginality. No typology exists alone, but all of them can be linked to each other resulting in typical forms.

Therefore, by adopting this theoretical framework, we propose to abandon the ‘urban core/suburb’ dual scheme, which has

dominated both the epistemological debate and the urban policies and practices in Italy – as is shown in the following section.

*The Marginality of urban policies ‘for the margins’ in Italy*

The faced problem here is if and how far the different meanings attributed to the peripheries have been developed and if these are reflected in the multiple and varied policies which, ever since the 1990s, have been discontinuously implemented in Italy. For sure, the inadequacy of urban policies and practices developed for these areas ‘at the margins’ (in physical and social terms) in the last twenty years could be linked to an interpretative mistake.

Even by remembering that Italian urban policies have been implemented more recently than in the other European countries, the first weak point we can underline is in the identification of the problem to face. Starting from this assumption, we can recognise how most of the policies seem to be construed to promote the ‘integration’ of peripheries with the rest of the urban fabric – as much as with the procedures, the vitality and the stimulating flow of non-marginal neighbourhoods – rather than to promote the integration of the several approaches needed to solve a complex issue. In some cases, the trend seems to be a move towards activities that will create “normality”, with the risk of standardizing at the expense of the diversity and multiplicity of the “worlds” and their identities. In fact, while it is possible to identify a distinct physical character, rarely a sufficient

space to those aspects that are not strictly linked to architecture and town planning – but commonly closer to the sphere of social policies – has given, by establishing a kind of implicit distinction (Tosi, 2000). As a matter of fact, no matter how well put together and well set up integrated urban policies might be, they do not necessarily respond to the social aims of the social policies and it is not even said that they deal with the same requirements of sociality which are pursued by integrated social policies.

In this framework, the experiences of social intervention as economic aid and mentoring are considerable an exception: a sort of integration to the integrated projects, to focus on non-material and social aims. For exemplum, in cases of extreme poverty and exclusion, generally associated with structural unemployment, financial supports were supplied as a minimum precondition within the framework of interventions, which are aimed at regenerating an area, or as a support in isolated conditions of poverty and discomfort or distress<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> As well as tutoring projects (i.e. in Turin the so called Social Accompaniment) a very good and poorly replicated project outlined four kinds of social mentoring which summed up the main forms of intervention that some programmes provided for:

- practical help to aide recovery together with social techniques involving management, mediation and communication;
- activities with positive influence on the context through a body of functional interventions on public spaces and buildings;
- project for completing the regeneration trough the activities of social relevance for when recuperation started and which would complete, although not be strictly those of town planning and housing;
- Interdependent component of a process of local development: thanks to urban regeneration to reveal hitherto undiscovered (Rei, 2001, p. 34).

During and after the so-called “*Programmi Complessi*” season (Italian for: “Complex Programmes”), these kinds of policies have not been used so much and for long time, and the marginal areas are shamefully disappeared from the public debate and the public actions. Indeed, more recently, the Italian government – with the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers of 15 October 2015 – launched some initiatives regarding regeneration and urban innovation for deprived urban areas; and similarly, the 2016 Stability Law (paragraphs 974-978) and the announcement of the “Peripheries Projects” in 2016.

Even these recent initiatives are financed by public funds, they speak different languages from the most recent EU call on deprived neighbourhoods. In fact, the European call uses words like innovation, experimentation, measurability (the results), participation, partnership, portability and scalability. While the Decree unclearly refers to improve (the quality of the urban decor and the social and environmental fabric), retraining, upgrading, adaptation (public or private property). At the same time, the Stability Law combines without any distinction in terms such as rehabilitation, regeneration, maintenance, decoration, re-use, re-functioning, territorial security, urban resilience and urban welfare. It confirms the widely held view that peripheries are “problem areas”, in spite of their gradual acceptance in the use of the plural, which refers to their many meanings.

In any case, the deficiency of policies used (when they took place) shows how the approach to the ‘peripheral question’ has mostly been tentative, unstructured and almost “accidental”. Moreover, the mentioned recent initiatives “confirm the lack of any intent, ignorance of important policy lessons, and the lack of cultural and methodological references” (Calvaresi, 2016). In Italy, it is not possible to talk about a targeted policy, but rather about “a body of instruments which have come into being over time, with extraordinary characteristics: there has been no continuity, each programme has been an episode, followed by a programme, with different procedures, even within the framework of common elements” (Governa&Saccomani, 2002, p. 21).

Thus, by considering the need to provide new knowledge and addresses for tackling marginality through urban planning, this work looks at the holistic concept of ‘Regeneration’ behind the English area based policies. In doing so, taking into account the link between interpretation and action existing in the UK context – and related tools developed for the purpose – the Bristol’s experience represents a valiant case study to improve our understanding and our ways to deal with the numerous and varied pockets of marginality on our territories.

### **AREA-BASED POLICIES FOR URBAN REGENERATION IN THE UK**

In the last thirty years, the main policy approach to urban

regeneration in the UK has been based on the Area Based Initiatives (ABIs) in a broad neoliberal political framework. In fact, since the Conservative urban policy, initially addressed to attract private-sector developments for economic and physical interventions (known under the name of ‘Thatcherite’), and then shifted towards a more holistic perspective with the idea of multiple actors – community, private sector and various state agencies – and the competitive bid-based mechanism for allocating resources, the ABIs have constituted the starting point of what will be called ‘urban regeneration’ (Jones and Evans, 2008). On these last principles, the ‘New’ Labour government elected in 1997 laid the foundations for its area-wide programme, with a specific focus on combating social exclusion, renewing deprived neighbourhoods and involving communities (Imrie&Raco, 2003; Smith et al., 2007). According to Cochrane (2007), during the New Labour period there was a deep change in the policies’ attitude: from a mainly physical or property-led regeneration to a social or community-led regeneration. «Regeneration» became a wider notion applied to a selection of priority areas usually classified in a national ranking, whose meanings fit with the general objective of tackling deep-rooted socio-economic and environmental inequalities.

However, the conditions that determined the successes in the urban regeneration processes in the late 1990s and during the 2000s until the credit crunch – such as a growing national economy, cheap credit and high levels of public spending – are no longer present and it

seems very difficult to predict a return to certain positive previous dynamics. In this scenario, the Coalition government that came to power in 2010 rejected any kind of ‘Keynesian’ strategy promoting the concepts of the ‘Big Society’ and ‘Localism’ in a renewed regime of austerity (Jones and Evans, 2008)<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, in the ‘Localism Act’ (2011), the current ‘Localist’ approach proposes initiatives to encourage local economic growth and new freedoms and flexibilities for sub-regional authorities in order to launch regeneration practices. This situation presents similarities with the Italian context, where: the economic growth is mainly demanded to the private sector; the cuts in the public spending reflect on welfare; the political instability is represented by a coalition government; and, the reforms of governance are experienced with the introduction of new forms of intervention. From this point of view, is relevant to analyse the ‘Neighbourhood Planning’ (NP) initiative in England, which aims at opening planning up to local stakeholders. It can be considered the flagship idea of the new urban agenda<sup>3</sup> in which NDPs-Neighbourhood Development Plans are the fundamental component of the ‘community-led’ regeneration whose task is designing the interventions in relation to the specific needs of each community.

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<sup>2</sup> A significant example of the cuts in the public spending has been the so-called ‘bonfire of the QuANGOs-Quasi-Autonomous Non- Governmental Organisations’.

<sup>3</sup> The Localism agenda provides a suite of new planning tools through which local community groups can become the designers of the plan they want: Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs); Neighbourhood Development Orders (NDOs) and Community Right to Build Orders (CRBOs). Cfr. Localism Act (2011).



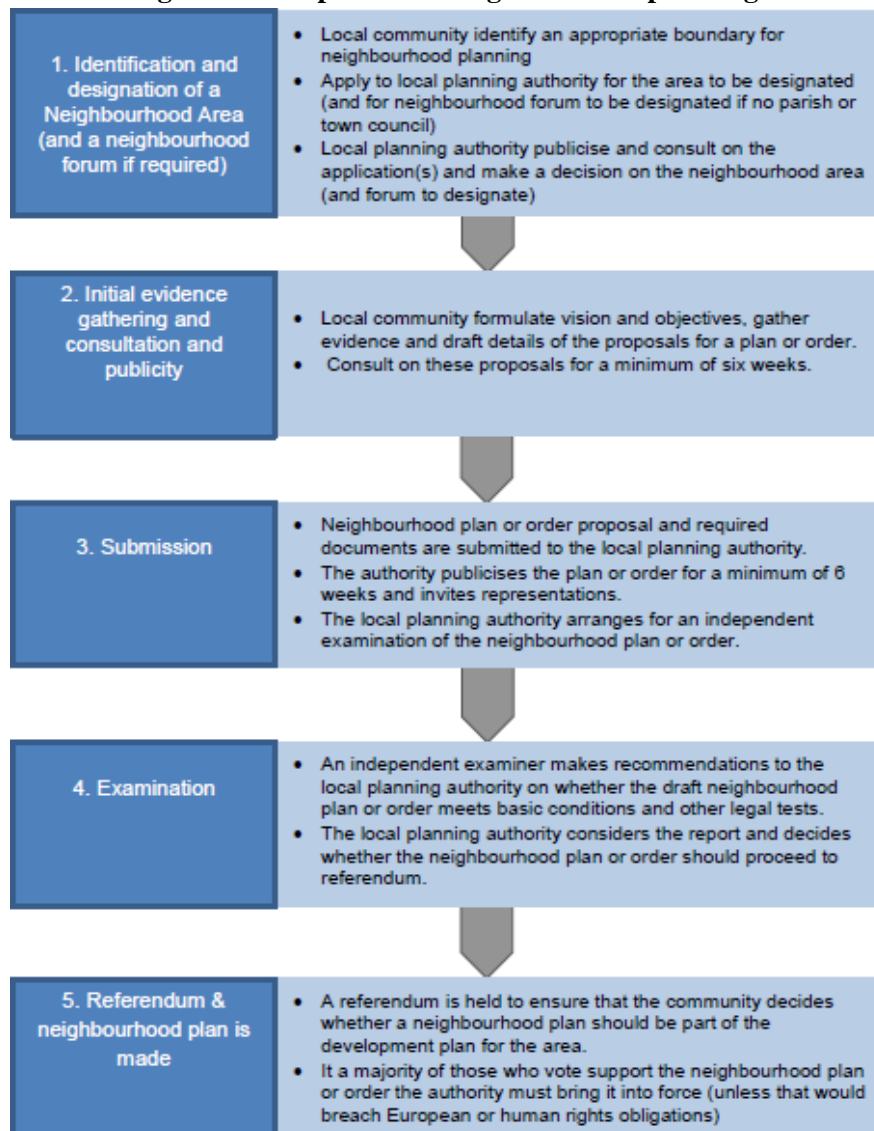
### *Neighbourhood Development Plans*

If in the past the local authorities engaged communities in plan-making processes, the Neighbourhood Planning Initiative provides that those communities are today called upon to: recognise the need for a plan, define its perimeter, organise its production, and finally, for the first time in the English planning history, produce a statutory plan in general conformity with national policy and Local Plans, with the authority's collaboration (by following the procedure shown in Figure 1).

In this context, a Neighbourhood Development Plan is a community-led planning tool designed for defining the future development and growth of an area, which sets out visions, goals and policies related to the use of land and associated social, economic and environmental issues.

In order to incentivise neighbourhood planning, since 2011 the government has introduced several forms of aid, both in technical and financial terms. Initially, a multi-agency approach was used to provide professional advice and assist those groups (and the related LPA-Local Planning Authority) involved in NP, but to date, just one consortium that is led by Locality with Planning Aid England/RTPI exists. Regarding the financial support, instead, in the period 2011-2018, the DCLG- Department of Communities and Local Government has dedicated funds for both LPAs and the communities interested in NP programme. From 2012 to 2014, each Local

**Figure 1 - The process of neighbourhood planning**



Source: Authors' Elaboration (DCLG, 2015a, p. 19).

Planning Authority could claim up to £30,000 for each neighbourhood plan in three steps, according to the plan-  
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making progress<sup>4</sup>.

In addition, for Parish councils, neighbourhood forums and communities' groups, NP grants were deferred in three tranches following different procedures and budgets: a) 'Neighbourhood Planning Front Runners Scheme' (2011-2012); b) 'Neighbourhood Planning Support Programme' I (2013-2015); c) 'Neighbourhood Planning Support Programme' II (2015-2018)<sup>5</sup>. In these years, the resources allocated focused for building plans (mainly for training, advice, engaging a planning expert, undertaking surveys, advertisement, etc.) and not for implementing the plan's objectives. In this perspective, an incentive with the CIL-Community Infrastructure Levy (Amendment) Regulations 2013 (SI 2013/982) occurred: a percentage of the CIL collected in a certain place could be used for NP physical projects.

Neighbourhood Planning is today at the centre of the politicians' and planners' debate. The emphasis about its potential could be summarised in a short sentence by Steve Quartermain – chief planner at the DCLG – told during the IED-Institute of Economic Development Annual Conference: NP "should be the bedrock of the future planning system".

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<sup>4</sup>Cfr. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/23-million-to-get-more-neighbourhood-plans-across-england>

<sup>5</sup> In the last period, each group can apply for up to £9,000 in grant and those groups facing a range of complex issues are eligible to apply for further support (£6,000). Cfr.: [http://mycommunity.org.uk/programme/neighbourhood-planning/?\\_a=funding](http://mycommunity.org.uk/programme/neighbourhood-planning/?_a=funding)

Obviously, since the Neighbourhood Planning system has been adopted, an articulated criticism has grown rapidly around it (Haughton & Allmendinger, 2013; Clarke & Cochrane, 2013; Davoudi & Madanipour, 2013). Among the raised issues, there is the thought that NDPs are not completely adequate to solve the marginalization problems experienced by many areas all over the country. According to some critical observers, there is a sort of lack of emphasis on what is meant by Deprivation in England.

*NDPs in the territories of Deprivation*

According to the theoretical background defined by Townsend (1979, 1987, 1993) in England, we can equalise the concept of Deprivation with Marginality in order to develop an operative suggestion. Therefore, we started by conceiving both of them a nomadic state that can be found in fragmented portions of land even in contexts that might seem very different from each other and difficult to compare. In doing so, we look at the area-based model of multiple deprivation used in UK as an analytical resource (a small area-level measure) in prioritising funds and supporting policy making and delivery for targeting disadvantaged areas. In this way, it presents a valid method for estimating and locating the current socio-spatial differentiations that are more complex than the well-known ‘centre-periphery’ dichotomy.

In an early study about the relationship between the IMD-Index of Multiple Deprivation and the NP applications during the first five

waves of NDPs ‘Front-Runners’, Vigar et al. (2012) shown that, as usual, wealthier neighbourhoods were more likely to initiate the planning process<sup>6</sup>. In 2013, these findings were confirmed in another work reporting the low percentage of applications (10%) and approvals (8%) in the most deprived 20% of areas nationally according to the 2010 IMD (Geoghan, 2013). Finally, in a more recent study, Parker (2015) states how initial concerns can be justified: the distribution of Qualifying Bodies as much as the number of those groups capable of reaching referendum is mainly concentrated in the less-disadvantaged areas. In fact, looking at the lower (and most deprived) two quintile groups (Q4 and Q5) of the 2010 IMD quintile group ranking, only a few (9 of the 80 NP to referendum) areas reached referendum and less than 23% of Qualifying Bodies of the country can be recognize by August 2015 (Parker,2015).

The reasons why an uneven geography of Neighbourhood Planning processes is being developed can be certainly found in the innate problematic nature of the deprived areas, but at the same time, in the structure of the policy, which seems not be designed for facing social justice’s questions. Considering all these problems, from April 2015,

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<sup>6</sup> The ‘English Indices of Deprivation’ measure relative levels of deprivation in the so-called Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), that are small areas or neighbourhoods, in England. They “are based on 37 separate indicators, organised across seven distinct domains of deprivation which are combined, using appropriate weights, to calculate the [IMD-]Index of Multiple Deprivation” (DCLG, 2015, p.2).

an important step in this direction has been set up by directing specific funds to some ‘priority areas’. The latter orientation is quite different from the previous ones because it identifies parameters to class the ‘complex groups’ that will be able to apply for additional technical and financial support and the 2015 IMD scores are used to determine the areas of deprivation (Locality,2015)<sup>7</sup>.

The Bristol City Council started to experiment this route since the beginning of the NP initiative and even before the national ‘Neighbourhood Planning Support Programme’ (2015-2018). Thus, it offers one notable example in promoting new tools in the areas with the highest level of deprivation by integrating them in a wider and coordinate regeneration strategy.

### **THE NDPs IN BRISTOL**

Bristol is well-known for its vibrant civic culture as much as for the broad experience of engaging with communities in plan-making. The Bristol’s NP activity started in 2011 when the Localism Act was still at Localism Bill stage, once that the Council invited three communities to take part in the ‘Neighbourhood Planning Front Runners Scheme’ (2011-2012): Lockleaze; Redcliffe and Bedminster

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<sup>7</sup> «If 30% or more of your Neighbourhood Area has an IMD score of 1 or 2 the area has a high level of deprivation, regardless of the area’s overall score. If less than 30% of your Neighbourhood area has an IMD score of 1 or 2 the area is not classed as having high levels of deprivation, even if there are pockets with higher scores» (Locality, 2015, p. 7).

(Myrtle Triangle). If the first received funds from the national pilot programme and have continued into the main scheme, the third test area did not have the same fate. However, following the enactment of the Localism Act, the local planning authority has actively promoted the opportunities of NP through its own programme articulated in two separate moments: although during the first edition (October 2012-March 2013) three further Neighbourhood Planning areas and forums were designated (Lawrence Weston, Old Market and Knowle West) and they were able to bid funding provided by Locality. During the next edition (which is still open), there have been just one new designation (Hengrove and Whitchurch Park). To date, Bristol City Council has six Neighbourhood Planning area designations and five Neighbourhood Planning forums pursuing NDPs<sup>8</sup>.

Even if the spirit of the Localism Act perceives NP as an optional process which should be undertaken by Neighbourhood Forums (or by Parish Councils, where they exist), giving the power to the lowest level of the local government; as Sarah O’Driscoll (2016) – the Service Manager City Planning – says, in BCC «no unexpected applications have been received». In other words, in the light of a collaboration pre-dating the localism agenda, the LPA has encouraged some local groups to apply for the programme, leading

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<sup>8</sup> This is because on August 2015, Knowle West Neighbourhood Development Forum decided to close. However, the designated area remains in place. Although few applications were received during the last edition, it nevertheless needs to be said that applications for Neighbourhood Planning can be made at any time.

them in focusing the attention on few particular areas and not in others. In this sense, contrary to some cities where NDPs are used to identify the sites for inclusion in the Local Plan (that is what is happening in cities such as Leeds), in Bristol the whole city is covered by statutory planning (Local Plan) and the NDPs are an integral and strategic part of the overall regeneration strategy (Figure 2). In fact, BCC has prioritised scarce resources promoting a tiered system of support which aims at stimulating proposals for the areas with greatest potential for regeneration, as identified in the ‘Site Allocations and Development Management Policies’ (2014), and areas with the highest level of deprivation in Bristol, according to the current IMD scores<sup>9</sup>. In this way, by looking into the range of criteria used to determine how much help a community needs and, at the same time, to the designated areas for NDPs, it is clear the Council’s attention to the most disadvantaged parts of the city.

Even though Bristol remains one of the least deprived of the English Core Cities based on the IMD 2015, it still «contains some areas of socioeconomic deprivation which are amongst some of the most deprived areas in the country yet are adjacent to some of the least

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<sup>9</sup>The areas with high levels of deprivation are those where one or more Lower Level Super Output Area (LSOA) are in the 20% most deprived in England for multiple deprivation and when they represent the majority (i.e. more than 50%) of the deprived areas which is proposed for Neighbourhood Planning (BCC, undated).



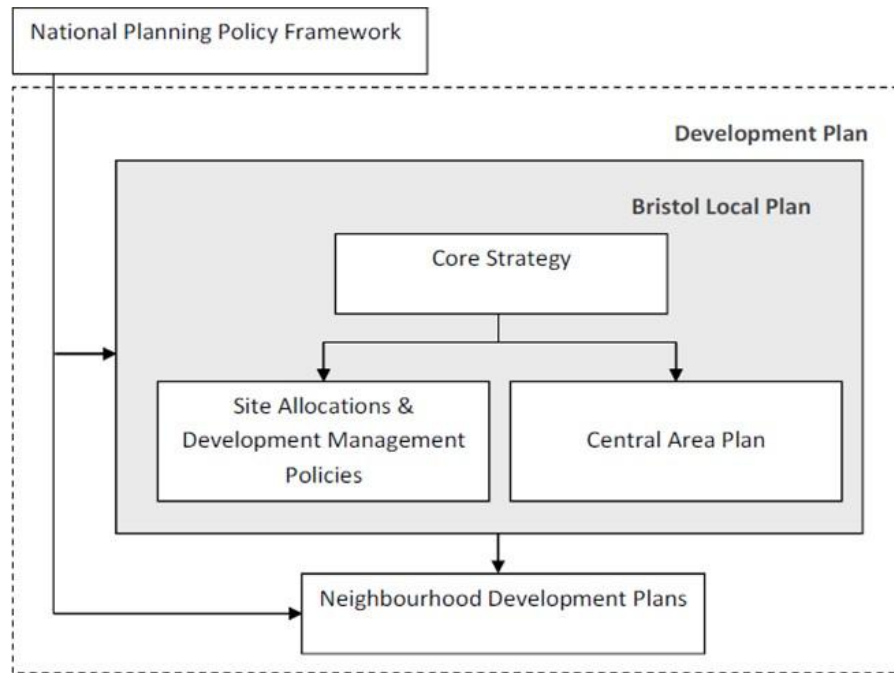
deprived» as it is stated in the ‘Core Strategy’<sup>10</sup>(BCC, 2011, p.7). For this reason, “Priority areas for change” are here set out and the Policies BCS 2 and 3 cover the NDP areas: all of them are effectively characterised by significant and heterogeneous pockets of deprivation falling within the most deprived 10% to 30% of areas in England <sup>11</sup> (BCC, 2015). Redcliffe and Old Market are in a central location, playing an important role in the business of the city; Lawrence Weston, Lockleaze, Hengrove and Whitchurch, instead, are essentially examples of the social housing estate located on the edge of Bristol. In a different way, they are the place where inhabitants have to face with problems linked both to the living environment deprivation (such as traffic, connection and transports difficulties, lack of maintenance of buildings and open spaces, homogeneity of residential demand, etc...) and to socio-economic circumstances (such as low income, unemployment, low skills and educational attainment levels, etc.).

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<sup>10</sup> The ‘Core Strategy’ (2011) is the primary document in the Bristol Development Framework (BDF). ‘Secure reductions in deprivation’ is one of the key targets and the Indices of Deprivation are among the indicators used to monitor whether the policy is being implemented successfully (BCC, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> According to the ‘Multiple Deprivation Scores and Ranks by Ward’, Lawrence Hill (Redcliffe, Old Market), Kingsweston (Lawrence Weston) and Lockleaze (Lockleaze) – where the four NDPs are fallen – are respectively ranked as 1st, 6th and 8th most deprived ward out of 35 wards in Bristol (BCC, 2015, p. 49). Moreover, the Instant Atlas mapping tool can be found here: <http://ias.bristol.gov.uk/IAS/dataviews/report?reportId=1346&viewId=1066&georeportId=5316&geoId=408&geoSubsetId=>

**Figure 2 - Bristol's statutory planning context**



Source: Bristol Central Area Plan (p.3.)

*Innovation in the NDPs plan-making in Bristol*

As we said earlier, the BCC was already bringing forward consultation before the enactment of the Localism Act especially whereby deprived groups were interested in having a development plan for their area. That is very important for helping the launch of the planning process because having pre-existing community plans (not land-use plans) means having already identified the community needs and having experienced plan preparation and people engagement. Moreover, the cooperative actions of civil society and

the local authority in Bristol is also proved by the ‘Neighbourhood Planning Network’, which is a network of “independent, voluntary [residents’] planning groups working to get better community involvement in planning decisions” in operation since 2006, that is today the only example in the whole England <sup>12</sup> (NPN, online).

In short, thanks to a sort of “advocacy planning”, it is possible to recognise a coordinated approach to neighbourhood planning which allows a bottom-up approach to the Local Plan (Vigar et al., 2014).

Although a distinctive civic culture is a surplus value (strength) in plan-making, NP initiatives regularly clash with weaknesses and threats of the community groups or policy itself. The main obstacle for communities in areas of deprivation is the limited amount of skills and financial resources to draw up their own Plan. They have to face the challenge of local capacity to carry out some of the fundamental processes involved in doing a NDP (e.g. design or drafting skills, chairing meetings, programming work effectively, etc.). They have to spend their time for a voluntary work, which is address to solve the neighbourhood’s difficulties rather than their individual problems. Moreover, the lack of parish structure – that is a typical situation in an urban area – means that there is no independent source on finance for the project and all the activities are dependent on grants or local fund raising. Therefore, the final product varies according to the

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<sup>12</sup>Cfr.: <http://www.bristolnnp.net/> and also an article written by Farnsworth (2011) about NPN in Bristol.

“Community’s Capacity” to plan (Norton et al., 2002; Gunn et al., 2015).

Moreover, another kind of enemy in this kind of process is time. As the Bristol’s planning officers said in an interview, if on one hand the procedure might be too long to allow an active engagement from beginning to end (“because people want results along the way”), on the other hand a longer time should be spent in making people ready. In addition, it is not always possible to satisfy the aspirations held by Neighbourhood Planning Forums because they are not always in conformity with national policy and other Local Plans; this is a cause of “consultation fatigue” (Bromilow, 2016). This power shift in plan making highlights a latent assumption in the ‘Localist’ approach: the idea that all the communities are able to develop statutory plans.

However, despite the legislation asks for a ‘light touch’, the task required to make a plan with a legal status seems effectively too complex for citizens. Therefore, what is happening is that NPFs are engaging private consultants to draw up plan for them, albeit it is expensive to manage it and they are not resourced.

In this scenario, paradoxically, among the NP areas, the Old Market Quarter is a very interesting case. It is the only area without a pre-existing community document with the highest concentration of multiple Deprivation (2015 IMD). It is the only example where the professional support has been found inside the neighbourhood (thanks to an ‘architecture forum’ that avoided the risk to engage private

experts); and it is the first NDP to be subjected to a referendum (25th February 2016)<sup>13</sup>.

By studying the Bristol's approach, it is also possible to recognise the opportunities of NP in a context where the local government plays a great role. Here, building relationships between the City Council and the local groups has meant creating a condition in which is possible to manage the inevitable conflicts deriving from the decision-making processes.

In fact, in order to ensure that communities have identified what they want for their area and are capable of influencing development and encouraging new land use and change, in a positive way, BCC has adopted several original strategies that, in a sense, go beyond the usual NP recommendations.

The tiered system of technical support not only represents an effective and innovative move to prioritise the opening efforts in areas in real need, but it has been a source of advice during all stages of plan preparation. In so doing, the authority has provided workshops and other occasions for local groups to engage with each other and to discuss procedures and contents. In particular, the Neighbourhood Planning Network, which has quarterly meetings with the Council, has organized appointments and seminars in order to develop capacity among the NPFs. By sharing knowledge and

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<sup>13</sup> The referendum returned an 88% vote in favour of the proposal: "Do you want Bristol City Council to use the neighbourhood plan for Old Market Quarter to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?"

experiences related with planning matters, the successful capacity building element in the network has transformed neighbourhoods from purely consultative bodies to active participants (Vigar et al, 2014).

Bristol's approach to NP is also known for the effective stakeholder involvement at an early stage of any project: the NPN has helped developers engage communities in accordance with the 'Pre-Application Community Involvement' (Pre App CI). This protocol provides that the community is able to be involved before Planning Application stage. In short, before the developers apply to the Local Planning Authority for specific proposals, they take part to a series of discussions together with the members of the community to exchange ideas about development in the area, by making to meet supply and demand<sup>14</sup>.

Moreover, in order to make up for the budget deficit of the work programme, BCC has addressed the groups in raising funds, giving that there is no capacity to raise a local tax to support this work. So far, through the Planning and Sustainable Development Division, it has provided start-up funding to all Neighbourhood Planning Forum. In addition, it has encouraged engagement with the Neighbourhood Partnership structure that would give the groups access to additional support and advice (e.g. the Neighbourhood Partnership covers the

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.bristolnnpn.net/news-and-reference/pre-application-process/#toc-what-is-the-advantage-of-this-new-pre-application-involvement-process>

25% of the costs needed for the referendum of the Old Market NDP)<sup>15</sup>. Finally, the Council has also provided finance to a central charitable organisation in Bristol – “Quartet Community Foundation” – that manages the ‘Community Planning Fund Grant’ through which is possible to direct grants to who is interested in engaging in NP processes.

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

The Bristol case study shows how, in a context of deregulation and streamlining of planning, following 2007-08 financial crisis, small interventions at the local scale can have a huge prospective in urban regeneration. Moreover, in Bristol, innovation and success can be summarised in a process in which by starting from the empowerment of communities – thanks also to the great experience in people and stakeholders’ engagement and networking – they tried to apply good planning, by promoting a bottom-up approach, in priority areas, in a way that is relatively new.

By looking at the Bristol’s practice is possible underline what are the innovative and successful factors so far have lead towards a progressive localism. It is an important exception because in contrast

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<sup>15</sup>Neighbourhood partnerships are “about decision-making and getting things done at a local level, so that local residents and community groups can work together with Bristol City Council, the police and local businesses to shape and influence their neighbourhood”. Each (of the 14) partnership allocates significant resources to benefit their local community. Cfr. <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/neighbourhood-partnerships/neighbourhood-partnerships-toolkit>

with the early national policy and in order to intervene in the disadvantaged areas of the city, Bristol adopted a multi-level strategy of support by encouraging them to operate. So, contrary to expectations – due to the structure of the policy and the innate problematic nature of the deprived areas – this practice reveals how the innovative potential of these kinds of initiatives begins to express right in the vulnerable contexts. In particular, in front of the diffusive ‘deficiencies’ in places of multiple deprivations, BCC has promoted several experiments of social action teaching that by building civic-mindedness through the constant relationship between citizens, experts and representation, the process works and “legal” plans come into force. Nonetheless, this was possible, however, by ignoring (or by reconsidering) the principle of the ‘autonomy’ which is on the basis of NP: if the legislation believes that the unconditioned protagonist should be the local communities, the local government has here played a fundamental role, by helping them and by coordinating the process during all the stages, in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation. Ever in this sense, the developers and the landowners are challenged to take part too in the consultation process as soon as possible; that is one of the important aspects and the only way to achieve a good negotiation and good outcomes .

To sum, under this lens of what we can call ‘progressive’ (or ‘experimental’) localism, we can better understand that where there are no “place-based” national policies for tackling marginality, that



issue is dealt with just according to the sensitivity of the LAs. Therefore, if on one side, the ‘community-led’ initiatives are nowadays a relevant part of the planning system, on the other side, it would be good do not forget that they can surely support, but never replace, the strategic (general) planning.

In this perspective, also the claim of better “policies for the peripheries” in Italy, it does not suggest to develop specific sector policies, but the need to deeply identify and integrate actions falling within a descriptive and interpretative hypothesis that is coherent with the emerging and more influent theses about the changes of the ‘Urban Question’. This is something already proposed from the national calls about the “Complex Programs” (1990s) whose task was to promote requalification, local development and regeneration on neighbourhood level. However, the outcomes revealed how these projects were based on an outdated thinking about the topic.

In this regard, we can argue that the question of ‘definition’ and ‘identification’ of the ‘problem’ remains unsolved. Indeed, the calls opened not only give freedoms to proposers in the phase of application in relation to the transformation hypotheses, but also in the selection phase of the target areas that, in fact, are not chosen by means of one standard and unambiguous scheme. In connection with this point, critical points are the decision-making procedures, the choice of stakeholders and financial actors.

In light of the exacerbation of the inequalities, and with the aim of

superseding the traditional “urban core/suburb” divide that has long anchored Italian epistemological debate and practices, appropriate strategies should be plan by taking into account the lessons learned from UK. In conclusion, we can summarise as follows:

- Challenging the process of ‘Area definitions’ for policy purposes, on the basis of a specific conceptual framework through which understanding the marginality issues of each area (by using a set of indicators and indices);
- Channelling the resources on priority areas for change to reduce the polarization of richness and poverty of places and individuals;
- Experimenting the “capability approach” (Sen, 1999) as an alternative approach to local welfare economics in crisis, both in the socio-economical and physical/structural dimension, in order to trigger transformative mechanisms from latent potentialities ;
- Promoting integrated policies oriented to abandon the ritual and instrumental sides of ‘participation’ in favour of the ‘empowerment’ of communities without scarifying the role of local governments and strategic (general) planning.

Such activities and policies enable us to understand different point of views by experimenting alternative approaches for integration and inclusion, by interpreting the breakdown of social bonds and the particular role of the city in forming pockets of poverty and distress from a number of different perspectives.

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