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Pooling urban commons: the Civic eState

by **Christian Iaione** | Jul 1, 2019 | **The Urban Media Lab**

Naples' Urban Civic Uses policy is characterised by the way artists, creatives, innovators and city inhabitants are entitled to organise themselves to establish forms of self-government for critical social infrastructure including urban commons such as abandoned, unused or underused city assets. Christian Iaione, URBACT Lead Expert, and LabGov's director tells us how Naples' Good Practice is being transferred to other European cities thanks to the Civic eState project.

The **Civic eState network** is all about the policy challenge of recognising and/or co-designing legal and sustainable urban commons governance mechanisms enabling city inhabitants and local communities constitutional rights to collectively act in the general interest.

The urban commons are tangible and intangible assets, services and infrastructures functional to the exercise of fundamental rights considered by the city of **Naples** as collectively owned and therefore removed from the “exclusive use” proprietary logic to be governed through civic “direct management”.

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The city of Naples carved out a policy based on several city council and mayor's office resolutions to overcome the traditional top-down command-and-control approach bringing city inhabitants to the centre of the decision-making and city assets management process, strengthening participation in political decisions relevant for the care and regeneration of the urban commons.

These are new policy tools that aim to give back to the community public and private abandoned properties.

Transferring Naples' Good Practice on urban commons collective governance

Watch the interview of Nicola Masella, from the Municipality of Naples and who coordinates the Urbact project and integrated development policies [here](#)

Naples' Good Practice consists of enabling collective management of urban essential facilities conceived as urban commons. This public-community governance approach secures fair and open access, co-design, preservation and a social and economic sustainability model of urban assets and infrastructures, all for the benefit of future generations.

Collective governance is carried out through the involvement of the community of neighbourhood inhabitants in designing, experimenting, managing, and delivering new forms of cultural and social services.

The network's objective is to transfer, with appropriate adaptations and improvements, Naples' Good Practice to partner cities: [Barcelona](#) (ES), [Gdansk](#) (PL), [Ghent](#) (BE), [Amsterdam](#) (NL), [Iasi](#) (RO) and [Presov](#) (SK).

The path to civic use

During the last decade, the city of Naples has been experimenting with new urban governance tools to give new life to abandoned and/or deprived buildings. Different movements and informal organizations have highlighted the need for such spaces to be used and managed by city inhabitants in common through self-organization mechanisms that turn such spaces into new institutions. The civic use of these empty buildings implied a temporary use and it represented a starting point for their "renaissance". It also created a stimulus to start searching for innovative mechanisms to use such spaces as community-managed or a community-managed estate.

By revisiting the ancient legal institution of “civic use” and adapting it to the urban context, the administration structured a new form of participatory governance that intends to go beyond the classic “concession agreement model”, which is based on a dichotomous view of the public-private partnership.

The civic use recognises the existence of a relationship between the community and these public assets. This process makes community-led initiatives recognisable and institutionalised, ensuring the autonomy of both parties involved. On one hand the citizens are engaged in the reuse of the urban commons and on the other hand the city administration enables the practice.

Urban commons

The first asset recognised as common property, to be managed through the collective governance mechanism of the civic use, was the ex-asilo Filangieri, an **URBACT Good Practice** (resolution of Naples City Council n. 893/2015). It is there that the first Declaration of Civic and Collective Urban Use was carved out.

One year later, 7 other public properties were recognised by Naples City Council as “relevant civic spaces to be ascribed to the category of urban commons”: ex-Convento delle Teresiane: **Giardino Liberato; Lido Pola; Villa Medusa; ex-OGP di Materdei**; ex-Carcere Minorile – **Scugnizzo Liberato; ex-Conservatorio S. Maria della Fede; ex-Scuola Schipa** (resolution n. 446, 27 May 2016).

The recognition will be finalised with appropriate agreements after the communities managing the spaces draft a Declaration of Civic and Collective Use, on the model of those of the ex-asilo, securing inclusivity, accessibility, impartiality and usability of the governance of the assets.



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<https://urbact.eu/urban-commons-civic-estate>

In the future, the list can be enriched with more urban common resources. These assets were unutilised or under-utilised urban buildings and spaces, informally occupied and regenerated by informal communities that animate them and still contribute to their regeneration (in many cases, the renovation works could not be completed at the beginning of the informal management and were carried out through self-funding schemes). These assets constitute the civic heritage of the city of Naples, co-used and co-managed by Naples' city inhabitants in the general interest.

Public-civic partnerships: a transferable model

Naples' Good Practice (i.e. the civic uses resolution) has forged one of the first examples of a new generation of public partnerships, the public-community or public-civic partnership (PCPs). PCPs are aimed at transforming city assets into **sustainable social infrastructures** that produce public value and social impact through social & solidarity, cultural & creative, collaborative, digital and circular economy initiatives.

Nicola Masella, lead partner, stresses the value of the Naples' Good Practice for the EU by saying that "*the mechanism proposed by the city of Naples, although anchored in the Italian legal system, is certainly characterised by a high degree of adaptability to other European urban contexts as it is based on largely shared ethical, legal and social values. In contrast to the models proposed by other Italian and European cities, where the municipality is in charge of setting up of the rules for the management of commons, the tool implemented in Naples has been built by recognising the citizens' self-organization models, through a continuous exchange between the community and the municipality.*"

A blueprint for the future?



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The **Civic eState** approach could generate a prototype methodology for cities to generate a new breed of cooperative agreements or projects between city governments and civic, social, local businesses aimed at developing cities through an integrated approach. In particular the civic uses resolution could be considered a blueprint for a larger category of legal tools in compliance with EU law, especially the relevant EU legislation on public procurement and state aid, stifling cooperation among urban actors in order to build and deliver social infrastructure and services such as education, healthcare and housing.

It might also be able to generate through the hybridisation of these places and economic models new community-based job opportunities and forms of civic entrepreneurship. These cooperative agreements, partnerships or projects could be the basis for more sophisticated and solid forms of financing that could fund social projects through new funding mechanisms including social impact bonds, social project finance schemes and many other new public-private partnerships that involve the participation of long-term investors to generate a sustainability model through social bonds and impact investing mechanisms.

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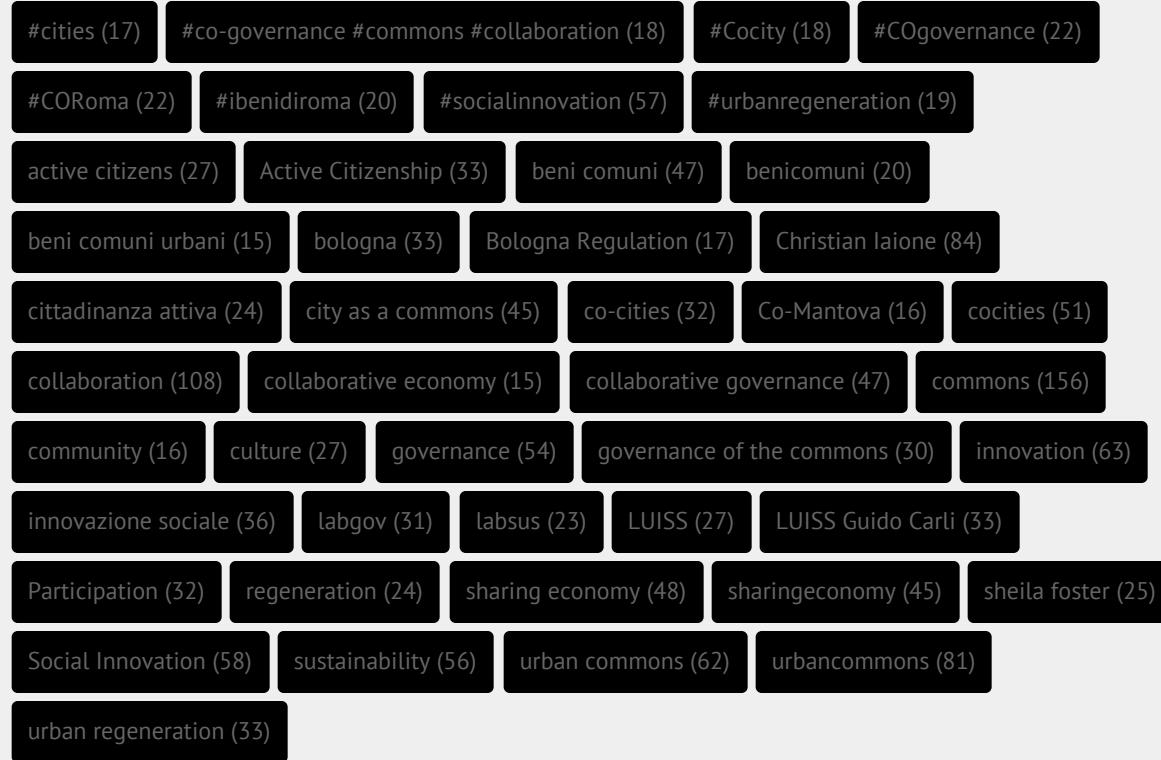
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