European development goals: sustainable cities and public regeneration perspectives

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Abstract: I c.d. "obiettivi di sviluppo sostenibile" dell'UE: città inclusive e prospettive di rigenerazione urbana – The so called "Goal 11" of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, durable, and sustainable. The Goal draws the countries' attention, among others, to the unstoppable process of urbanization that is affecting the population of the entire planet. In this regard, Public Administration is called to include among its main objectives the implementation of liveability, attractiveness, competitiveness, and sustainability of existing neighbourhoods through the choice of eco-efficient strategies, the creation of an adequate supply of public spaces, the diversification of housing types and access to better financing, legislation and knowledge. This approach undoubtedly calls for the need to connect timely interventions, local policies, and global strategies in a continuous and recursive relationship.

1. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): an introduction

The concept of sustainable development was first addressed by the United Nations at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, held between the 5th and the 16th of June 1972. This Conference represented the first attempt to create a common vision on how to meet the challenges of environmental protection, thus including mainly generic environmental objectives rather than precise regulatory positions[1]. Accordingly, in the Declaration produced on that occasion a definition of sustainable development was not provided, therefore it was not until 1987 that the term was adopted in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the "Brundtland Commission". The title chosen for the report was "Our Common Future", and the following definition of

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[1] G. Handl, *Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Declaration), 1972 and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,* United Nations, 2012.

"sustainable development" was given[2]: "*sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*".

The concept adopted is one of intergenerational development, reiterated five years later at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, held from the 3rd to the 14th of June 1992: "*Principle 3: The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations*"[3].

It is also important to mention that, during the summits held so far, in addition to the declarations, more concrete action plans were drawn up with the intention of providing the various stakeholders with precise indications on what objectives to achieve, as well as indicators to measure the progress achieved in each of them and real multilateral treaties. In Stockholm, the "Action Plan for the Human Environment" was written, at the first conference in Rio the so called "Agenda 21" was produced and the "United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change" and the "Convention on Biological Diversity" were signed.

In this regard, at European level, the sustainable development principle has been enshrined several times in a multilevel perspective by EU public authorities. Please, consider, by way of example:

(i) the "European Urban Act" dated 1992 (amended several times over the years) which expresses the key role of the urban environment in the process of changing lifestyles, production, and consumption. To provide

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[2] See also J.D. Sachs, *L'era dello sviluppo sostenibile*, Milano, 2015, 292 ff.

[3] Over time, the definition of sustainable development has been modified to give it a more practical approach: in particular, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, once again organised by the United Nations and held from 26 August to 4 September 2002, the three "pillars" that make up sustainable development were recognised and defined for the first time, previously theorised by Barbier: "*we assume a collective responsibility to advance and strengthen the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development, economic development, social development, and environmental protection at the local, national, regional, and global levels*" (see B. Barbier, *The Concept of Sustainable Economic Development*, in *Environmental Conservation*, 1987, 2, 104 ff.). According to Sachs (*Ibid.*), it is necessary to consider also a fourth dimension: that of governance. If the objective of adequate governance, both by states and by companies, is not achieved, it will not be possible to satisfy the other three dimensions components of sustainable development. Even Pagett, albeit with a more pessimistic attitude than Sachs, embraced this idea, stressing the need for cooperation between stakeholders: "*we certainly have compromised the ability of future generations to meet their own needs comprehensively. Though until global governance gets that, sustainable development is pretty much a lost cause. Of course, under basic sovereignty principles, a country's government is responsible for its own state. […] However, at least a joint responsibility should be laid at the doors of global institutions and donors from industrialised countries*" (R. Pagett, *Building Global Resilience in the Aftermath of Sustainable Development: Planet, People and Politics*, New York, 2018, 114 ff.).

standards of living applicable to the city context, the sustainable development principle was "rethought" into a more fluid concept: sustainability is understood not as a set of precise rules, but as a local creative process, in which the individuality of each context emerges. Cities recognised that the concept of sustainable development provides a guide to matching living standards to the carrying capacity of nature; they include "*social justice, sustainable economies, and environmental sustainability among their objectives*". In a nutshell, in the aforesaid Act, sustainability does not represent an immutable state or vision, but rather a local, creative, and balancing process encompassing all fields of local decision-making. It generates a continuous review in city management to identify activities that push the urban system towards balance and those that push it away from balance[4];

(ii) the Articles 16 and 31 of the "European Social Act" (1961) revised in 1996, which effectively "guarantees" citizens a right to sustainable living, by ensuring access to housing of a sufficient standard and making the cost of housing accessible to those without adequate resources[5];

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[4] The Act states that it is necessary to "*promote development towards sustainability at the local level through 21 local agenda processes, strengthening partnerships between different actors in local communities*". A long-term action plan was therefore adopted to strengthen cooperation between authorities and coordinate the process with EU actions in the field of the urban environment. The Act main activities include, by way of example, fostering mutual support between European cities in designing, developing and implementing sustainability-oriented policies; collecting information on successful examples at local level; promoting the principle of sustainability to other local authorities; providing the European Commission with suggestions concerning various policies; providing material for the reports on sustainable cities by the Urban Environment Expert Group; supporting local administrators in implementing the recommendations and standards issued in this area by the European Union. On this point, see H. Patsy, R. Williams, *European Urban Planning Systems: Diversity and Convergence*, in *Urban Studies*, 30, 4-5, 701-720 (1993); R. Lafortezza, C. Davies, G. Sanesi, C.C. Konijnendijk, *Green Infrastructure as a tool to support spatial planning in European urban regions*, in *Biogeosciences and Forestry*, 6, 3, 102-110 (2013); I. Tosics, *European urban development: Sustainability and the role of housing*, in *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 19, 67-90 (2004).
[5] Article 16, in detail, specifies that "*with a view to ensuring the necessary conditions for the full development of the family, which is a fundamental unit of society, the Parties undertake to promote the economic, legal and social protection of family life by such means as social and family benefits, fiscal arrangements, provision of family housing, benefits for the newly married and other appropriate means*". On the relationship between the two Articles, pursuant to European Committee of Social Rights decision No. 31/2005, it shall be noted that "*the fact that the right to housing is stipulated under Article 31 of the Revised Charter, does not preclude a consideration of relevant housing issues arising under Article 16 which addresses housing in the context of securing the right of families to social, legal and economic protection. In this context and with respect to families, Article 16 focuses on the right of families to an adequate supply of housing, on the need to take into account their needs in framing and implementing housing policies and ensuring that existing housing be of an adequate standard and include essential services*". On the matter, please see J.F. Akandji Kombè, *Charte sociale européenne et Convention européenne des droits de l'homme: quelles perspectives pour les 10*

(iii) Article 37 of the so called "Charter of fundamental rights of the European union" (2012/C 326/02), which expressly states that *"a high level of environmental protection and the improvement of the quality of the environment must be integrated into the policies of the Union and ensured in accordance with the principle of sustainable development"*[6].

However, the most important step as regards the origin of so called "Agenda 2030" is to be found in the "Millennium Declaration"[7]: this declaration was the final outcome of the Millennium Summit held in New York from the 6th to the 8th of September 2000, in which a list of precise development objectives, known as the "Millennium Development Goals" was drawn up for the first time[8], to be achieved ideally by the end of 2015. At this point, when this deadline expired, the MDGs were replaced by the so called "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs), listed in Agenda 2030. The SDGs were officially adopted on the 25th of September 2015 by UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1, which again mentions the need for an integrated approach between the "three" dimensions of sustainable development (i.e. economic, social, environmental) and defines the five areas of *"crucial importance for humanity and the planet"* on which they focus: people, planet, prosperity, peace and collaboration[9]. An important difference to the

prochaines années?, in O. De Schutter (ed.), *The European Social Charter: a social constitution for Europe/La Charte sociale européenne: une constitution sociale pour l'Europe*, Bruxelles, 2010, 159 ff.; F. Sudre, *La protection des droits sociaux par la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme: un exercice de «jurisprudence fiction»?*, in *Rev. trim. dr. h.*, 2003, 55, 755-779.

[6] Please see, among others, D. Simon, *Des influences réciproques entre CJCE et CEDH: «Je t'aime, moi non plus»?*, in *Pourvoi - Revue française d'études constitutionnelles et politiques*, 2001, 96, 31 ff.; S. Douglas Scott, *A tale of two courts: Luxembourg, Strasbourg and the growing European human rights*, in *Common Market Law Review*, 2006, 43, 3, 629 ff.; J.Y. Carlier, O. De Schutter, *La Charte des droits fondamentaux de l'Union européenne*, Bruxelles, 2002, 56 ff.; S. Peers, A. Ward, *The European Charter of Fundamental Rights*, Oxford, 2004; O. Pollicino, V. Sciarabba, *La Carta di Nizza oggi, tra sdoganamento giurisprudenziale e Trattato di Lisbona*, in *DPCE*, 2008, 3, 101 ff.; D. Anderson, C. Murphy, *The Charter of fundamental Rights*, in A. Biondi, P. Eeckhout, S. Ripley (eds), *Eu after Lisbon*, Oxford, 2011, 102 ff.

[7] There were eight Millennium Development Goals: (i) eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; (ii) ensuring universal primary education; (iii) promoting gender equality and empowering women; (iv) reducing child mortality; (v) improving health; (vi) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; (viii) ensure environmental sustainability; (viii) develop a global partnership for development.

[8] As said by Ban Ki-Moon, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015: Foreword*, United Nations, 2015, *"the MDGs have had a positive and encouraging response. […] Did they really make a difference? It would seem so. We have seen a marked acceleration in terms of poverty reduction, disease control, increased access to education and infrastructure in the poorest countries. The MDGs have helped to coordinate the global effort"*.

[9] Agenda 2030 has been adopted by all member countries of the United Nations, but is aimed more broadly at various stakeholder groups, in particular the so-called "Major Groups", formalised for the first time in Agenda 21: women, children and young people, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organisations, local authorities, workers and

Millennium Development Goals is to be found in the principle of universality, therefore the SDGs are applicable to all countries, not just developing countries. In addition, the SDGs are more numerous than the MDGs: not eight objectives anymore, but seventeen[10].

2. The SDG 11 "Sustainable Cities and Communities"

Goal 11 of the Agenda 2030 aims to "*make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, durable and sustainable*". The Goal draws the countries' attention to the unstoppable process of urbanization that is affecting the population of the entire planet. The UN focuses its attention on cities as the main human settlements, but also and above all as the privileged areas from which to promote social sustainability, as well as the economic and environmental aspects of the new development model (UN-Habitat, 2016). The theme is of much interest to European (the signing of the "Amsterdam Pact. A European Urban Agenda" also in 2016) and international institutions (the New Urban Agenda adopted at the UN Habitat III Conference in 2016 in Quito), as well as a subject of attention to national institutions (a national urban agenda is being drafted in Italy[11]). Numerous

trade unions, industry and enterprises, scientific and technological communities, farmers,

[10] As far as it concerns, namely: GOAL 1: No Poverty; GOAL 2: Zero Hunger; GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being; GOAL 4: Quality Education; GOAL 5: Gender Equality; GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation; GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy; GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality; GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities; GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production; GOAL 13: Climate Action; GOAL 14: Life Below Water; GOAL 15: Life on Land; GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions; GOAL 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal.

[11] In Italy, the steering committee so called "*Benessere Italia*" has been recently set up: it is a unit of the Prime Minister's Office with the aim of "*coordinating, monitoring, measuring and improving the policies of all ministries in the name of citizens' well-being*". Sustainable regeneration of territories, mobility and territorial cohesion, energy transition, quality of life and circular economy are the five macro-areas in which the programme lines of the above-mentioned committee are developed. Nevertheless, the main instrument for coordinating the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in Italy is the so called "National Sustainable Development Strategy" ("*Strategia Nazionale di Sviluppo Sostenibile*"), approved by CIPE with resolution No. 108/2017. The document at hand defines the national reference framework for "*environmental and territorial planning, programming and assessment processes to implement the sustainable development goals of the Agenda 2030*" itself. In detail, the aforesaid National Strategy is the key document for the development of a new circular, low-carbon economic model that is resilient to climate change and other global changes that lead to local crises, such as biodiversity loss, changes in key biogeochemical cycles and changes in land use. It is also based on a multidimensional approach to overcoming economic, environmental, and social inequalities and thus pursuing sustainable, balanced, and inclusive development. The Strategy is structured in five areas of intervention, corresponding to the so called "5Ps" of sustainable development (*i.e.*, People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership), each of which provides for strategic choices and strategic goals for Italy, and recall the profound interrelationship between economic dynamics, social

scholars are also finding new paradigms of reference to interpret the transformation processes underway and the strategies aimed at addressing them in a logic of sustainability[12]. Goal 11 is made up of 10 targets referring to multiple areas of intervention, measuring quality of life in cities: housing, services, neighbourhoods, and urban regeneration (11.1), transport and mobility (11.2)[13], participated and integrated planning (11.3 and 11.a), cultural heritage (11.4), air, water and soil, natural disasters and climate change (11.5, 11.6 and 11.b), urban greenery (11.7) and developing cooperation for sustainable construction (11.c).

For each target, where possible, indicators have been identified that are capable of declining these proposals on a global scale. However, it should be noted that, on the one hand, significant and adequate indicators are not always available. On the other hand, Goal 11 is complex as it includes multiple aspects regarding cities. This highlights its transversal character to the targets of other Goals[14]. Cities play a key role in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, because more than half of the global population and about one third of European population is concentrated within them. These cities are safer, more inclusive, resilient, and innovative than in the past. "Inclusiveness" refers to social and territorial cohesion, to being capable of leading a community towards a type of growth that is shared and accessible to all. The city as a social construction can be inclusive when it implements a shared global project of coexistence, in which poverty

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growth and environmental quality, aspects also known as the "three pillars" of sustainable development.

[12] G. De Luca, *Manifesto per l'urbanistica italiana. Dieci punti per l'avvio di un dibattito pubblico*, in *Urbanistica Informazioni*, 2017, 275-276, 86-88; G. Guastella, *Il valore della natura*, in *Equilibri*, 2018, 1, 91-97; W.E. Soja, *Regional urbanisation and the End of the Metropolis Era*, in G. Bridge, S. Watson (eds), *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*, Oxford, 2011, 46 ff.

[13] Mobility issues (Target 11.2.1 "*By 2030, to provide access to safe, sustainable transport systems and convenient for all, improve road safety, in particular by expanding public transport, with particular attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly*") are extremely complex because they involve, on the one hand, the dimension of demand and supply of mobility, and on the other hand, the issue of safety. On an even wider scale, it concerns the issue of sustainability, first and foremost starting with air quality. Moreover, these aspects are intertwined with the customs of the city and the territory of multiple actors (resident population, students, city users), with the economic-productive system (logistics, localization of the productive areas, new times of work) and with social issues (residential areas or peripheral cities which often welcome those with scarcer resources). See on this point S. Colenbrander, D. Archer, *Leave no one behind. What is the role of community-led urban development?*, London, 2016.

[14] Such as: Goal 1 on poverty (Targets 11.1, 11.5 and 11.b with reference to the issues of inclusiveness and poverty, and vulnerability), Goal 3 on health (Target 11.6 with reference to air quality), Goal 9 on infrastructure (Target 11.2 regarding safe transport), Goal 13 on climate and Goal 15 on ecosystems (Goal 11.3 referred to urbanization processes, 11.4 natural heritage, Target 11.5 and 11.b with regard to disasters, and adaptation to climate change) and lastly Goal 17 on partnerships.

and inequality, social exclusion and spatial segregation are fought, and in which training, and skills acquisition are supported[15]. In this regard, it is necessary to specify that what we today call "resilience" embodies a new, more pragmatic meaning of the consolidated concept of sustainability and can be defined as the ability of a city to react to external events, adapting and evolving towards new states, different from the initial one. The urban environment encompasses a wide range of elements, from those related to the built physical capital and its economic, natural, social, and cultural value, to those related to the times, actors, and institutional structures. It is an overly complex system, continuously exposed to potential crises. Its evolution needs an approach combining sustainability objectives and adaptation to any type of change. "Resilience" recalls the fragility and vulnerability of cities, but it also contains the indication of a reaction, summing up *"effectively the innovative[16] theoretical and methodological assumptions indispensable in the current context for new actions necessary for development"*[17]. In this regard, Europe currently faces unprecedented

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[15] As said in doctrine (Sachs, *Ibid.*) *"this project reflects the existence of a an open, dynamic and truly democratic society that aims to promote urban development in solidarity with the active involvement of people in decision-making processes (European Union 2010). These results on the economic and social level refer to the design of an urban space without physical and cultural barriers, equipped with places for meeting and confrontation, both in the established parts of the city and in the outskirts of the city that he more they need such attention"*. In a nutshell, a city must be based on a peaceful, just, and inclusive society, capable of guaranteeing fair access to justice, in which human rights (including development rights) are respected, in which there is a rule of law and good governance for all levels through responsible, effective and transparent institutions. Projects promoted by local communities must aim to eliminate violence, insecurity (including environmental insecurity) and injustice, defeat corruption and inequality, and limit inefficient governments, and stop illicit flows of arms and money (United Nations 2018). On this point see P. Catney, D.N. Lerner, *Managing Multidisciplinarity: Lessons*, in *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, 34 (4), 290-308, 2009; J. Diamond, *Management of Regeneration*, London, 2005, 56 ff.; D. Donnison, *Agenda for the Future*, in C. McConnell (ed.), *Tricke Down or Bubble Up?*, London, 1993; F. Fukuyama, *Social Capital, Civil Society and Development*, in *Third World Quarterly*, 22, 1, 7-20, 2001.

[16] Innovation concerns the ability to promote, manage and encourage the circulation of knowledge and skills within the urban context, not only with reference to strictly economic and entrepreneurial aspects, but also to social aspects. In this sense, innovation represents a set of new ways to meet social needs that have remained unmet, or to which inadequate and insufficient responses are given, and it can be linked to sustainable management of resources, to induction of changes in the behaviour of individuals towards greater responsibility and the mechanisms for activating society, within a general framework of promoting smart, sustainable, and inclusive development. Innovation therefore means *"new ways of living in today's world, new ways to serve the users of any service, new systems to offer value to potential recipients, new ways of working, new models to build alliances and create resources and skills"* (S. De Falco, *Le città nella geografia dell'innovazione globale*, Milano, 2017).

[17] M. Savino, *Urbanistica Informazioni*, in F.D. Moccia (ed.), *Crisi e rinascita delle città*, Napoli, 2018, 234 ff. As said by many scholars, resilience is the ability of a system to respond adaptively to stressors or to more or less traumatic external changes; it is a concept applied in recent decades to an ever-increasing number of knowledge sectors,

environmental, climate and sustainability challenges. These include biodiversity loss, climate change, resource use and pollution. As a response to these, the European Commission recently published a proposal for the so-called "8th Environment Action Programme" (EAP) on 14 October 2020. In detail, the proposal supports the environment and climate action objectives of the European Green Deal. The EAP proposal calls for active engagement of all stakeholders at all levels of governance, to ensure that EU climate and environment laws are effectively implemented. It forms, in a nutshell, the EU's basis for achieving the United Nation's Agenda 2030 and its SDGs, since it aims to accelerate the transition to a climate-neutral, resource-efficient and regenerative economy, which gives back to the planet more than it takes, recognising that human wellbeing and prosperity depend on the healthy ecosystems within which we operate[18]. To achieve these goals, from an urban sustainability point of view, the European Environment Agency (EEA)[19] could also plays a key role, assessing the urban

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to the point of being considered as "fluid and borderline" (G. Mazzeo, *Resilienza, circolarità, sostenibilità*, in F.D. Moccia (ed.), *Crisi e rinascita delle città*, Napoli, 2018, 145 ff.). In general, on the development of the local entities dimension among national and european levels, please see V. Parisio, *Europa delle autonomie locali e principio di sussidiarietà: la Carta Europea delle autonomie locali*, in *Foro amm.*, 1995, 9, 2124-2135.

[18] Building on the European Green Deal, EAP has the following six priority objectives: (i) achieving the 2030 greenhouse gas emission reduction target and climate neutrality by 2050; (ii) enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change; (iii) advancing towards a regenerative growth model, decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation, and accelerating the transition to a circular economy; (iv) pursuing a zero-pollution ambition, including for air, water and soil and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans; (v) protecting, preserving and restoring biodiversity, and enhancing natural capital (notably air, water, soil, and forest, freshwater, wetland and marine ecosystems); (vi) reducing environmental and climate pressures related to production and consumption (particularly in the areas of energy, industrial development, buildings and infrastructure, mobility and the food system). As stated in the EU communication COM(2020) 652 final, *"the objectives of this proposal for a Decision cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States alone. Since environment and climate policy is an area of shared competence in the EU and a decentralised policy, one of the purposes of this Programme is to create common ownership of all three EU institutions and the Member States of its objectives, providing policy makers and other stakeholders - including regions and cities, businesses, social partners, civil society organisations and individual citizens - with a predictable framework and direction for action"*.

[19] Established in 1990, the EEA is an EU agency tasked with providing sound, independent information on the environment. It operates as a major information source for those involved in developing, adopting, implementing, and evaluating environmental policy, and the general public. The EEA aims to support sustainable development by helping to achieve significant and measurable improvement in Europe's environment, through the provision of timely, targeted, relevant and reliable information to policymaking agents and the public. In detail, EEA's mandate is to (i) help the EU and its member countries make informed decisions about improving the environment, integrating environmental considerations into economic policies, and moving towards sustainability; (ii) develop and coordinate the so called "Eionet", the network of national environmental bodies set up to help the agency.

environment in Europe[20], the trends in land take and consumption and environmental quality as well as urban sustainability issues and urban sprawl in Europe. Although the EEA's current main line of action is data gathering/collecting, it should nevertheless completely fulfil the primary function for which it was set up, i.e. "*assessing the correct implementation of general measures adopted at European level*", including in the field of urban sustainability. In this regard, synchronism, and coordination between the EEA – as a technical and advisory entity – and the other legislative and executive bodies of the European Union is undoubtedly indispensable, also in order to draw up legislative projects aimed at improving, refining and perhaps solving sustainability problems.

3. Brief prospect of a sustainable "public regeneration"

In order to promote an inclusive and sustainable urbanisation, to plan an increasingly complex urban settlement and manage it in a participatory and integrated way, it is necessary to refer to tools capable of guiding those transformations and making a city regain its own identity, through regenerative processes of "self-reconstruction"[21]. Urban regeneration represents an interesting theme of study within which there are very different design experiences, following top-down or bottom-up logics, envisaging social activation and the re-appropriation of public spaces or identity goods, and aiming at the revitalization of historic centres or suburban neighbourhoods. For the full implementation of Goal 11, therefore, the Public Administration is called to include among its main objectives the implementation of liveability, attractiveness, competitiveness and sustainability of existing neighbourhoods through the choice of eco-efficient strategies (reuse of free or unused areas, increase in green areas, waste management), the creation of an adequate supply of public spaces, the diversification of housing types and access to better financing, legislation

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[20] Priority 8 of the 7th EAP underpins the need for 'criteria to assess the environmental performance of cities, considering economic, social and territorial impacts'. Some initiatives are either under way or have already been developed to help local authorities to define sustainability criteria and to facilitate comparison between cities with similar characteristics. At the same time, cities are heterogeneous (*e.g.* in terms of climate, heritage, morphology, demography, geographical situation, trajectory, activities, local culture). The complexity of the urban system makes comparisons difficult but not impossible if they are done within a group of similar cities. In this way, the EEA has developed a typology of EU 28 cities (based on 383 cities) to analyse groups of cities with similar characteristics rather than an individual city.

[21] The first theoretical elaborations on urban regeneration are from the beginning of the 1990s, with the definitions provided by Lichfield (1992, 1996), Donnison (1993), Hausner (1993), Paddison (1993), Roberts and Sykes (2000) referring to social and economic mechanisms aimed at revitalizing urban areas by starting some sustainable processes in a long-term perspective. These are processes that go beyond recovery and physical requalification, managing urban transformations and modifying the DNA of individual cities.

and knowledge[22]. The studies on urban regeneration, in line with the objectives of Goal 11, show increasing attention from Public Administrations to a more holistic approach, including physical, social, economic and cultural aspects both from a theoretical and operational point of view. In this multidimensional and long-term perspective, urban regeneration is based on the concept of sustainability, on a strategic vision and on building partnerships between public and private entities[23]. The efficiency of such partnerships depends both on the capacity of public actors to manage different premises of knowledge and professionalism (related to the multidisciplinary backgrounds of the decision-makers), and to be a point of reference to local communities. In light of the above, from a public point of view, the realization of SDG 11 of the Agenda 2030 – at the level of sustainable cities – goes through the recovery and the valorisation of physical spaces and the creation of material and digital connections[24], together with the development of interactions between communities and contexts and the management of the intangible cultural heritage, placing local peculiarities at the centre of this strategy[25].

4. Conclusion: "regeneration" and current scenarios

The future of cities, using urban regeneration, goes through a substantial paradigm shift in their way of thinking and planning. A regenerated city can be thought of not only as a place of spatial quality, but also as an area within which there is a different relationship between the resources to be preserved (and recycled) and the behaviour of those who live and produce there. This approach calls for the need to connect timely interventions, local policies, and global strategies in a continuous and recursive relationship. The way forward could be to promote inclusive urban policies, through the adoption of strategies capable of managing the physical extension of the city and

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[22] On this point, H. Haarstad, *Constructing the sustainable city: examining the role of sustainability in the 'smart city' discourse*, in *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 19 (4), 2016, 1-15; J. Hartley, *Innovation in governance and public services: Past and present*, in *Public Money&Management*, 25, 1, 2005, 27-34.

[23] See M. Raco, *Sustainable Development, Rolled-out Neoliberalism and Sustainable Communities*, in *Antipode*, 2005, 37, 2, 324-347; A. Luque-Ayala, *Developing a critical understanding of smart urbanism?*, in *Urban Studies*, 52, 12, 2105-2116 (2015).

[24] For an in-depth analysis, R. Kitchin, *The real-time city? Big data and smart urbanism*, in *GeoJournal*, 79, 1, 2014, 1-14; R. Krueger, D. Gibbs, *The sustainable development paradox: Urban political economy in the United States and Europe*, New York, 2007, 25 ff.

[25] Within these new integrated scenarios of development and transformation *"the key words are multidisciplinary, intersectionality and temporality of the interventions"*. Actions must be planned by public administrations in a strategic, tactical, and operational way to favour the transition of the city towards new organisational structures (G.C. Wedding, *Measuring Site-level Success in Brownfield Redevelopments: a Focus on Sustainability and Green Building*, in *Journal of Environmental Management*, 2007, 85 (2), 483-495).

ensuring a commitment to urban regeneration. To be effective, the latter must be integrated with a sustainable growth model and refer to the traditional "European city paradigm", which in its multiplicity is recognizable in the search for complexity, compactness, functional diversity, plurality and social integration. It would be appropriate, then, to question how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the concept of urban regeneration. And in fact, if on the one hand the limitation of mobility and therefore of the circulation of vehicles, as well as the closing of companies, is immediately positive for the urban environment[26], the same cannot be said about other items of the Goal 11. For example, Goal 11.1 – *"by 2030, guarantee access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services for all and ensure the modernisation of deprived neighbourhoods"* – would be most affected. The same can be said for Goal 11.5 (*"by 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected by disasters, including water-related disasters, and substantially reduce direct economic losses in relation to global Gross Domestic Product, with a particular focus on the protection of the poor and people in vulnerable situations"*), sub-Goals 11 which are more closely linked to the management of poor neighbourhoods and the protection of this section of the population from an economic and social point of view. In any case, the Goal 11 targets provide a partial view of the Covid-19 problem in relation to urban regeneration. At this case would even emerge as an improved area thanks to the pandemic (see Goal 11.6. linked to the decline in CO2 emissions)[27]. This result, clearly, should not be interpreted in exclusively positive way, as this is neither a structural nor a permanent decline. In fact, it is highly likely that in the medium to long term there will be a recovery in emissions, in any form and free of any cost, probably in line with what happened after the financial crisis of 2008-2009[28]. Further evidence supporting this anticipation is the recent statement by the Environmental Protection Agency that in the United States cited the pandemic as justification for suspending most of the existing pollution regulations[29]. In light of the above, the goal of urban regeneration is fundamental to achieve greater balance and integration between all dimensions of sustainability, and thus contribute to greater economic competitiveness, eco-efficiency, social

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[26] Think about Goal 11.6, *"by 2030, reduce the negative environmental impact per capita of cities, particularly with regard to air quality"*. On the other hand, no impacts are substantial in terms of transport, management and planning of urban settlements, access to public green spaces or the preservation of cultural and natural heritage.

[27] See also N.A. Megahed, *Antivirus-built environment: Lessons learned from Covid-19 pandemic*, in *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 61, 2020, 230 ff.; C. Webster, *The nature of cities and the Covid-19 pandemic*, in *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 2020, 24, 134 ff.; C. Kuzemko, M. Bradshaw, J. Jewell, I. Overland, *Covid-19 and the politics of sustainable energy transitions*, in *Energy Research & Social Science*, 68, 2020, 456 ff.

[28] See also F. Caprotti, *Eco-cities and the transition to low carbon economies*, Berlin, 2016, 57 ff.; J. Evans, A. Karvonen, *The experimental city*, London, 2016.

[29] L. Friedman, *Citing Coronavirus, Drastically Relaxes Rules for Polluters*, New York, 2020.

cohesion, and civic progress beyond any kind of issue. In other words, it is about building an Urban Agenda that considers policies as the "place to experience" the exceedingly difficult balance between development and cohesion objectives, between social innovation and inclusion. Starting from this premise, the themes of resilience and regeneration can be interpreted not as new words, linked to passing fads, but as principles for action, as pillars supporting policies and interventions capable of consolidating innovative dynamics, reducing inequalities and promoting the enhancement of diversity.

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