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EVALUATION AND EVALUATING THE COMMUNITY INITIATIVE “URBAN”

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is divided in four parts.

The first part emphasizes the importance of “evaluation” on building social and institutional “learning”. It is argued that evaluation should go beyond the monitoring role, which is mainly related to how effectively and efficiently the resources are used, focusing on the production of relevant immaterial resources, like knowledge and social learning.

The second part emphasizes “diversity” of experiences and cultures on evaluation processes across the EU member states, identifying a “common” guidance from European Union to the national and regional authorities on Community Initiatives, such as the Initiative URBAN. The main features and challenges of this initiative are also considered.

The third section identifies the main factors that contributed to the creation of a spiral of urban and social decline in a suburban neighbourhood of the city of Porto (S. João de Deus – SJD), as well as the reasons why this neighbourhood was chosen as a priority area of intervention in the Initiative "URBAN II of Porto / Gondomar”.

The fourth and last part outlines the evaluation model developed by Alves (2011) and the results obtained by this academic research, focused on the SJD area. The comparative analysis between the results achieved on this research and those presented by the EU Ex Post evaluation lead us to conclude that some weak points of the initiative were omitted, which does not help the important goal of learning with this type of experimental initiatives and in the urban regeneration field.

2. EVALUATION AND LEARNING

The relevance of the relationship between evaluation and learning is widely acknowledged, as well as the importance of this learning process to support policy decision making. There are indeed a consensus regarding the relevance of these immaterial assets to inform policies, bringing information about what works better, why, for whom and in what circumstances.

The production of new ideas and perspectives is particularly valuable in the case of policies that deal with complex and multidimensional problems, such as those who involve the urban deprived areas. The vast number of stakeholders, who can affect or be affected by the intervention, and the high level of uncertainty and the dilemmas related to what should and can be done in areas that face complex processes of economic, social and physical decline, emphasize the importance of learning with those who have stakes there (residents, public workers, investors, etc.).

This type of policies embedded in complex and multidimensional issues request models of evaluation less dominated by quantitative approaches (since they tend to ignore what is not mathematical measured and tend to overestimate what can be quantifiably measured) and more sensitive to the variety of interest and expectations that exist in society (Alves, 2008; Healey, 1997).

“The ‘original sin’ of mainstream evaluation (that with a positivist imprint) lies in choosing to play a low-key role. Neither wanting to enter into the ‘value’ problem (thanks to a value-free stance), not wanting to discuss the theoretical implications of programmes, evaluators have concentrated their efforts on developing a methodology for verifying the internal validity (causality) and external validity (generalization) of programmes. No wonder so much energy has been spent not only in developing evaluate methods in general (the pride of the profession), but methods suited to test programmes frames in that way” (Stame, 2004: 59).

The pluralistic approaches of evaluation challenge the “scientific” models of evaluation, showing that they have not been occurred in an ideology-free social vacuum but in contexts where political, economic and social pressures affect the results of evaluation. The recognition that there is circuits of power within and between organizations and the influence of values and ideologies in all the process have implied a paradigmatic shift in the theory and practice of evaluation, towards more constructivist models (Guerra, 2002).

These models, inspired by a constructivist thinking which believes that knowledge is a human construct produced by social interaction and experience, support approaches and methodologies of evaluation more reflective and democratic. Approaches that should be developed with those who affect and were affected by the interventions.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF EVALUATION IN EU AND OF THE URBAN INITIATIVE

The structural and management considerations as well as the expenditure pressures in Europe over the last decades have promoted the rapid growth of evaluations carried out at an international, national and local level. "Citizens expect to know what has been achieved with public money and want to be sure that we run the best policy. Monitoring and evaluation have a role to play to meet such expectations" (European Commission, 2012a). It has also been recognized that there are different traditions and cultures of evaluation between Member States (European Commission, 1999) although there is a common guidance from the European Union to the national and regional authorities for the evaluation of programmes and initiatives funded by the EU.

On this matter, Ferrão and Mourato (2010) have emphasized the recent tradition of evaluation in Portugal, of only two decades, and how it has established and grown as a response to European Union demands and regulations. Such delay, in Portugal as well as in other southern countries and new EU member states from central and Eastern Europe, can be explained by the permanence of dictatorial rulers and of non-transparent hierarchical and bureaucratic structures.

It is worth to emphasize the significant influence of the European Commission with its publication of detailed methodological guidance for the evaluation of all EU funded programmes. Specially of the MEANS programme (Means for Evaluating Actions of a Structural Nature) which started in 1995 and culminated in 1999 with a six volume publication where were presented the main guidelines, standards and recommendations for the assessment of socio-economic development programs involving Community funding (European Commission, 1999). In 2004, MEANS was transformed and developed into a website – Evalsed (European Commission, 2012a).

A recently published report of the European Commission (2012b) that presented a new evaluation model that will replace the model MEANS, recognizes several inaccuracies in MEANS model arising from the difficulty of distinguishing between "results" and "impacts" or between a short-term direct effect (result) and a longer-term, indirect effect (impact) (European Commission, 2012b).

Other main criticism is the excessive simplicity of this model to deal with the complexity that involves the intervention, with multi-levels of governance and several stakeholders with different interests and visions. On this matter, Murtagh and McKay (2003) criticized the model for being predominantly instrumental and technocratic, revealing weak interpretative capabilities of issues such as "the actors who are and are not represented", the "internal democracy of the system" or the "social justice and equity contained in the decisions and actions".

The Community Initiative URBAN was an initiative launched by the European Commission and implemented by the cities to tackle the serious and multidimensional problems of economic, territorial and social exclusion (associated with poor environmental conditions, long term unemployment, poverty, discrimination).

Even the EU has no official competency in the area of Urban Policy, this initiative, like others before, had an important impact on cities. The initiative followed the principle of subsidiarity, in the sense that the goals and objectives were defined by the European Commission while the strategies and means were defined at local levels. Each selected city taking part in the URBAN Initiative was implementing its own programme.

The “Urban Pilot Programme” was launched with the aim of experimenting and setting the agenda of the URBAN initiative (Alves, 2011), that was after funded in two phases: 1994-99 and 2000-2007. The main features of the initiative were: an integrated approach to issues that are often treated in isolation, strengthening competitiveness, combating social exclusion and environmental regeneration, to help the integration of immigrant communities, to promote equal opportunities and to manage the initiatives locally, close to the people and their problems (European Commission, 2003).

The actions were co-financed by two of the European Community’s Structural Funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF). In terms of evaluation, EU left the responsibility for evaluation of the first two stages (ex-ante and on-going) to the regional and local authorities but commissioned the final stage of the ex-post evaluation in collaboration with Member States.

Some academic research has been carried out concerning the effects of the URBAN initiative on governance to conflict resolution and participatory practices in local development (Murtagh e Sterrett, 2006, in Derry/Londonderry, North Ireland); on innovative practices in area based urban regeneration (Barbanente e Tedesco, 2002, in Bari, Italy); and on the creation of strategic and more integrated area based regeneration in what is concerned with stakeholders and dimensions of intervention (Blanco, 2005, Barcelona, Spain).

4. S. JOÃO DE DEUS (SJD) IN THE CONTEXT OF “URBAN II” OF PORTO/GONDOMAR

This section is divided in two complementary parts. In the first part, the main phases of construction and occupation of the S. João de Deus (SJD) neighbourhood are analysed, as well as the factors that contributed to the creation of a spiral of urban and social decline in the area. In the second part, the main characteristics of the Community Initiative "URBAN II" of Porto / Gondomar are scrutinised, as well as the strategies targeted to the SJD neighbourhood, that was defined as a priority area of intervention of the initiative in Porto area.

4.1 - The SJD neighbourhood

The SJD's history is a story about social housing estate that “was born poor” in terms of urban planning, social occupation, and location. The neighbourhood was constructed in a peripheral area, where there was still a very incipient urbanization process and therefore very low or non-existent economic and social opportunities (such as jobs, social and private services, etc.). It was constructed to rehouse a population that was living in different parts of the city but had in common the bad housing conditions and the low-incomes. The neighbourhood is therefore inseparable of the politics of inner-city slum clearance that were implemented in the city of Porto between 1956 and 1966 (Alves, 2011).

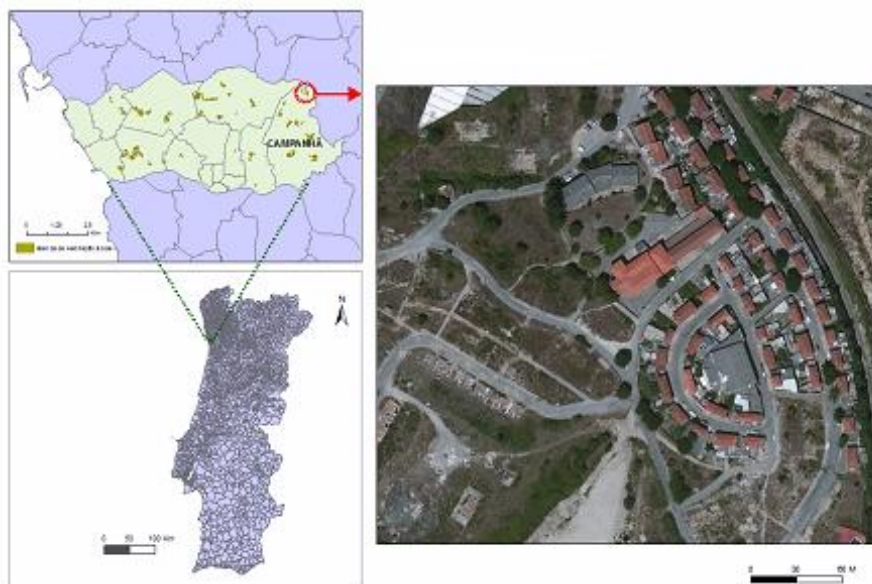


Fig. 1 – The SJD neighbourhood

The history of the neighbourhood started in 1944 with the construction of small detached dwellings (Fig. 2) and continued in the 50's and 60's with the construction of multi-storey buildings (Fig. 3) (Fig. 4). In the 80's the neighbourhood consisted of about 448 dwellings that housed a population of about 400 families and 1600 inhabitants.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

The shortage of housing and the rapid increase of families seeking for housing in the city of Porto, as a consequence of the independence of ex colonies and the return of thousands of families who were previously living in Africa to Portugal, as well the rural exodus after the implementation of democracy in Portugal in mid70's, led to the construction of shanties around the housing blocks in the neighbourhood (Fig. 5).

The construction of the shantytown around the social housing blocks increased the concentration of poor people and illegal activities as well as the sense of insecurity in the neighbourhood. The lack of social control within the neighbourhood created a spiral of decline and the influx of new population and criminal activities which became by itself a source of further physical and social decline of the area.

In the mid-90s, as part of a national initiative to combat poverty, the shanties were destroyed and new multi-storey buildings were constructed (in total 270 dwellings) (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

The construction of new housing brought improvements to the physical and environment conditions of the neighbourhood and to the housing conditions of the population (that

before was living in the shanties) but did not bring improvements in the neighbourhood management. Quite the contrary: After the end of the project that led to the construction of the new housing blocks, no one (public authority) was responsible for managing the neighbourhood. Consequently, the tenants did not pay rent and they began to exchange and sell houses illegally.

The loss of control over what was happening in the neighbourhood led to intensification of its problems and of its downward spiral.

In 2000, the neighbourhood was inhabited by about 2600 people, occupying about 706 dwellings (28 multifamily housing units and 144 single-family houses) and was already known as the major focus of drug trafficking and consumption in the Metropolitan Area Porto. Its inhabitants were facing a broad range of economic and social challenges, as well as a rundown physical environment.

4.2 – The SJD neighbourhood in the URBAN II Porto Gondomar initiative

The context of high concentration of problems and needs justified the priority given by the local authority of Porto to the SJD neighbourhood. The area of intervention of URBAN II, which is marked in Fig. 7, comprehended a territory of 5,7 km² and of 27,365 inhabitants. A territory with high levels of social, economic and physical deprivation that belongs to two contiguous municipalities of the metropolitan area of Porto: Porto and Gondomar.



Fig. 7

The program of intervention was structured in three strategic axes: Regenerating the urban character of the area, Social Inclusion and Economic and Professional Qualification and Promoting social, cultural and sporting activities (Deloitte, 2003). From 2001 to 2006 the Programme's total cost amounted to € 15,2 million euros, of which € 10,1 million came from ERDF - (CCDRN, 2007), and € 4 million from the local administration. The participation of the private sector was not expected and didn't occur in the program (Deloitte, 2003: 24).

The ex-ante evaluation, took place before the adoption of the programme, to provide a prior judgment on whether the strategy and proposed objectives were relevant and whether there was incoherence in relation to community practices and guidelines (European Commission, 1999). In this evaluation phase, which was carried by a department of the national government (Direcção Geral do Desenvolvimento Regional - DGDR) in collaboration with an external private firm of consultants (CEDRU), the SJD neighbourhood was selected as a priority area of intervention. Several reasons justified this decision: the youth of the population (47% of the total was less than 24 years old), its ethnic diversity: 34% were Roma (Gypsy) population and 7% had African roots; the highest unemployment rate (equivalent of 35.3% of the active population) and a stronger dependency on social benefits provided by the state (like on the minimum income). This higher prevalence of drug traffic and drug use in the SJD neighbourhood was emphasized by this report (DGDR, 2001).



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

In a very early stage of the programme implementation, it was carried out the Mid-term evaluation by an external consultant that among other things should analyse the first outputs and results of interventions. In what is related to the SJD, the evaluation report (Deloitte, 2003) gave emphasis to the positive effect that the demolition of “some” blocks in the neighbourhood could have in diminishing the concentration of poor households and allowing the construction of a road to connect and open the area.

Nevertheless, the report did not explain how they intended to rehouse the (poor) population neither the estimated effects caused by the displacement into other areas and communities. Decisions on how to rehouse, where to rehouse, whether to rehouse whole communities or to scatter individual households over all estates, were not answered anywhere. There was not any plan, neither mediator to enable the inclusion into the new neighbourhoods.

However, the report recommended a better articulation between the Programme manager and the management, monitoring and controlling structures and a previous hearing of an enlarged number of social partners during the programme's financial re-orientation (Deloitte, 2003).

4.2.1 – The SJD in the municipal agenda.

The strategy for neighbourhood improvement was defined by the local municipal executive, without public participation. The Councillors of Social Services and of Urban Planning requested the department of projects of the municipality, to produce a draft project based on the following strategic lines: i) the reduction of the population of the neighbourhood through a large-scale demolition of housing stock to clear the site for future developments; ii) the construction of a road that should cross and open the area; iii) the construction of 124 semi-detached dwellings to rehouse part of population (it was not defined which groups); iv) the requalification of the semi-detached dwellings constructed in the 40's; v) the transformation of the local school into a private university, and the closure of all the local services of the neighbourhood.

At the end of 2002, the project was presented to the inhabitants and to the media. Several aspects associated with the project were criticized: the lack of public participation by community members and local representatives, the idea of demolishing housing units that were constructed recently (a decade before) and the ambiguity associated with the rehousing of more than two thousand of residents, to be accomplished over the next years.

The municipality argued that the existence of poor housing and poor urban design was contributing to the physical isolation of the neighbourhood and for the maintenance of a antisocial behaviour (crime, vandalism, drugs ...) and therefore the demolition would be more cost effective than the renovating and maintenance of the neighbourhood.

In 2003 began the demolition of the blocks of multi-family housing. By the end of 2005 the demolition of nearly the entire neighbourhood was concluded. In total 28 blocks of multi-family housing total of 562 housing units were demolished (Figure 10), in the neighbourhood remained only 144 single-family houses built in the middle of the last century, and currently inhabited by a predominantly older population.



Fig 10



Fig. 11

The demolition process involved a high level of contestation and a strong police intervention (Fig. 11). The demolitions lead to the transfer of 430 households to other housing estates and to 132 housing evictions. According to the local authorities, the housing evictions occurred in situations when the housing unit was being used for illicit purposes, such as second homes or illegal occupation of the household (e.g. due to trade or illegal sale of houses).

The resettlement process did not involve collaborative and monitoring methodologies, and occurred through the school year. It is important to mention that many families were rehoused in many large housing estates, some of them already considered problematic and segregated due to a high concentration of problems of crime and antisocial behaviour. For example the Cerco neighbourhood, that was targeted by the initiative URBAN I and concentrated already 3,100 inhabitants, received 69 more families (CMP, 2001). This neighbourhood, that at the time began to show a positive trajectory, in terms of community identity, social cohesion, etc. (Alves, 2008), faced an increase of problems as a consequence of this mass relocation.

The residents, who remained in the neighbourhood, considered that the neighbourhood improved in terms of calm and quietness, but became an empty place. The old houses were not qualified as promised, and they were progressively sealed, as soon as their occupants die or were transferred to other areas. The figures 12 and 13 were taken in January of 2013.



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

The table 1 shows the achievements in the SJD according to the three mains strategic axes defined for the initiative URBAN II in Porto-Gondomar. As it can be seen by this analyses, even the SJD neighbourhood was defined as a priority area of intervention in this initiative, its effects on their inhabitants and area were quite low.

Table 1 - The realisations in the SJD

The Strategic axes of the initiative URBAN II Porto-Gondomar	SJD Neighbourhood
<p>Priority 1 - Regenerating the urban character of the area.</p> <p>Revitalise the urban environment and add value to the public space to enable urban spaces to become areas where social and intergenerational relationships are possible</p>	<p>No Demolition and “cleaning”</p>
<p>Priority 2 – Social Inclusion and economic and professional qualification</p> <p>Pre-training, vocational training and promotion of self-employment: improving the skills and qualifications of the local population, enabling them to enter into the labour market</p> <p>Valorisation of local economic activities and promotion of entrepreneurship.</p> <p>Combat drug traffic and drug addiction: promoting prevention and information measures by fostering the existing health and social services to host and treat drug addicts</p>	<p>Only information about employment opportunities/ training</p> <p>No</p> <p>No Displacement to other areas</p>
<p>Priority 3 – Promoting social, cultural and sporting activities</p> <p>Education.</p> <p>Promotion of socio-cultural life and sport.</p> <p>Active citizenship and participation: Revitalise the social environment, by strengthening local communities to integrate more vulnerable people (immigrants, ethnic minorities, etc)</p>	<p>Yes Supporting Projects in the schools and institutions (seniors)</p> <p>No</p>

5. EVALUATIONS AND RESULTS

In this section it is presented the evaluation model developed by Alves (2011) and the results obtained by this academic research that focused on the SJD area. The results of the research are compared with the findings presented by an Ex Post evaluation undertaken at the EU level in which the initiative was considered “a real achievement” (European Commission, 2010b)

5.1 – The Alves evaluation model: concepts, methodology and results

The evaluation framework was structured around several concepts and dimensions (Fig. 14) that were subsequently translated into research questions. The concepts and

dimensions of evaluation were structured in two different survey guidance's: one created to officials who were engaged directly in policy making or implementation (these included local government staff, members of specific project teams and members of local associations), and the other one intended to people who were directly affected by the interventions. The selection of the interviewed population followed the diversification criteria in order to ensure diversity of profiles and thereby the identification of different positions of the population towards the initiative. It was interviewed households from those that continued to live in the neighbourhood after the intervention but also from those who were displaced and rehoused in other housing estates. The data was collected from different documentary sources (reports, specific legislation, studies), and from semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The sense in which the concepts were used in this evaluation model was explained in detail in Alves (2011). Within this paper it is particularly important to note that these are interlinked and mutually reinforcing concepts.

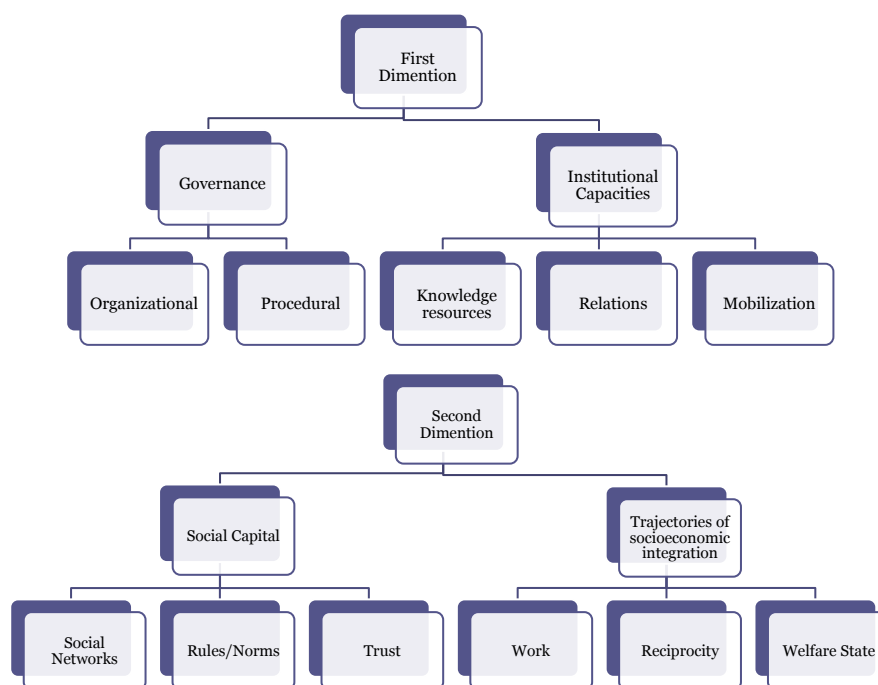


Fig. 14

Some key ideas were essential for the structuring of this evaluation model, such as:

- Capabilities of individuals and institutions can be transformed, in a positive or negative way. When they are successfully transformed they create trust, and foster good relationships between users, service providers, public authorities and other stakeholders.

They also can promote individual trajectories of social inclusion, towards work, reciprocity, social protection of the state (Kesteloot, 2002);

- Social capital is related to the set and quality of relationships that connect people and institutions in a particular territory. From this perspective depends on where people live, with whom they live and how they live (Meegan and Mitchell, 2001).
- The availability of knowledge and relational resources are necessary dimensions of urban regeneration initiatives, which have the potential to build sustainable institutional capacity for pro-active place-making, but they need to be deliberately mobilized to release their potential (Magalhães et al., 2002)

The core of the survey involved many descriptive, normative and causal questions about what happened, the relations of cause/effect between methodologies and the impacts on individuals and neighbourhoods; about the correspondence between results and needs, and the level of satisfaction of individuals and institutions towards institutions and partnership working.

Regarding the results achieved by this research, it is particularly important to emphasize the following findings:

Although there may be different ways of understanding and interpreting the process of implementation, there was a consensus among the interviewees about the discrepancies between the aims or the purposes of the initiative and the achieved results. The representatives of the local organizations (schools, community, social workers,...) considered that the way the neighbourhood was demolished and families relocated disrupted pre-existent social relations and created new problems (such as the isolation of the elderly, and an increase in the school dropout, namely among the gypsy community).

The implementation procedures were not consistent with the principles of democratic involvement, empowerment, participation and collaboration of the urban program. For example the local actors were not involved in decision making process, but instead were informed by the mass media about the municipal decisions. The political devaluation of the principles, values and goals of the EU initiative led to the creation of an administrative structure that was strictly hierarchical and unresponsive to the expectations and needs of the beneficiaries and of the local actors.

5.2 – The Ex-post evaluation of Urban II

The Ex post evaluation should recapitulate and judge the entire programme, particularly its impacts. Its aim is to account for the use of resources and to report on the effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions and the extent to which expected effects were achieved. It should focus on factors of success or failure, and on the sustainability of results and impacts (Commission European, 1999).

In the case of URBAN II Porto Gondomar, the Ex post evaluation was performed several years after the end of the programming period, and the report was published in 2010. The evaluation was carried out by independent evaluators (ECOTEC) in collaboration with the Coordination Commission of the North (which was the Programme Manager). With the title, "URBAN II Evaluation, Porto Gondomar Case Study: An isolated success story?" this report highlights the achievements of the initiative in both municipalities of Porto and Gondomar.

Regarding the results obtained by this report, it is particularly important to highlight the following:

1 - The SJD which had been described as a priority area of intervention is not referenced in this ex-post evaluation report. No reference is made to the neighbourhood.

2 - The investigation of Alves (2011) revealed the existence of processes of decision-making and implementation marked by the prevalence of sector and top-down approaches, and by weak forms of institutional collaboration between the municipality and local associations. The conflict associated with the whole process was, moreover, widely reported in the local media. On the contrary, the assessment developed by an international team, presented a totally different reality:

"URBAN II is the only urban regeneration initiative in the area that is based on broader consensus, empowerment and integrative participation model (...)

The integrated approach adopted in the URBAN II programme Porto – Gondomar can be considered a real achievement. It has brought together key stakeholders to work in employment, social inclusion and physical and environmental regeneration in the area. The programme involved a rather balanced and coherent set of physical and urban regeneration, social integration and educational measures based on local partnership proposals..." (European Commission, 2010b)

Changes in strategy have never been explained in this report neither the impacts of demolition and displacement of population to other areas.

6 – FINAL REMARKS

"Implementation tends to be seen as a means to an end; the main test of whether implementation is successful is whether it produces the desired outcomes" (Skiker, 2006: 156). In the case of the Community Initiative Urban II, the aim was "to develop innovative and integrated approaches to regenerating neighbourhoods in crisis and promoting sustainable urban development" (European Commission, 2010a: i). "The expectation was that URBAN II would contribute to positive improvements and would develop a legacy of longer term change, whereby public and private agencies, together with local communities

would work together to create sustainable neighbourhoods in their cities” (European Commission, 2010a: i).

Even there was a strong emphasis on partnership working, to develop and deliver effective initiatives, the SJD case study showed:

Despite the way the initiative was welcomed by some people working at local level, centralized forms of government blocked the experimentation of new approaches and methodologies based on principles of collaboration and empowerment. Moreover, some preconceived ideas of political leadership, values and ideologies have created a low level of mutual trust and of coordination during decision making process and implementation phase. A movement away from centralized and sectoral divisions of government to multilevel governance based on a real partnership working is necessary for upgrading the program results

The political pressure to show results and success in conjunction with some bureaucratic mechanisms of evaluation is not helping the goal of learning with these experimental initiatives. The multidimensional nature of critical areas requires new evaluation approaches, based on reflective and democratic exercises with the involvement of all the stakeholders, namely of those who are affected by the interventions, in order to improve their quality and accountability.

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SUMMARY

The relevance of the relationship between evaluation and learning is widely acknowledged; as well as the importance of this learning process to support policy decision making and to judge the value of “what was done”, “how” and “with what results”. Although the activity of evaluation is not something new, but a field of knowledge with its own theories and practices, it is important to notice that there is great variability in the tradition and cultures of evaluation between countries.

This paper presents and compares different conceptual and methodological frameworks created for the assessment of the European initiative Urban II, including the one that was used by the author in the context of an academic evaluation in the city of Porto.

The comparative analysis of the results leads us to the recommendation for more democratic processes of evaluation and intervention, in order to improve their quality and accountability and promote the important goal of learning with this type of experimental initiatives.