

Rapid Cities – Responsive Architectures

22-24 Novembre 2020, American University in Dubai, UAE



Regeneration and Sustainability: a comparison of practices

Rosalba Belibani

Abstract

In a view of a city as a living system reframing urban theories and images starting from the 20th century, regeneration is the organic metaphor with which a contemporary city was represented,¹ as well as a very common term in political programmes and latest generation planning tools. The biological meaning applied to the urban environment does not only mean rebuilding spaces and renewing functions, but restoring new dignity to places for life where citizens can identify with. The concept of “urban regeneration” implies policies and

intervention projects to improve abandoned, unqualified or socio-economically, spatially and environmentally degraded urban areas.² This notion has evolved over time to meet the growing needs of an even more dynamic reality, shifting from punctual rehabilitation action within the urban fabric to integrated programmes extended to the entire urban area aimed at promoting economic activities, restoring sociality, recovering urban ecosystems.³ The purpose of regeneration is to take into account the complexity of urban habitat by encouraging development and improvement in many sectors simultaneously, so as to foster economic growth, decrease social and cultural inequity, strengthen community cohesion and social capital, minimize climate change risk.⁴ Such all-embracing nature of urban regeneration is also its greatest limitation: difficult challenges along with the need to satisfy multiple interests have produced partial and incongruent outcomes favouring people or business alternatively. This is why sustainability, in its various declinations, is embedded with urban regeneration policies, especially regarding the interaction of initiatives to support the city economy, living standards, climate change adaptation and mitigation. Regeneration aims to favor new urban life processes capable of generating social and economical dynamics, but mainly environmental ones: indeed, awareness and protection of the built environment form the basis of the whole concept of sustainability. However, including sustainability in the urban practice is to be supported by a significant cultural change, in the absence of which the essence of sustainability remains a mere label with no real content. Regeneration goes far beyond the objectives, aspirations, and results of urban upgrading.