Bologna's regulation for the care and regeneration of the urban commons

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Why did we select this case?

Bologna's regulation for the care and regeneration of the urban commons is encouraging a new relationship between the local government and its residents. It is an interesting case as it is one of the most innovative legal/contractual experiments carried out by a municipal government.

About the case

In 2011, a neighbourhood group wanting to donate a set of benches to their neighbourhood park, which lacked seating options, contacted the City to determine how to do so. After being directed from department to department and a frustratingly long wait, they were informed that it was illegal for residents to contribute to the care of their own public spaces.

As one of Italy's most progressive cities, home to a thriving co-operative sector and Europe's oldest university, the "bench scandal" quickly spread across the city and caused an uproar among its residents. As a result, the City partnered with LabGov–an innovation lab based in Rome–whose projects investigate ways that residents can more actively participate in managing City resources rather than being passive recipients of its services. In 2014, after two years of fieldwork, three urban commons governance labs and countless contact hours, the City introduced a 30-page regulatory framework. LabGov's report "Regulation on Collaboration between Citizens and the City for the Care and Regeneration of Urban Commons " outlines how local authorities, residents and the community at large can manage public spaces and public assets together.

LabGov's director Christian Iaione sees the document as:

> *"a sort of handbook for civic and public collaboration, and also a new vision for government. It reflects the strong belief that we need a cultural shift in terms of how we think about government, moving away from the Leviathan State or Welfare State toward collaborative or polycentric governance."*

Thanks to its leadership, in a few short years Bologna went from being a city in which citizens couldn't provide basic street furniture for their own parks to one in which all manner of self-organized, commons-based projects now thrive. The City of Bologna now has more than 90 pacts of co-operation with self-nominated groups in three thematic areas: living together, growing together and making together. Projects range from urban agriculture and community gardens to co-operative childcare and the world-famous social streets, an initiative that originated in Bologna and has spread to more than 350 groups worldwide, enabling neighbourhood-level co-operation, festivals, resource swaps and more. Iaione continues:

> *"The job of city governments, and maybe every government layer, is changing. Their function is less about commanding or providing. They are increasingly acting as a platform that enables collaboration between citizens and social innovators, not-for-profit organizations, businesses and universities to unleash the full potential of urban, cultural, and environmental commons, promote a sustainable commons-oriented development paradigm, [and] updating the concept of State or government."*

Source

Text from the report: Navigating the sharing economy: A 6-decision guide for municipalities