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article

From policy entrepreneurs to policy entrepreneurship: actors and actions in public policy innovation

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Policy entrepreneurs are considered key actors in public policy. However, there are so many definitions of what they can do that it is difficult to use this concept in a systematic, analytical way. Starting with a critique of the tendency to overstretch the concept of the policy entrepreneur, we propose a more parsimonious conceptualisation by de-personalising entrepreneurial actions and by focusing on a specific pattern of action whose main task is to promote innovation. Thus, policy entrepreneurship is conceptualised as a pattern of action (involving different types of actors) focused on innovation promotion that is pursued by activities such as framing a problem, developing solutions, building a coalition in support, and seeking opportunities and attention. We also highlight prevalent resources for those activities. We then apply this conceptualisation to two cases of urban planning in Italy to discuss the activities of successful policy entrepreneurship as a collective effort.

Key words policy entrepreneurs • policy entrepreneurship • entrepreneurial strategies • policy actors • public policy • innovation • urban planning • policy change

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Introduction

The role of agency in the interplay of the structure in social science and public policy remains a disputed issue (Emirbayer and Mishe, 1998). At best, agency – which is defined 'as a temporally embedded process of social engagement' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 963) – is treated as a residual variable that enters into the picture when other explanations are trivial or insufficient. This role often depends on the individualisation of agency roles, whereby policy success is attributed to a 'lonely heroic individual' (Petridou, 2014), especially when attention is focused only on the traits of one person or organisation. Such an individualised focus does not allow one to see that the same individuals may fulfil different functions in explanations

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of policies as causal processes (McAdam et al, 2001). In the end, this lack of clarity inhibits a proper understanding of the specific contributions of different types of actors to policy change (as well as even the type of obtained change) or to policy stability (Capano and Galanti, 2018; Mintrom, 2020: 10).

The diffusion of multiple conceptions of what policy entrepreneurs do is a good example of the risks of the individualisation of agency. In fact, if we attribute all possible activities to policy entrepreneurs, it is difficult to identify the added specific value of these 'entrepreneurial' actions (Cohen, 2012). Hence, the risk of conceptual overstretching is very high.

In this article, we propose shifting attention from 'policy entrepreneurs' as individual actors to 'policy entrepreneurship' as a pattern of action comprising specific activities (Ackrill and Kay, 2011: 74) related to a specific task (innovation promotion) whereby innovative ideas are articulated (Mintrom and Vergari, 1996: 422) and ultimately affect policy change. Policy entrepreneurship ranges from setting the agenda to formulation and implementation (Mukherjee and Giest, 2019), activating causal mechanisms in peculiar circumstances (Galanti and Giest, 2019). In particular, we address the problem of the conceptual overstretching of the policy entrepreneur and propose a shift from individual actors to a specific pattern of agency whose task is innovation promotion pursued through four types of activities (framing problems and ideas, developing solutions, building coalitions, and seeking opportunities and attention). We then apply this conceptualisation to two empirical cases of urban transformation in Italy, Turin and Florence. In particular, the two cases shared similar economic and political transformations from the early 1990s to the 2010s. They are considered among the most capable and dynamic cities in the centre-north of Italy in an era of urban renewal and participatory governance (Pinson, 2002), though they have very different achievements in terms of policy change (Dente et al, 2005). Thus, the cases fit perfectly to explore the validity of our theoretical framework.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. In the next section, we summarise the literature on policy entrepreneurs, showing how they are supposed to do things they are hardly skilled at doing, and we try to overcome such shortcomings by proposing a more parsimonious definition of policy entrepreneurship. In so doing, we also highlight the collective character of successful entrepreneurship (Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Ackrill and Kay, 2011; Oborn et al, 2011; Petridou, 2018). The third section presents the research design and the cases of urban planning in Turin and Florence as being similar; and the fourth section shows that in one of the two cases, all the various entrepreneurial actions and activities aimed at innovation promotion are performed by multiple individuals and organisations, irrespective of their formal roles or identities. Our conclusions close the presentation of our research.

From individuals to patterns of actions: towards a parsimonious definition of entrepreneurial actions

Individual entrepreneurs: roles, activities and tasks

Scholars have focused on entrepreneurs as individual actors endowed with special attributes. The social sciences abound with definitions of entrepreneurs, including the economic (Schumpeter, 1946), political (Schneider and Teske, 1992; Sheingate,

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2003), bureaucratic (Teske and Schneider, 1994), public (Polsby, 1984) and, last, policy entrepreneurs (Roberts and King, 1991; Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom and Vergari, 1996; Mintrom, 1997; Mintrom and Norman, 2009).

Under its original meaning, an entrepreneur is one who owns a company, who combines productive factors, who invests resources, and who faces risks hoping for future returns (Schumpeter, 1946). Willpower, aiming to initiate action, is the quintessence of the entrepreneur (Czarniawska-Joerges and Wolff, 1991: 533). While economic and political entrepreneurs are focused on profit and on consent (Sheingate, 2003), or on whatever increases their power (Schneider and Teske, 1992), policy entrepreneurs are more concerned with innovation and policy change (Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom, 1997; Mintrom and Norman, 2009).

Hence, the term 'policy entrepreneur' has acquired a variety of meanings and now corresponds to a set of very different types of actions (Cohen, 2012; Frisch-Aviram et al, 2018) revealing a number of strategies and some related traits (Frisch-Aviram et al, 2019), often making it difficult to identify policy entrepreneurs as a distinct class of actors in policymaking (Mintrom, 2020: 48). All the literature on policy entrepreneurs is a continuous attempt to define their characteristics in terms of their differences from other actors, but precisely because of the different roles and activities attributed to entrepreneurs, this attempt is very ineffective. Therefore, the two problematic questions here are these: 'who' are the policy entrepreneurs and 'what' characterises their actions?

Regarding the 'who' question, Kingdon was the first to think about policy entrepreneurs as a specific class of actors when conceptualising the policy process as a chaotic process where problems, policy solutions and participants flow in streams quite independently of one another. At certain times, referred to as windows, the three separate streams may be coupled together, effecting a change in the status quo (Kingdon, 1995; Zachariadis, 2007). The policy entrepreneur is, literarily, 'what makes the coupling' (Kingdon, 1995: 188). In their pursuit of personal interest, policy entrepreneurs 'perform the function of coupling for the system', and even if the presence of the entrepreneur alone cannot bring about change, without the entrepreneur, linking the streams may not take place (Kingdon, 1995: 191). To effect that coupling, the policy entrepreneur performs activities such as 'advocating ideas' and 'softening them up' for the wider public; however, the policy entrepreneur is also 'brokering ideas' through negotiations and 'recombining different elements in the policy proposals', which is why such people are more likely to be scientists or academics but could easily also be politicians or even bureaucrats (Kingdon, 1995: 131, 189). However, the 'who' question of policy entrepreneurs remains largely underdeveloped in other theories of the policy process (Sabatier and Weible, 2007; Mintrom, 2013: 443; Cairney and Jones, 2016), while the work of John Kingdon has inspired other scholars in policy entrepreneurship who are also interested in explaining policy change and innovation beyond the agenda phase. This emphasis on the skills of policy entrepreneurs may favour a conceptual confusion with other functions, such as those of management and leadership (Czarniawska-Joerges and Wolff, 1991). This confusion becomes more evident in those studies investigating the activities of policy entrepreneurship beyond the agenda setting, particularly in policy adoption (Zahariadis, 2015) and implementation (Zahariadis and Exadactilos, 2016). Here, the role of entrepreneurs becomes so widespread that it is difficult to conceptually distinguish other types of actors. For example, if one considers political leaders to

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be 'a subset of policy entrepreneurs' (Zahariadis, 2015: 467–8), scholars are asking entrepreneurs to do things those leaders usually do. For example, while political leaders may well act as policy entrepreneurs when they promote innovation, the resources needed to make innovations last (for example, political authority and legitimacy, followership) are usually beyond entrepreneurship. In other words, political leaders possess a number of features that are not available to 'normal' entrepreneurs: they have access to the other policymakers, they signal commitment to change thanks to their position, they enjoy a reputation and legitimacy that extend beyond ordinary policy entrepreneurship (Zahariadis, 2015: 468), and they nurture and steer the national mood thanks to their institutional bully pulpit (Zahariadis, 2015: 477). The possible overlaps between entrepreneurs and leaders are even stronger in the implementation phase. Zahariadis and Exadaktylos (2016: 62–3) emphasise three strategies entrepreneurs may use to avoid decoupling: developing issue linkages and framing to disseminate ideas, manipulating institutional rules and managing centralised networks, and making side payments to create and maintain minimum winning coalitions due to the implementation of parts of the law. These activities are indeed typical of policy leadership as a pattern of action dedicated to steering and coordinating the process across different organisations and levels (Capano, 2009), which requires not only the support of followers (Stillers, 2009) but also the use of authoritative resources (in terms of political power and legal authority to take collective decisions) (Wallis and Dollery, 1997).

Thus, the problem of the overlapping roles of policy entrepreneurs is an evident shortcoming in the literature and must be addressed. The main point here is that, against all attempts to define an autonomous role for policy entrepreneurs, it appears more promising to consider the possibility that different actors can behave as entrepreneurs. For example, Frisch-Aviram et al (2019) show that different entrepreneurial actions can be undertaken during the different phases of the policy process, ranging from setting the agenda to formulation, implementation and evaluation, and they even show that low-level bureaucrats can take entrepreneurial actions (on this point, see also Lavee and Cohen, 2019).

If entrepreneurial policy actions can be performed by a variety of actors with multiple identities (Mintrom, 2020: 49), or even policymakers acting across various levels of government (Ackrill and Kay, 2011), truly, the idea that actors must assume a specific 'pure' role of 'entrepreneur' is misleading.

Regarding the 'what' question, the literature on policy entrepreneurs mainly emphasises the following: the influential role of their ideational activities and their framing of ideas and opportunities to initiate change (Roberts and King, 1991; Zachariadis, 2007; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Crow, 2010; Font and Subirats, 2010; Oborn et al, 2011; Brouwer and Bierman, 2011; Cohen, 2012; Carter and Jacobs, 2014; Watts et al, 2015;); their pivotal importance in coalition building (Mintrom and Vergari, 1996; Mintrom, 1997; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Béland and Cox, 2016; Saurugger and Terpan, 2016) in multi-level networks (Arieli and Cohen, 2013; Carter and Jacobs, 2014; Navot and Cohen, 2015; Shpaizman et al, 2016; De La Porte and Natali, 2018); their capacity to discover new avenues for policymaking (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Mintrom, 2020); and their capacity to successfully promote 'evidence-based policymaking' according to different windows of opportunity (Cairney, 2018).

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Thus, with respect to the 'what' question, there emerges a list of activities that can be reasonably attributed to the entrepreneurial process; but towards which tasks are these activities performed? Here, it emerges that innovation can be considered the main goal or 'mission' of entrepreneurial activities. All in all, ever since Kingdon's seminal work, entrepreneurs have been considered to be those capable of showing what other actors 'cannot' see: a new idea or the opportunity to link an actually emerging problem to a pre-existing solution. Regarding the core task of entrepreneurial actions, the work of Michael Mintrom has been fundamental. Policy entrepreneurs are basically those actors who discover unfulfilled needs, bear the risks of change, and resolve collective action problems (Mintrom and Vergari, 1996: 422) by 'selling ideas designed to bring about policy change, identifying problems, shaping policy debates, networking in policy circles, and building coalitions' (Mintrom and Vergari, 1996: 423; Mintrom, 1997). The emphasis on innovation – the introduction of a new idea or solution that is not perceived as part of the status quo – also emerges from the latest study by Mintrom (2020: 1), who states that 'policy entrepreneurs are energetic actors who work with others in and around policymaking venues […] and are distinguished in their attempt to introduce and drive proposals for policy innovation'.

Thus, what emerges from our critical review of the literature on policy entrepreneurs is that the focus on entrepreneurs as individuals leads to considering too many forms of political actions as entrepreneurial activities and that this conceptual overstretching (Sartori, 1970) can be detrimental to a deeper understanding of the specific and exclusive functions of different types of agency in the policy process. Furthermore, the literature shows that what is accomplished through entrepreneurial actions can be truly diversified, which calls for a rationalisation or for an effort to order this variety in a coherent way.

Policy entrepreneurship as a pattern of action for innovation promotion

Generally, policy entrepreneurs cannot be a distinct class of actors (as suggested by Kingdon) precisely because many different types of actors (political, bureaucratic, social, and so on) can act in an entrepreneurial manner depending on context (Mintrom, 2020).

Thus, we propose to order the various concepts coming from the literature by shifting the focus from the 'lonely individuals' and their actions (Petridou, 2014) to the characteristics of the actions themselves, from the personified 'entrepreneur' to the recurrent activities that can be defined as entrepreneurial, and from individual entrepreneurs to 'entrepreneurship' intended as a specific pattern of action that can be performed by numerous individuals or collective actors with multiple identities (Ackrill and Kay, 2011; Capano and Galanti, 2018; Mintrom, 2020).

Returning to the original meaning, we propose to assume that policy entrepreneurship is a specific pattern of action finalised towards *the promotion of policy innovation* (Mintrom, 2020). According to this definition, different kinds of actors can be considered to be behaving as entrepreneurs only when they pursue innovation promotion. By taking innovation promotion as the core of policy entrepreneurship, the added value of entrepreneurial actions in terms of policy change is clarified: not all types of policy change can be considered to be driven through entrepreneurship (what about incremental changes or those changes that reverse a previous decision?); instead, we consider only those characterised by innovation promotion. Furthermore,

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by considering innovation promotion as the primary task of policy entrepreneurship, we characterise this type of pattern in a clear way (as different from other patterns of action such as leadership, management and brokerage). This clarification is also needed to empirically distinguish the specific function of entrepreneurship by identifying a set of specific activities, which are aimed at innovation, from other activities such as brokerage, which are more specifically aimed at mediation (Capano and Galanti, 2018).

Last, according to the literature that identifies innovation promotion as the task of entrepreneurial actions (Roberts and King, 1991; Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom and Vergari, 1996; Mintrom, 1997; Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Oborn et al, 2011; Ackrill and Kay, 2011; Mintrom et al, 2014; Cairney, 2018; Mintrom, 2020), we can also endorse four *types of prevalent activities* through which this goal is pursued by performing key functions in the specific context of policymaking.

First, innovation promotion requires *framing ideas and problems* (Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom and Vergari, 1996; Mintrom, 1997; Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Font and Subirats, 2010; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Oborn et al, 2011; Mintrom, 2013). Those actors who take entrepreneurial actions must possess expertise and the time or money to challenge the issues on the agenda and to advocate for new ideas and to soften them up for the wider public. In some cases, this activity entails using discourse and rhetoric to shape debates around policy problems (Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom and Vergari, 1996; Béland and Cox, 2016) and eventually to shape a proper vision of prospective change (Roberts and King, 1991), also through the use of emotions (Zahariadis, 2007; Zahariadis, 2015). Here, it should be clarified that when framing ideas and problems, what is required is not necessarily inventing something radically new but rather reassembling existing ideas and instruments in an original way, thus allowing one to create a new match between ideas and problems. This ability is particularly important during the agenda phase.

Second, innovation promotion requires *developing policy solutions* as a recombination or packaging of policies and problems (Kingdon, 1995; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Oborn et al, 2011; Nay, 2012; Watts et al, 2015; Zahariadis, 2015); this also entails developing policy contents with stakeholders and verifying policy solutions with experts (Oborn et al, 2011) while amassing evidence to show workability (Mintrom, 2013). Here, knowledge and expertise are the key resources needed to translate ideas into feasible policies (Frisch-Aviram et al, 2018), to adapt to politicised design contexts (Mukherjee and Giest, 2019), and to build teams to impact policy formulation (Frisch-Aviram et al, 2019).

Third, innovation promotion requires *building a coalition* in support of the change pursued (Roberts and King, 1991; Kingdon, 1995; (Mintrom and Vergari, 1996); Zahariadis, 2007; Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Font and Subirats, 2010; Oborn et al, 2011; Carter and Jacobs, 2014; Faling et al, 2019). Investing in coalitions means building consensus and developing trust (Petridou, 2018), and it involves using relations and networking capacities as the main resources to build multi-level coalitions (Mintrom and Vergari, 1996). This is fundamental to both the formulation and adoption phases.

Fourth, innovation promotion requires *seeking opportunities and attention* from all the relevant actors – policymakers, the media and the wider public (Kingdon, 1995; Zahariadis, 2007; Font and Subirats, 2010; Brouwer and Bierman, 2011; Saetren, 2016). This pursuit allows one to seek favourable venues for the preferred solution (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Praelle, 2003; Shpaizman et al, 2016). In this sense,

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innovation promotion means exploiting opportunities to influence policy outcomes, even without all the necessary resources to do so alone (Arieli and Cohen, 2013; Navot and Cohen, 2015), and to adapt entrepreneurial strategies to the nature of the window of opportunity (Cairney, 2018). Exploiting such opportunities requires displaying social acuity (Mintrom and Norman, 2009) and political acumen and, most importantly, having access to policymakers as prevalent resources (Kingdon, 1995). Seeking opportunities is crucial not only in the agenda and formulation phases but also during the implementation phase, especially in contexts where economic, social or political reasons make modifying the status quo extremely difficult (Arieli and Cohen, 2013; Lavee and Cohen, 2019).

Innovation promotion, as the core goal of policy entrepreneurship, can become a task of one or more individuals or organisations in policy dynamics, irrespective of formal positions and identities (Mintrom, 2020: 49). In other words, any experts, advisors, scientists, advocates, public officials, or political leaders may carry out entrepreneurial actions if they purposefully act together in order to promote some sort of innovation in public policy, either in content or process.

Table 1 summarises the characteristics of policy entrepreneurship as a pattern of action.

In this sense, by defining policy entrepreneurship as a pattern of action finalised towards innovation promotion, we clearly distinguish it from other types of activities aimed at steering the policy process towards either stability or change – which is typical, for example, of policy leadership. In other words, we propose that a political leader in a formal position may decide to promote policy innovation and in doing

Table 1: Policy entrepreneurship as pattern of action: task, activities, resources

Main task of policy entrepreneurship	Prevalent activities for innovation promotion	Prevalent resources for innovation promotion
Innovation promotion (Mintrom, 2020)	1. **Framing problems and ideas** (Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom and Vergari, 1996; Mintrom, 1997; Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Font and Subirats, 2010; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Oborn et al, 2011; Mintrom, 2013; Cairney, 2018)	Communication (Béland and Cox, 2016)
	2. **Developing policy solutions** (Kingdon, 1995; Zahariadis, 2015; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Watts et al, 2015; Oborn et al, 2011; Nay, 2012; Cairney, 2018)	Knowledge (Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom and Norman, 2009) and tenacity (Mintrom, 2020)
	3. **Building coalitions** (Kingdon, 1995; Roberts and King, 1991; (Mintrom and Vergari, 1996); Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Font and Subirats, 2010; Oborn et al, 2011; Carter and Jacobs, 2014; Zahariadis, 2007; (Faling et al, 2019); Petridou, 2018)	Relations and networks (Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom, 2013), credibility (Mintrom, 2020)
	4. **Seeking opportunities and attention** (Kingdon, 1995; Zahariadis, 2007; Font and Subirats, 2010; Brower and Bierman, 2011; Arieli and Cohen, 2013; Navot and Cohen, 2015; Saetren, 2016; Cairney, 2018)	Access to policymakers (Kingdon, 1995), Time (Kingdon, 1995), Money (Kingdon, 1995), social acuity and sociability (Mintrom, 2020)

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so takes entrepreneurial actions. In addition, those taking entrepreneurial actions do not require a formal position or authority to promote the goal of policy innovation.

By shifting to policy entrepreneurship as a pattern of action whose main task is innovation promotion, it should be easier to understand how policy entrepreneurship succeeds or fails. The success of policy entrepreneurship depends on fulfilling various entrepreneurial activities (framing, developing solutions, building coalitions and seeking opportunities) through which innovation promotion is pursued. Here, it is relevant to underline that most recent empirical research has shown that issue promotion and coalition building should be considered key cross-boundary entrepreneurial strategies (Faling et al, 2019) and that those taking entrepreneurial actions behave within structural networks (Christopoulos and Ingold, 2015) and work in teams using 'collective entrepreneurship as entrepreneurial team leadership' (Petridou, 2014; Petridou, 2018). Thus, we can propose that what makes policy entrepreneurship successful is the coordination of different actors taking entrepreneurial actions with the same purpose. In this sense, policy entrepreneurship can be considered a kind of embedded collective pattern of action through which a specific type of action is coordinated to reach innovation promotion (McCaffrey and Salerno, 2011; Capano and Galanti, 2018).

Hence, the collective character of entrepreneurship (Petridou, 2014) is what makes innovation promotion more likely to be successful. In fact, the diversity of resources aimed at promoting innovation and the intensity of the different activities and strategies to seize the moment are rarely encompassed in one person but can be distributed among different actors (Petridou and Olausson, 2017).

In the following sections, we apply our policy entrepreneurship framework by comparing two cases of urban planning in Italy.

Research design

In Italy, urban planning comprises a rigid and multi-level governance structure involving subnational and national governments. Overall, the structure of local finance, the harsh competition of interests related to construction and private housing, and the resistance of bureaucracy lead policy to favour the status quo (Thornley and Newman, 2005; Vettoretto, 2009). The cases of urban planning in Turin (1986–2011) and Florence (1985–2015) can be seen as very similar ones from a theory-driven perspective (Mintrom, 2020: 44). This is because the two cities exhibit similar starting conditions: both cities have experienced considerable levels of problematic pressure on urban planning issues since the end of the 1980s, both have generated public debate on land use planning and its model of economic development, both have experienced similar political changes with the direct election of a mayor and the empowerment of local executives, and both cities are governed by a coalition of both civic movements and political parties with a centre-left political orientation.

Notwithstanding these similarities, however, Turin and Florence differ in their output. Radical changes in urban planning were achieved in 1993 in Turin thanks to the approval of a masterplan that realised the vision of a new economic vocation for the city, from an industrial city centred around one company, FIAT (the dominant Italian automobile company), to a city of knowledge and culture propelled by universities, private bank foundations and citizens' initiatives (Pinson, 2002). In Florence, on the other hand, after many years of discussions and proposals, adopting the preliminary

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Table 2: Urban planning in Turin and Florence: cases compared

	Local economy	Centre–periphery relations	Economic crisis	First year of direct election of the mayor	Type of political system	Main stakeholders in urban planning	Main actors in policy entrepreneurship	Main opportunities for policy entrepreneurship	Main policy outputs
Turin (1986–2011)	Industrial	State capital (Piedmont Region)	De-industrialisation starting in the late 1970s global financial crisis 2009	1993, a 'civic' mayor is elected	Two main coalitions, democratic parties largely dominant, centre-left coalition government, no alternation	FIAT	Architects and local politicians (1987–1992)	Direct election of the mayor (1993)	1993–1995 master-plan (Piano regolatore generale): redesign of a new 'city of knowledge and loisir'
		Chair of ANCI (National association of Italian Municipalities): 2009/2011				Ferrovie dello sStato	Academic-mayor (1992–2001)	National and European renovation programmes for example, PRIU and URBAN (late 1990s)	
						Construction industry	Academic-councillor (1992–1995)	First Strategic Plan (1998–2000)	
						Bank foundations (San Paolo, Cassa Risparmio Torino)	City-manager (1993–2011)	Contest for the Winter Olympic Games (1997–1998)	
						Local associations	Professionals (architects and engineers) recruited as Municipal staff (1993–2011)		
						Professionals (architects and engineers)			

(*Continued*)

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Table 2: (*Continued*)

	Local economy	**Centre–periphery relations**	**Economic crisis**	**First year of direct election of the mayor**	**Type of political system**	**Main stakeholders in urban planning**	**Main actors in policy entrepreneurship**	**Main opportunities for policy entrepreneurship**	**Main policy outputs**
Florence (1985–2015)	Service and tourism	State capital (Tuscany Region)	De-industrialisation starting in the 1990s global financial crisis 2009	1995, a 'civic' mayor is elected	Two main coalitions, democratic parties largely dominant, centre-left coalition government, no alternation	Fondiaria Assicurazioni		Direct election of the mayor (1995)	1995 masterplan; 2010 new masterplan (Piano Strutturale): 'conserving the city centre and existing activities'
		Chair of ANCI (National association of Italian Municipalities): 2000/2009				Ferrovie dello Stato		Reform of planning legislation by the Region Tuscany (starting in 1995)	
						Construction industry		National renovation programmes (late 1990s)	
						Local associations		Strategic plan (2002–2003)	
						Professionals (academics, architects and engineers)			

Source: Authors' own elaboration

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project of a land use plan took until 2011, and this did not change the city's traditional role as a residential and touristic city.

Given that innovative urban planning was achieved only in one case despite all these similarities, we can hypothesise that a difference could have been made by effective policy entrepreneurship acting towards innovation promotion by framing problems, developing solutions, building coalitions and seeking opportunities.

The reconstruction of the urban planning process is based on two in-depth case studies conducted between 2010 and 2012, with a follow-up in 2015 in the case of Florence. The process has been reconstructed through a chronological review of the local press (over 200 articles available from the free online archive of *La Repubblica*, 1985–2011); the records of the municipal council agenda, including an analysis of the programmatic documents of the mayors (1993–2011 for Turin and 1995–2014 for Florence); policy recommendation papers and studies in urban planning on the two cities. All the documents – including personal notes and other grey materials – were accessed due to a six-month research internship in the municipal cabinet offices of the two municipalities. Furthermore, 34 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key policy actors in urban planning (mayors, local politicians, academics, planners and architects, local civil servants, members of interest groups, local associations and local journalists) who were identified through both convenience and snowball sampling (Arieli and Cohen, 2013). The interview questions were aimed at ascertaining whether the various activities related to policy entrepreneurship were performed and, if so, by whom. To reach this goal, the questions were formulated to unveil the presence of the different conceptual dimensions of policy entrepreneurship and to contrast them with other relevant variables in the research design, such as administrative capacities, the political preference of the coalition government, and the importance of political leadership (for the lists of all interviewees – including those cited in brackets – and questions, see the Supplementary material). Table 2 summarises the main characteristics of the cases.

Policy entrepreneurship in Turin and Florence: a collective endeavour of innovation promotion

The policy dynamics

Urban planning in Turin has been debated since the early 1980s when a serious economic crisis hit the city. Turin was a Fordist industrial city strongly dependent on FIAT, the automobile company that also represented the core of the dominant elite (Bagnasco, 1986). Urban planning soon monopolised the electoral debate and became a battlefield for very different policy solutions regarding the economic vocation and physical design of the city. In 1987, a renowned architectural firm in Milan drafted a preliminary project. Its content was radically innovative since the project replaced abandoned industrial railways with boulevards, services and residential properties. Nonetheless, the project waited and suddenly exited the political agenda.

Some years later, urban planning returned to the political agenda due to two prominent academics who chose the 1987 preliminary project as their preferred policy solution. For the first time, these academics proposed an alternative view of the renovation of Turin as 'the city of knowledge and leisure' (INT6), an idea that challenged the dominant status quo of Turin as a solely industrial city. The leader of the

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local dominant party – the Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS) – endorsed this idea and decided to nominate one of the two academics as mayor in 1993. During the electoral campaign and after the electoral victory, the two academics and subsequent policymakers promoted citizens' participation in elaborating on the new plan and organised public meetings where the project was eventually amended; it received final approval in December 1993. Furthermore, the academic-mayor launched the First Strategic Plan (1998–2000) in order to create trust among local stakeholders by involving them in concrete projects (Dente and Melloni, 2005). Moreover, the Municipality of Turin, using innovative financing opportunities from several national and European renovation programmes (INT6), took advantage of a great event: the 2006 Winter Olympic Games (WOG).

The case of Florence showed similar conditions in terms of urgent problems in urban planning, expert debate and political turmoil and new and multi-level financial opportunities for urban transformations. Urban planning has been perceived as a pressing issue since the mid-1980s. The existing land use plan was highly contested by academics, planners and interest groups because of the scarce attention paid to the peripheral area and the lack of basic transport infrastructure (INT22). In 1995, after the election of an academic as mayor of Florence, the approval of the new masterplan reaffirmed the status quo, maintaining the city centre and existing residential areas as the 'fundamental drives of the city' (INT33). In 2002, the urban planning problem became pressing once again, so the new partisan mayor developed a new masterplan project in order to attract investments in transportation while maintaining households and core economic activities in the city centre (INT33). This project did not receive political support from the majority following a 2008 judicial scandal surrounding urban concessions that involved both the municipal council and the executive.

That scandal presented an opportunity in 2009 for an outsider, not part of the dominant local party, who portrayed himself as 'the scratcher of the old political class'. During the electoral campaign and after becoming mayor, the outsider had an idea for another project for the masterplan, the so-called 'Zero Volume Plan', to send the message of a break from the past. He personally took part in the early stages of the participatory process in 2009/2010 and committed economic resources to it in order to monitor it. Nevertheless, the content of the plan was, yet again, in line with preserving the existing productive activities.

Compared with the case of Turin, urban planning in Florence was much more contested and produced very few urban physical transformations, despite the elaboration of numerous projects related to land use plans. Hence, urban planning in Florence is an interesting case that highlights the need for collective policy entrepreneurship aimed at innovation promotion and involving multiple activities and actors, from experts to policymakers and from managers to private partners.

In the following sub-sections, interviews will highlight how policy entrepreneurship was carried out differently in the two cities by focusing on the various activities aimed at innovation promotion.

Framing ideas and problems

In Turin, policy entrepreneurship clearly emerged in the alternative framing of the city's crisis with the idea of breaking from the past legacy of a 'one company town' (Bagnasco, 1986). Turin had to reinvent itself not only as an industrial city but also

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as a 'city of leisure', combining its industrial DNA with a new vocation linked to knowledge and culture because 'Turin could no longer be "just" the city of FIAT but couldn't afford to be the city 'without FIAT" (INT6). A group of academics and professionals who formed an association, the 'Alleanza per Torino', and the leaders of the local dominant party, the PDS, strongly supported this idea. The opposition between 'the supporters of change against the prophets of doom' (INT3) and those living in a sort of 'nostalgia for the past' (INT6) epitomised the environment surrounding Turin's possible renaissance.

Such alternative views in the framing of the city's economic development never emerged in Florence. Even when the mayor called in a mixed group of experts for advice in 1995 – in order to avoid Florence becoming 'a city of rent' – their ideas were so abstract that 'it was difficult to translate them into executive plans' (INT23). In addition, in 2009, when the political outsider presented his candidacy as 'a rupture with the past' (INT29), blaming the existing local elites while framing the image of Florence as a 'smarter' and 'faster' city (INT 29, INT20), the vision of the city was still oriented towards safeguarding the existing activities and households in the city centre (INT33, INT23, INT24).

Developing innovative policy solutions

In Turin, the two alternative views of the future of the city were reflected in two different projects for the masterplan, which were also discussed during the 1993 electoral campaign. The idea of a 'city of leisure' matched the physical transformation already proposed in the 1987 preliminary project, so the two academics promoted the project as a 'ready-to-use' policy solution that would bring investments and work to the construction sector (INT 3, INT5). The 1987 preliminary plan was not only innovative in content but also a landmark for citizens' participation. In fact, a number of public discussions were organised around the 1987 preliminary plan involving local political assemblies and interest groups. Moreover, policy entrepreneurship was apparent in the experimentation with (at the time) innovative governance instruments, such as the First Strategic Plan (INT3). Modelled on cities such as Bilbao and Barcelona, the Strategic Plan was used to illustrate the workability of the transformation (Mintrom, 2013) because 'if a citizen saw he could take a first step, then he got confident, and other steps would follow' (INT6).

Despite the availability of similar policy instruments (with particular reference to strategic planning), Florence never experienced the development of an alternative policy solution for urban planning. Since the 1980s, academics from the faculty of architecture have engaged in numerous debates, criticising the choices that were made, generally by local political parties and local bureaucracies, without proposing a coherent set of policy solutions. In addition, the 1995 and the 2002 masterplans pursued 'a conservative view of the city' (INT33). In a similar vein, the policy content of the 2010/2011 'Zero Volume Plan' confirmed the status quo, highlighting the idea of the 're-use' (rather than the conversion) of discarded areas. Furthermore, the plan was used as an instrument to appease dissenters:

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> 'we identified all the subjects who were against our plan, we interviewed them and put the transcripts online, we carried out focus groups involving the citizens and the municipal officers […], we collected suggestions and answered all of them directly, we involved the executive and the council several times […] and it worked out brilliantly.' (INT29)

Building a coalition

In Turin, the framing of the city's renaissance as a 'city of leisure' proved useful in mobilising a number of citizens who were far removed from (the indeed delegitimised) local politics. In addition, this framing helped to reassure important private stakeholders, such as FIAT itself and the local bank foundations, emphasising the renewed importance of both the industry and the banks in the design of the new 'city of leisure', thus creating a larger coalition in support of the 1987 project (INT6, INT5). Gaining the support of – or at least avoiding fierce opposition from – other actors in the local arena (local councillors, local civil servants, and the region) revealed a key insight. The councillors were actively involved in the discussion of the 1987 preliminary project, which maintained some aspects that 'resulted from negotiation with the political parties' (INT6). Furthermore, a group of young professionals (architects and engineers) was recruited to actively participate in modifying the project and soon became the 'priests of the plan' (INT6). The group also included some young regional officers who were later involved in experimental renovation projects. These actions were aimed at 'spreading the spirit of the plan' (INT6) and expanding support for it.

In contrast, coalition building in support of the planning instruments proved very difficult in Florence. Several projects, including the 2002 one, came to nothing due to rifts inside the political majority (INT23), which eventually 'collapsed' (INT27). Moreover, the Tuscany region 'never played a positive or collaborative role' (INT23). In 2009/2010, the 'Zero Building Volume' plan was used as a coalition magnet to the discontent of citizens and experts, but it was difficult to translate it into definitive approval for all related regulations by the municipal council; this came only in 2015.

Seeking opportunities

The keys to the successful promotion of innovation in Turin included persistently seeking opportunities to include the 1987 preliminary plan in the political agenda and feeding the planned transformation additional (financial and symbolic) resources. First, the academic-mayor and the city manager strongly encouraged the participation of national and European programmes and funding schemes for urban renovation (for example, PRIU and the URBAN I and II initiatives). Second, they increasingly involved private bank foundations in several experimental projects for public–private partnerships on the basis of a 'common view of the future of the city' (INT9). Third, and most importantly, policy entrepreneurship was evident in the 'bet' (INT17) represented by participation in the competition to host the 2006 WOG. A small staff worked on the proposal, and 'the victory came as a total surprise for us; nobody believed it was possible' (INT17). The WOG proved fundamental to completing the physical transformations, to increasing successful initiatives in social housing, and to creating 'a sense of pride and belonging to the city' (INT17).

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On the other hand, this persistent search for opportunities and attention was absent in Florence. While the local public administration 'lacked the technical capacity for complex projects, which is a fundamental skill for success' (INT23), Florence could find no additional resources (either financial or symbolic) because of a complicated relationship with private stakeholders and the central government (INT25). The words of one mayor of Florence are telling:

> 'I think that the story of Florence and the story of Turin are really similar. Florence too had a mayor-professor who designed transformation and then a partisan mayor who had to realise that vision [...]. The difference is that the central government has never sponsored urban policies, and thus Italian cities can take advantage only of exogenous events such as the Olympic Games – which Turin had and Florence did not have.' (INT 23)

Nevertheless, participating in the contest for the 2006 WOG was considered 'a hazard', 'improbable' and 'a crazy idea of the mayor' by commentators in Turin at the time (INT11 and INT17) and was soon revealed to be a brilliant entrepreneurial effort by the mayor, the city manager, and the experts on the project team.

Policy entrepreneurship made the difference

Comparing two similar cases of urban planning has illustrated how policy entrepreneurship – intended as a pattern of action – matters. In particular, this analysis is aimed at showing how a composite group of policy actors achieved policy innovation in Turin by simultaneously framing the problems of the city in a new way, developing innovative policy solutions in urban planning, engaging in coalition building to support change, and seeking opportunities for financial resources and attention. On the other hand, a similar group of actors performing different entrepreneurial activities of innovation promotion was absent in Florence. The innovative planning in Turin was therefore not driven by individual entrepreneurs but by different actors, holding different policy and political roles, who performed entrepreneurial actions together.

Conclusions

In this article, we have tried to challenge the conventional views of agency in the policy process by focusing on the different conceptions of the work of the policy entrepreneur in the literature. We have focused on the 'who' and the 'what' questions and have argued the following: 1. policy entrepreneurs cannot be considered an autonomous type of actor because actors in different formal positions, including policy leaders, can fulfil entrepreneurial actions from time to time (while the success of policy entrepreneurship in pushing for change is often derived from a collective effort); 2. by making policy entrepreneurs perform every kind of activity in the policy process, the concept is conceptually overstretched and thus becomes less useful for empirical research.

By the same token, we have proposed a shift from individual actors to a pattern of action by conceptualising policy entrepreneurship exactly as a pattern of action (that can be acted upon by different actors depending on the context) whose main task is to pursue policy change through innovation promotion that is implemented

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through four specific activities: framing a problem, developing solutions, building coalitions in support, and seeking opportunities and attention. According to this conceptualisation, the probability of successful policy entrepreneurship, and thus its specific contribution to policy change, depends on the density of entrepreneurial actions devoted to promoting innovation. Thus, all in all, successful innovation promotion, and thus policy entrepreneurship, is a kind of collective enterprise. We have empirically applied this conceptualisation by comparing urban planning in two Italian cities where the presence of policy entrepreneurship justifies the different output reached, notwithstanding the high level of political-institutional and contextual similarities between the two cities. This empirical application shows how considering policy entrepreneurship as a pattern of action and thus focusing more on actions pursuing innovation promotion than on single individuals could be very promising. In fact, thanks to the proposed conceptualisation, the richness of the entrepreneurial actions occurring in specific policy dynamics can be seen, grasped and ordered. Thus, the collective strength of entrepreneurship can be appreciated. Obviously, this conceptualisation will require further empirical evidence. Particular analytical attention should be devoted to which contextual factors can or cannot favour the entrepreneurial pattern. However, it appears that without theoretical lenses capable of achieving that aim in the same policy process and on the same policy issue, with different actors taking entrepreneurial actions, we risk missing too much and retaining a misleading and simplistic conception of entrepreneurs and their actions.

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Conflict of interest
The authors have no conflict of interest

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Supplementary material

A. List of interviews

Code	Profile	Place and date
Int1	Assessor - peripheral areas	Turin, 29/04/11
Int2	Municipal officer	Turin, 6/04/11
Int3	Mayor (1993–2001)	Turin, 11/04/11
Int4	President of the Municipal Council	Turin, 13/04/11
Int5	Mayor (2001–2011)	Turin, 20/04/11
Int6	Assessor - urban planning	Turin, 05/05/11
Int7	Deputy mayor (2001–2011)	Turin, 14/4/11 and 21/4/11
Int8	Assessor - urban planning (1993–1995)	Turin, 28/04/11 and 27/04/11
Int9	General Secretary, Bank foundation	Turin, 20/06/11
Int10	Councillor, majority	Turin, 13/04/11
Int11	Journalist	Turin, 10/05/11
Int12	Local secretary of PDS	Turin, 13/04/11
Int13	Municipal officer, experimental projects	Turin, 12/04/11 and 12/05/11
Int14	Journalist	Turin, 6/04/11
Int15	Head of municipal department, finance	Turin, 28/04/11
Int16	General manager of Turin	Turin, 6/04/11
Int17	Municipal officer, Strategic plan and WOG	Turin, 08/04/11
Int18	Assessor - urban planning (1995–2011)	Turin, 20/04/11
Int19	Councillor, urban planning commission	Turin, 20/06/11
Int20	Councillor, majority	Florence, 13/01/11
Int21	Head of municipal department, Council	Florence, 08/03/11
Int22	Councillor, opposition	Florence, 28/12/10
Int23	Mayor (1999–2009)	Florence, 20/05/11
Int24	Municipal officer	Florence, 21/03/11
Int25	Assessor, housing	Florence, 18/02/11
Int26	President of the Municipal Council	Florence, 28/01/11
Int27	Head of department, urban planning	Florence, 01/03/11
Int28	Head of department, mayoral cabinet	Florence, 03/02/11
Int29	Head of unit, development	Florence, 25/02/11
Int30	Councillor, opposition	Florence, 28/12/10
Int31	Councillor, opposition	Florence, 16/12/10
Int32	Mayor (1995–1999)	Florence, 08/06/11
Int33	Head of Municipal department, urban planning	Florence, 21/03/11
Int34	Councillor, opposition	Florence, 27/07/11

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B. List of questions used in the semi-structured interviews on agency and the policy process in urban planning in Turin and Florence

Premise: The interviews were carried out in person, recorded and fully transcribed by one author during a research internship. The formulation of the questions was explicitly aimed at unveiling the dimensions of entrepreneurship that are distinct from other political and administrative variables (political manifestoes, coalitional agreements, policy preferences, and administrative capacities) and other possible agency roles or activities. The following list of open questions focused on entrepreneurial actions were posed to the interviewees during the interview (here translated from Italian).

- We have been talking about in urban planning in Turin/Florence in the early nineties. How was the problem perceived at the time? Was urban planning and the masterplan a real issue in the political and electoral debate, and how did you and your allies portray it? Who else defined it as such? [used to detect "framing ideas and problems"]
- Did alternative solutions emerge in that debate? What instruments or projects were addressed? [used to detect "developing policy solutions"]
- Who were the actors supporting the different solutions? Who were the main opponents? How did you get people with similar views to come together? [used to detect "building coalitions"]
- How did you overcome the main resistances to the plan/the proposed solution? How did you manage to spread these ideas and to sustain and support the different initiatives given the harsh economic crisis and the municipal financial constraints? [used to detect "seeking opportunities"]
- Was it an individual or a collective effort?

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