



Temple and the city, Sara La Pira, modification: cut

Social inclusion in the regeneration processes of historic centres

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the theme of city users' participation in the urban renewal processes. Although not a new approach, in the last years it has been considered as the best way to reach meaningful results in the planning of urban design strategies that take into account the citizens' needs and desires. The paper focuses only on one part of a complex European Research Project carried out in the period 2011-2013 within the cooperation programme between Italy and Malta. During the research development we decided to do a specific activity related to urban knowledge and based on the cooperation between a sociologist and an architect. The historic centre of Siracusa was the case study and visual sociology was the methodological approach adopted. This is a way to connect the perception of the urban space to the process of identifying urban features. A focus group was formed and each of its members was asked to describe a part of Ortigia by doing a photoshoot; ten photos describing the city and answering two simple questions a) What part of your city would you like to show to one of your friends who has never visited it? b) What part of your city wouldn't you like one of your friends to see? We classified the collected photos and then we organized a public discussion to evaluate the relationship between visual perception and oral description. In this way, we activated interactions between sensitive knowledge and logical considerations. Perception and representation were defined through relationships me/other oriented and city/tourists oriented for the purpose of constructing a conception of identity of the city. I will describe, step by step, the complex process that has led to the elaboration of a model of the social representation of the Urban Identity.

KEYWORDS

historic centres, urban regeneration, visual sociology, urban identity

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2011 a research project named Euro South Hub project was financed by the Italy-Malta 2007-2013 Operational Programme. The objective of the Euro South Hub was to create a centre for research, a social space and an incubator for projects and social enterprises, taking as its starting point the experience already acquired by more than 23 cities around the world, 4 of which located in the Mediterranean area. The main idea of the project was to create a physical HUB space in Ortigia (Siracusa) with a satellite in the island of Lampedusa and to develop one virtual hub for Malta in order to facilitate communications between Siracusa, Malta and Lampedusa. The final goal of this work was to foster the cultural, social and economic development of the human and cultural heritage of this crucial area of the Mediterranean basin. Special attention was paid to the connection between the targeted territories and international networks and circuits that go beyond the traditional seasonal tourism. The intention to adopt the Hub philosophy in order to consolidate the vocations and identities of Siracusa (Ortigia), Malta (Valletta) and Lampedusa - with special reference to their historic centres and their particular condition of being located in the southernmost part of Europe, in the Mediterranean Sea - is in line with the European Neighbourhood Policy that encourages the development of social and economic growth by promoting the creation of interconnected corridors favourable to sustainable and endogenous local development. Sustainability is the key word for entrepreneurs and social innovators who bank on the social, economic and environmental sustainability of their enterprise. From this point of view, the relationship between a new idea and the place of its actualization is the most important factor that needs to be investigated. An Impact Hub is also a network which shares the same features as a web-based network which simplifies interactions between people and facilitates the circulation and aggregation of ideas.

An Impact Hub responds to its users comfort requirements, provides a space where international

offices network takes place and its core business is social and environmental innovation.

For these reasons, one part of the research project was specifically devoted to the exploration of the possibilities of improving Ortigia, the historic centre of Siracusa, considering this as an unavoidable necessity.

This part of the research project was organized with the collaboration of an urban sociologist, Antonio Casciaro, who had worked over the past years as a consultant in the planning process of the strategic plan "Innova Siracusa 2010".

The aim, actively pursued with the team coordination, was to delineate new ways of investigating the constitutive features of the city which represent its identity.

A focus group of ten high-school students and university students belonging to the Department of Architecture of Siracusa (SDS Architettura Siracusa - Università di Catania) was organized.

2. METHODOLOGY

The first part of the work reports on the state of art of citizens' participation in the urban renewal processes. Although this topic does not represent a new way to approach urban design and city transformation programmes, during the last decades of the 20th century a great number of experimentations were carried out.

In 1989, for example, Isabella Amirante, professor of Architectural Technology at the University of Naples Federico II, edited a book entitled "Recuperare con gli abitanti". She wrote in the Introduction: "Without taking into account the real needs of people it is impossible to establish a new relationship between needs and performances. This relationship constitutes the central aspect of the technological control applied to Building Recovery. This involves an evaluation of both the physical constraints imposed by the buildings and the compatibility of the new uses along with the different orders. The aim is to single out suitable indicators to design appropriate transformations in order to satisfy

the users' various demands". (Amirante I. 1989)

This topic was debated throughout the seventies when, after observing the urban growth, sociologists and urban anthropologists stated that the main aim of urban sociology was the methodical analysis of new social assets from a historical point of view. In particular, the new socio-historical situation is represented by: immigrant integration, analysis of housing needs, new kinds of social interactions occurring in urban areas, urban clashes, city organization and management, social participation. (Ciglia A. 1988)

If we observe the historic centres according to these principles, i.e. by looking at the processes of urban change, we understand better the needs and expectations of the city users and their role in the urban environment, their request of a high-quality life, and in particular the urban management and preservation of the cultural identity of the oldest parts of the city.

Recognizing the central importance of the social issues in the Urban and Building Recovery means to transform and innovate words such as restoration, renewal and maintenance so that the meaning of regeneration acquires a deeper significance. Words such as revitalization and regeneration belong to the fields of biology and ecology i.e. they refer to natural processes: the ability of an organism or an ecosystem to regenerate themselves; this process creates favourable conditions for the organism/ecosystem as a whole. When we use the word regeneration we should always bear in mind the political choices and the selective impacts they have on different social groups. (Vicari Haddock S. 2009)

For these reasons, today the word regeneration is so wide-spread and the realization of urban regeneration programmes relates to strategic actions carried out thanks to the financial support from the European Community.

At the end of the Nineties the Green Paper on the Urban Environment along with the Urban and European Cities of Culture programmes were adopted by the European Community to strengthen urban policy and finance cultural activities and complex programmes. There is, among the above-mentioned fund-financed projects, the Urbact II HerO project (Heritage as

Opportunities) whose aim is to develop sustainable management strategies of Historic towns.

The towns and cities that give Europe its international identity, economic vitality and social cohesion - whether they be national capitals, regional centres or cultural hubs - are all, inter alia, in part historic or heritage cities whose character derives substantially from the quality of their historic urban landscapes.

These 'historic' towns and cities are the context within which much of Europe's most important physical cultural heritage is experienced and enjoyed by citizens and visitors. It is this unique character that encourages Europe's citizens and businesses to identify and engage with 'their' city and underlines the importance of cultural heritage as a key resource capable of developing participative, integrative and sustainable urban strategies; a resource whose untapped potential can act as catalyst for sustainable urban development and an internationally competitive Europe. (HerO The Road to Success, 2011)

Reflecting on the outcomes of the renewal actions already carried out in a great number of European towns, thanks to the financial support of the EU funding, means to highlight the great difficulty of conceiving, promoting and developing plans that are marked by a truly multidisciplinary approach and a fruitful combination of different visions. In other words, this means that it would be always necessary to ensure that there is no disjunction between the technical and socio-economic aspects of urban renewal strategies.

The prevailing of one element over another is due to the Local Authority's and stakeholders' efforts to increase widespread support.

For the aforementioned reasons, we are still developing research programmes on Urban Renewal and Urban Maintenance; developing new ways of improving Regeneration and increasing Value; studying the importance of the contribution provided by disciplines such as sociology, economics and anthropological sciences in order to find out suitable solutions from both a technical and a social point of view.

"We talk about assets that have historical and artistic interest and those that do not, but the distinction rightly so is a variable line and not even of primary interest,

because attention is focused not on protection, nor on the market values, but on the "service life" of the assets and the cultural value that all public assets help to generate." (Torricelli M.C. 2012). Our interest on the real estate focuses on the quality of urban areas and their buildings, the evaluation concerns both the actual performances and the potential ones. "The system of evaluating tools can has different functions of support, such as mapping and monitoting the public real estate, or considering strength and weakness of potential acquisitions. These evaluating tools must be adapt to the agencies policies and to the various (economic and social) needs of the local community, in order to make clear and costantly updated, possibly also through synthetic indicators, critical issues, potentialities and priorities of the assets involved in strategies for increasing the trade value and the intrinsic value." (Talamo C. 2012)

3. ORTIGIA – THE CASE STUDY

The historic centre of Siracusa, the isle of Ortigia, represents a central area where expectations converge in a global strategy for urban development. In 1998 the Piano Particolareggiato Ortigia - PPO (Detailed Town Plan for the restoration of Ortigia) was adopted. The plan was conceived as a response to the depopulation due to the urban growth. This demographic flow led to a gentrification process. Gentrification is the social and spatial manifestation of the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial urban economy based on financial, business and creative services, with associated changes in the nature and location of work, in occupational class structure, earnings and incomes, life style and the structure of the housing market. (Hamnet 2003) This process affects various European towns and causes the impoverishment of the collective memory and the displacement of lower social classes; so it

may be necessary to invest a huge amount of money both in the oldest and newer parts of the city in order to provide new kinds of urban and social services. Despite the adoption of the PPO (whose strategy was based on the realization of social housing, tourist and cultural activities, educational buildings and services) and the Funds provided by the European Community such as for instance those devoted to Urban Programmes and spent for the restoration of monuments, network infrastructures and subsidized private initiative, there are still marginal places in a wide part of Ortigia, especially in the Northern part of the island i.e. from the Seaside to the Big Harbour.

During the last years the Local Authorities' and the stakeholders' efforts have been oriented toward the construction of a new identity of the city to attract tourist flows so as to implement a Territorial Marketing Strategy.

Cultural tourism is the keyword but we would like to know if the symbolic vision, connected to the territory's identity, are related to the past or to the future and if they bring an innovative contribution to tourism management.

Today's mainstreaming policies are oriented toward the improvement of urban renewal trough the creation of attractive urban spaces considered as indicators of

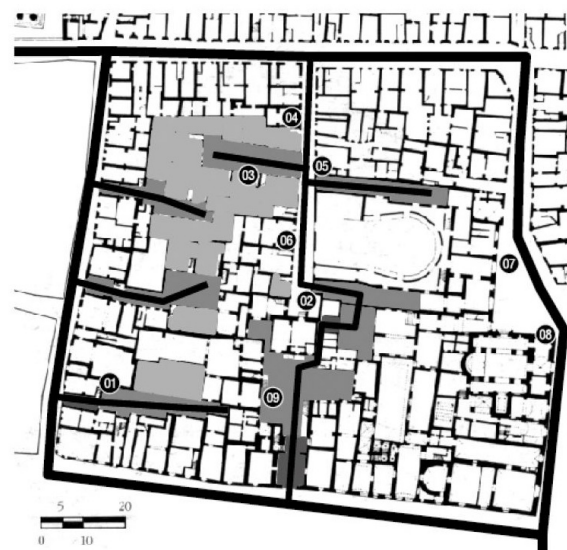


Figure 1.
Ortigia - the case study area

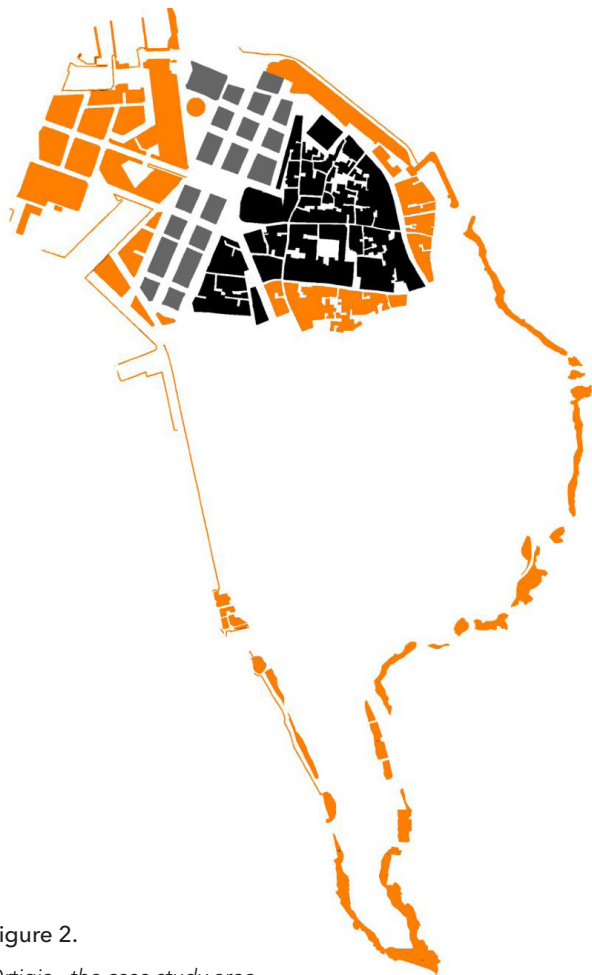


Figure 2.

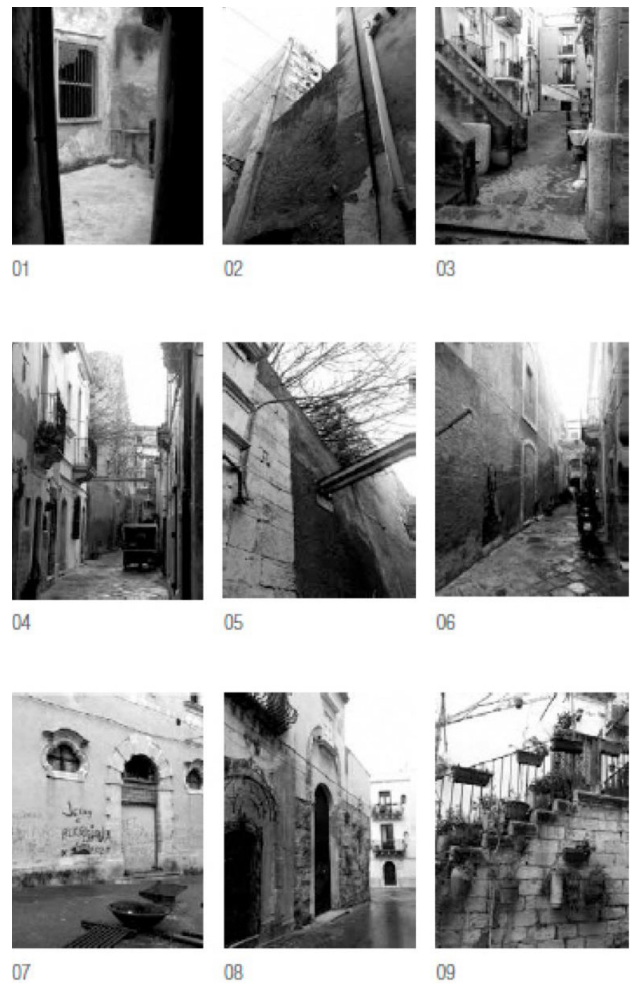
Ortigia - the case study area

lifestyle improvement i.e. considered as the right way to attract tourists, workers, firms and investments.

From the point of view of the Territorial Marketing Strategy, this means to build a brand identity as a distinguishing mark which contributes to the development and the increase of the incoming tourist flows.

The concept of placed identity is a collectively shared concept within a community; its definition is the result of overlapping cultural, architectural and social relationships.

In order to achieve our research goals, we felt the need



to know how Ortigia users would define the identity of Ortigia. By analyzing the elements considered by its inhabitants and users as vital elements of the city's identity, we tried to highlight and grasp their expectations and desires, to meet their demands.

On the basis of such considerations, we put the social representation of Ortigia at the centre of our attention by adopting an integrated approach of three elements: the environmental/territorial element, the social element and the visuo-perceptive element.

This organization is referred to visioning processes: visioning is a neologism: vision and planning play

a central role in the new ways of sharing territorial planning choices which trace alternative sceneries according to a long-term vision. The aim of the visioning is not to collect a series of images but to share a certain scenery with the whole community. (Khakee A. 1999)

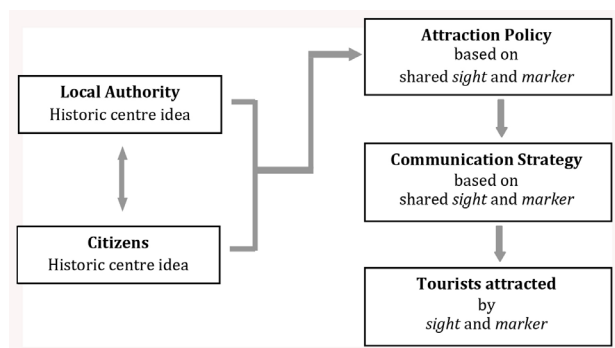


Figure 3.

Bottom up approach

We imagined a circular relationship between cognitive and social recognition, between the perception of the urban space and the sharing of its meanings, addressed to a hypothetical action of welcoming tourists. By adopting the visual sociology approach we invited each member of a group of Ortigia users to do a photoshoot: ten photos describing the city and answering two simple questions:

- A. What part of your city would you like to show to one of your friends who has never visited it?
- B. What part of your city wouldn't you like one of your friends to see?

The group of users was shown all the photos taken during the shoot and a workshop discussion was organized.

Visual Sociology considers pictures as an important part of the research thus underlining the importance of critical interpretation of images.

We simultaneously evaluated two aspects of expressive language: visual perception and the way

of speaking so as to make a comparison between concreteness and abstraction.

Three sub-sets were generated by the photo classification:

1. Spaces of sociability and public relations;
2. Urban decorum;
3. Folk traditions, handicrafts and local economy.

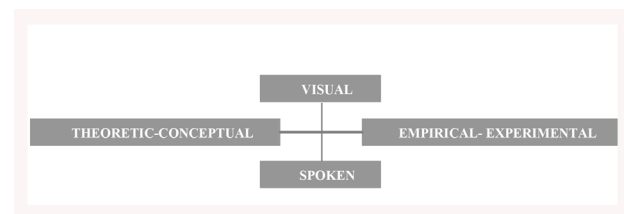


Figure 4.

Analisis levels

The Urban Identity dimensions derive from these sub-sets and are strictly related to the images of the urban space.

We identified four dimensions of Ortigia's identity:

- place or group membership and its ambiguity;
- arrangement of different features;
- distinction and recognition capability - pars pro toto;
- consciousness construction vs historic and social modifications.

The photos on the following page are taken from the selected pictures as examples of our research results.

CONCLUSIONS

We started from a strong idea: the search for common bases for making territorial brands distinguishing features of the identity of historic centres, able to attract both tourists and public funds.

What came out from the research was the demand for public responsibility and a certain prevalence of symbolic elements in the definition of the Urban Identity.

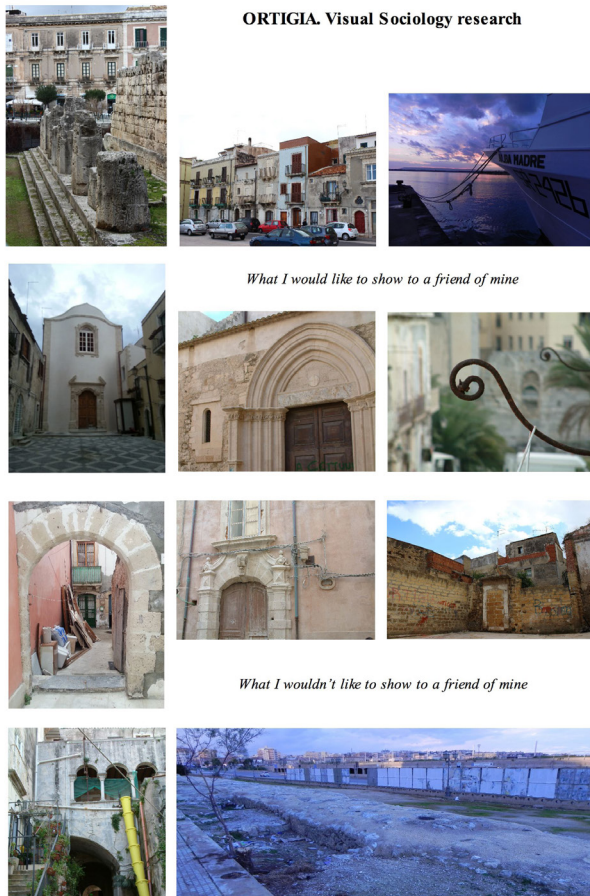
This highlights the need for urban decorum and

fitness for human habitation; that is a direct criticism of Local Authorities which are unable to provide a suitable level of life quality.

This shows that citizens have to be involved in planning the future asset of the city.

The differences between Past and Future invoke a symbolic element able to connect them: the Future is a criterion based on value; the Past is the heritage to be designed.

This work proposes, possibly, a methodologically-oriented starting point to manage complexity: the relations between citizens and city planners; this could be useful to Local Authorities that will be compelled to cut down hierarchies.



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Figure 5.

Ortigia - Visual Sociology research