

INCLUSIVE CITIES AND REGIONS *TERRITOIRES INCLUSIFS*

14° Biennale of European Towns and Town Planners, Naples

Edited by
Marichela Sepe

#Parallel Workshop



INU Edizioni

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Progetto grafico
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Prodotto da
INU Edizioni Srl
Via Castro Dei Volsci 14
00179 Roma
Tel. 06 68134341 / 335-5487645
inued@inuedizioni.it
www.inuedizioni.com
Iscrizione CCIAA 81 4890/95
Iscrizione al Tribunale di Roma 3563/95

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Finito di stampare
Preprint Aprile 2024
Officine Grafiche Francesco Giannini & Figli SpA

In copertina
Hug. Napoli, San Francesco di Paola colonnades.
(source: Marichela Sepe' archive)

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preprint

Creating our futures

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14th BIENNALE
OF EUROPEAN TOWNS
AND TOWN PLANNERS
NAPOLI

Inclusive cities and regions/Territoires inclusifs

22-24 April 2024 | DIARC University of Naples Federico II

INCLUSIVE CITIES AND REGIONS/TERRITOIRES INCLUSIFS**Edited by Marichela Sepe**

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The “Villa del Sole” project. A green area without greenery anymore...

Teresa Cilona*

The redevelopment of urban public spaces requires a holistic approach and the collaboration of different skills. The projects carried out in numerous Italian and foreign cities show that the best redevelopment projects have a positive impact on the quality of life, the aesthetic appearance of public spaces, the enhancement of the urban heritage, the environment and the local economy. This study examines the recent redevelopment project of the “Villa del Sole”, a green area located in the centre of Agrigento, built after the Second World War, where in December 2023 numerous trees were uprooted to make way for new buildings to be used to a nursery and kindergarten. This has given rise to discontent and heavy criticism from citizens, cultural and environmentalist associations and sector experts towards the *governance* of the City, accused of serious inattention to the real needs of the community. While in other cities the tree heritage is increasing, in Agrigento it is being cemented, in contravention of National Law No. 10 of 2013 “Development of urban greenery”, in clear contrast to the consolidated need to minimize land consumption, ignoring the landscape and geomorphological constraints that weigh on that portion of territory (PL28, protection level 1-28b). The project process of this intervention, which is opaque and lacks any hint of bottom-up planning, has the declared aim of obtaining a major European public funding (National Recovery and Resilience Plan resources). It all began when the city council, under the AGENDA URBANA programme – Action 9.3.1 PO FESR 2014-2020¹ – proposed a variant to the town planning instrument² for the approval of the final project (first excerpt). The area – indicated in the current PRG as sub-zone G3 (environmental protection and enhancement – equipped public green areas) and identified in the N.C.E.U. at Fg. 142 part. 3642 – is one of the two largest municipal villas in the city. For decades it was a very popular meeting point for

the people of Agrigento, characterized by a large fountain – with an adjoining lake – structured on several levels, enriched in the 70s and 80s by wildlife (peacocks, ostriches, monkeys), games and sports equipment. Today, *that green area no longer has greenery* and very little remains of the lush vegetation, which constituted the arboreal heritage of the city... (fig.1). The urban landscape has been brutally disfigured to make room for new building of dubious utility (fig. 2). In fact, there are several concerns about the ‘quality’ of the redevelopment intervention. The survey carried out³ did not reveal any ISTAT data – essential according to urban planning standards – that would justify the need, even potential need, to build new school facilities for children. Moreover, official demographic data show that between 2013 and 2023, the number of children between the ages of 0 and 6 years is in sharp decline. At this point, some questions arise spontaneously: on which forecasts is the project based? Why build new buildings? Could existing school structures no longer in use be recovered? Why cut trees? In planning, notoriously, every future action on the territory is closely linked to the needs of the community, to the number of people who will use the places and structures, paying maximum attention to the environment and the surrounding landscape. In this project, however, the priority would seem to be obtaining financing. The only data relating to sizing are the minimum number (No. 25 children) and the maximum number (No. 28 children) for the nursery; for the childhood centre the total number is 60 people. Data that give much food for thought on the planning methodology used. And again, another very important aspect must be underlined. Among the project documents there is no agronomic study, necessary to identify, before cutting, the type of vegetation and the conditions of the individual trees and this in order to confirm their maintenance, or to plan their replacement with new planting. On November 29, 2023, the local administration celebrated the “laying of the first stone” without there being all the necessary authorizations for the start of the works, so much so that, on December 20, 2023, the Superintendence warned the Municipality, suspending the construction site just started⁴. As of March 1, 2024, work is still blocked. In view of Agrigento “Italian Capital of Culture 2025” we believe that, for the resumption of the “Villa del Sole” project, even before the construction of new volumes, it would be necessary to look to the city of the future by recovering and enhancing the properties no longer in use, together with the existing arboreal heritage. The use by citizens of public open spaces and abandoned buildings, adequately rethought and reasoned, would guarantee a higher quality of life. Only in this way will Agrigento be able to recover positions in the *quality of life* rankings, rather than being relegated to the last places.

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¹ Initial amount of €2,100,000.00 subsequently increased to €3,000,000.00.

² The P.R.G. of Agrigento is from 2009. The variant, pursuant to art. 19 clause 2 of DPR 327/2001, was voted favourably by the City Council with resolution n. 82 on 26 July 2022 and approved with DDG (Territory and Environment Department) n. 136 of 01.06.2023.

³ The project documentation was provided by “Codacons” of Agrigento.

⁴ Work suspended following reports from local associations citizens’ against the demolition of the trees.



Fig. 1. Agrigento - Panoramic view of the "Villa del Sole". 1a) the area before the intervention; 1b) the area after the works carried out by the Municipality. Trees and vegetation were brutally removed (5).



Fig. 2. a) Project plan, excerpt of project T. 03, in red the area identified for the construction of the buildings; b) detail of the building plans (3).

The Biennial of European Towns and Town Planners is an event of the European Council of Urban Planners ECTP-CEU which aims at discussing the main issues in the European debate relating to urban planning by sharing them with urban planners, architects, engineers, economists, sociologists, historians of architecture, citizens, politicians, private and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The theme chosen for the 14^o Edition, organized from 22 to 24 April 2024 in Naples with the INU as the main organizer, is Inclusive Cities and Regions/ Territoires inclusifs. Inclusion is understood in its multiple declinations that define the 10 general themes of this Biennial - Regional issues and regional disparity, Metropolitan or city proposals, Urban regeneration and Public Spaces, Migration and cultural inclusion, Cultural heritage, Resilience and adaptation, New economic approaches, IT and the use of artificial intelligence in planning, Ports, airports and other infrastructures, Underground space – and in further ones proposed by the participants who further specify the general themes namely About Spatial Inclusivity, Urban regeneration and spatial justice with Nature-Based Solution, Inclusive public spaces for water cities facing climate change, "Italian UNESCO Chairs' vision and actions, A Transdisciplinary Approach to Placemaking and Inclusivity: COST Action Dynamics of Placemaking, Inclusive city Ecosystems, Youthbanism for a New Generation of Urbanists, Fragile geographies. Visions, projects and studies to mitigate and adapt to environmental and anthropogenic risk. Green Oasis for the 15 minutes city model, Making/unmaking urban circular economies with 'otherness', Public space for inclusive cities: the Biennial of Public Space, Universal accessibility and university education, the knowledge network, Findings and Evidences from the PNRR project RETURN, and River Contracts as voluntary and negotiated planning tools.

The works contained in this Catalogue, presented by administrators, professionals, academics, and researchers concern projects, policies and research that have international interest and, at the same time, attention to the local, all at different scales.

It is possible, from this vastness of topics, to understand the broad discussion that resulted, outlining new interested subjects and involved actors, as well as new possible intersections of themes.

Marichela Sepe is Associate Professor at the DICEA Sapienza Università di Roma. She has also joined the ISMed-CNR and the DiARC-University Federico II. In 2013 she has been visiting Professor in the Peking University and held lectures in the Peking, Wuhan and Xi'an Universities. Her research interests include: urban design and planning; place identity; healthy city; livable public spaces; creative urban regeneration; multimedia. On these topics, she has published several national and international journal articles, conference papers, books and book chapters.

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In the cover

Hug. Napoli, San Francesco di Paola colonnades.

(source: Marichela Sepe' archive)

Formato digitale

ISBN 978-88-7603- (eBook) €. 0,0