

City space and children's skills

New uses of urban space in the Noce neighborhood of Palermo

Ferdinando Trapani*

The general theme is that of policies such as community education to combat educational poverty aimed at the social and economic contexts of regions and urban areas characterized by hardship and a high level of early school leaving. Understanding the inevitable connections between the role of urban public space indoors and outdoors is crucial in these policies. The concept of poverty is universally known in terms of material poverty, as in the scientific definition of poverty as the minimum income level required for physical subsistence (Rowntree, 1901, 1937, 1941; Veit-Wilson, 1986). However, for the purpose of defining contrast strategies, it is a complex concept with regard to its measurement and comparison (Lister, 2004). The role of urban planning against poverty in the countries of the global south, for example, remains anchored in the "1) reference framework based on sustainable urban development goals; 2) an inclusive city position; 3) a poverty alleviation focus" and finally to "an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary urban diagnosis" (Bolay, 2020). In addition, in the concept of poverty there is also the fact of the impossibility of participating in social life since the lack of level of education and competence prevents the activity of active citizenship to try to solve one's problems (JRF, 2014). Therefore, the concept of *educational poverty* remains distinct from the concept of *inequality in education* because it can constitute an additional conceptual tool to analyze and enhance the role of education in enabling participation in modern society (Glaesser, 2022). The relationship between educational poverty and urban and spatial inequality was discussed in geography not as the not only physical proximity to services, infrastructures and jobs, but considering instead the development over time of distinct areas of urban decay that render those services present in the same urban context ineffective: social analysis is necessary to identify appropriate policies. (Grant, 2010). Urban planning studies also highlight the role of the overall context in which the learning of young people takes place, which only in extreme cases directly depends on the infrastructure and services for education (Nonnenmacher, 2017). For many years, in fact, the term 'educating community' has been linked to policies to combat educational poverty to unambiguously define the context of learning and their indirect effects on children and adolescents. Planning must take into account the analyses of the educating community and the qualities of the living space in which it is inserted. "PEC - Poli Educanti in Condivisione" (Shared Educational Poles) is a project of integrated actions carried out by a partnership made up of schools and third sector entities and universities (in the role of external evaluator). PEC aims to combat educational poverty in the Noce district of Palermo to activate poles in close synergy with each other, where members of the community meet and train, who become competent and therefore "educating". The extension of the opportunities for integrated development of children/young people aged 5-14 at risk of social exclusion and the growth of the transversal skills needed to strengthen their resilience capacities in the social dimension are the objective considered. The network of social animators that won the competition organized a variety of actions during the after-school hours involving children, their families, teachers and citizens of the Noce district. The aim is to activate the educating community through the innovative use of spaces to make them places of living. A 3-5 year long process (with the delays of the lockdown) in which gardening works were carried out, change of functions (from parking to garden open to the neighborhood through national workshops), an educational carnival for thousands of participants, music courses, occupations of landfills and spaces usually used for drug dealing, etc. In addition to the activities that have changed some spaces that are functional nodes of the Noce district, personalized educational programs have been created for children who needed special care or others who showed particular interest in extracurricular activities: all of them directly and indirectly involved their families and friends in a new community. The contribution highlights how the urban space ends up being the protagonist of almost all the actions of the integrated project that necessarily took place in public open spaces. Social sciences and practical knowledge related to child and adolescent care were used to develop the PEC project. While "PEC" is aimed at changing the lifestyles of children in a disadvantaged neighborhood, urban space is not only the physical environment in which all the activities of the project take place but is a vital function of the subject involved in the project both individually and collectively as the relational capital of the educating community.

*Department of Architecture, University of Palermo, ferdinando.trapani@unipa.

Images & references.



Fig. 1. Social event "Carnival of Noce neighbourhood" in Palermo, 2024. Created by the PEC projects experts and children of the schools, families and other citizens involved.



Fig. 2 The new architectonic solution for the new garden replacing the school parking as a new neighbourhood service .

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Sitography

- Noce Carnival: <https://fb.watch/qDacraEhmC/>
- Il Giardino dei Giusti (the Garden of the Righteous): <https://www.iostudionews.it/un-giardino-dei-giusti-allistituto-de-amicis-vinci-palermo/>