



QUADERNI

#14

Planning for all generations

Per una pianificazione multigenerazionale

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& Kai Walcott |
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in questo numero
in this issue

Topic/Tema >

Planning for all generations

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a cura di / edited by GU | Generazione Urbana

Viviana Andriola & Serena Muccitelli

Generazione Urbana_p. 5

Framing a multigenerational approach to planning. The Italian context

Per una pianificazione multigenerazionale. Il caso italiano

Mildred E. Warner_p. 17

Multigenerational Planning: Theory and Practice

La pianificazione multigenerazionale: teoria e pratica

Gregory Smith_p. 25

The pedagogy of an urban studies workshop focused on age-friendliness in selected Rome neighborhoods

La pedagogia di un laboratorio di ricerca urbana sulla condizione
di vita di giovani ed anziani in alcuni quartieri di Roma

Adam Bronfin, Rachel Liu, Kai Walcott_p. 33

Can Regeneration be Multigenerational? A case study of Piazza Alessandria

La rigenerazione urbana può essere multigenerazionale?
Il caso studio di Piazza Alessandria

G. Brakke, A. Visnauskas, E. C. Dañobeytia, R. Blandon, J. Glasser_p. 43

Path Dependence and Social Reciprocity in an Unplanned Neighborhood

Path dependence e rapporti sociali
in un quartiere non pianificato

Carlo Cellamare_p. 53

“Epiphanic” peripheries , re-appropriation of the city and dwelling quality

Periferie epifaniche, riappropriazione della città e qualità dell'abitare

Nicola Vazzoler_p. **63**

TOD: un racconto fra sostenibilità e accessibilità

TOD: a tale between sustainability and accessibility

Madeleine Galvin_p. **71**

Living Next to a Transit Node: A Livability Audit of Age-Friendliness

Abitare vicino a un nodo di trasporto:

valutare la qualità della vita per bambini e anziani

Tishya Rao, Ehab Ebeid, Graham Murphy, Edna Samron_p. **79**

Exercising the 'Right to Tufello' by Local Institutional Actors

Esercitare il "Diritto al Tufello"

Giovanni Attili_p. **89**

Pratiche informali e istituzioni. Per una politica dell'attenzione

Informal practices and institutions. Towards a politics of attention

Apparati/Others >

Profilo autori/**Authors bio** p. **98**

Parole chiave/**Keywords** p. **101**

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Path Dependence and Social Reciprocity in an Unplanned Neighborhood

Path dependence e rapporti sociali in un quartiere non pianificato

@ Gray Brakke |
@ Amelia
Visnauskas |
@ Eduardo Carmelo
Dañobeytia |
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Social reciprocity |
Unplanned
development |
Participatory
photography |

Reciprocità sociale |
Sviluppo
non pianificato |
Fotografia
partecipatoria |

In Pineta Sacchetti, an unplanned neighborhood on Rome's periphery, a unique developmental history has engendered invisible assets of placemaking that allow it to overcome poor physical design. Theoretically speaking, this phenomenon embodies path dependence as a means to social reciprocity. In our research, we initially thought that the neighborhood was unfriendly to children and elders based on its design characteristics, but we then found that a strong social layer compensated for them. In that social layer we uncovered slow flow, shared history, sense of place, and norms of reciprocity as the invisible assets that overcome poor design.

Introduction

Pineta Sacchetti, a Roman postwar community, highlights the promises and pitfalls of an unplanned neighborhood. Using standards outlined by the World Health Organization and UNICEF, we assessed this neighborhood's child and age friendliness. These standards emphasize the importance of physical form and structural accessibility. Being self-built and developed without a central plan, Pineta Sacchetti has many struggles of consistency and quality of its physical environment. Ultimately based on widely accepted standards, this makes it both inaccessible and child and age unfriendly. However, we through our research we found an active social layer that atoned for these



Fig.1 Pineta Sacchetti
Context Map.

flaws in maintenance and design. Its unique assets of placemaking makes for invisible assets that create a positive feedback loop of social reciprocity. This social layer, in part in spite of and in part because of the physical layer, helps make Pineta Sacchetti a favorable and accessible place to live.

Methodology

To conduct our study of Pineta Sacchetti, our research utilized two primary methods of inquiry: observation and engagement. In studying the physical, demographic, and statistical, we utilized observation data collected through a variety of methods documented below. Similarly, our photo essay, photovoice, questionnaires and intercept interview work were conducted through engagement with the residents of Pineta Sacchetti.

Photo Essay

Through an original photo essay, we sought to visually explore Pineta Sacchetti's identity and accessibility across generations. There is a substantial literature on visual anthropology, whose primary aim is to qualitatively catalog bodily expressions, space in human behavior, and the choreography of culture (Collier 2003). Our research primarily hinges on the second of these, as we investigate the nature of space and neighborhood identity. Alongside intergenerational placemaking and place attachment, neighborhood identity formed the crux of our visual, qualitative research. When conducting a community study, "photographs showing spatial relationships and the visual character of homes offer sociometric understandings, qualifications of affluence and poverty, older areas and new development, and often social subdivisions within a community" (Collier 2003, pp. 235–6). In our case, we sought to assess neighborhood identity formation in public spaces. With this medium, we depicted Pineta Sacchetti's intangibles as experienced by its inhabitants.

Photovoice

Our photovoice research is inspired by Sancar and Severcan's (2010) participatory photography work in the Bodrum peninsula Turkey, and our methodology is resultingly similar to his. After initially contacting the Casa del Parco library, as they provide various services for children, our team was referred to the Scuola Media Sisto IV, where administration and staff were readily willing to help us in our research.

Twenty disposable cameras with 27 photos each were distributed to children at Scuola Media Sisto IV by an instructor. Twenty students across two classes, who all live within Pineta Sacchetti, were asked to participate. Students range from age 11 to age 13. The cameras were accompanied by a worksheet that provided children with structured requirements for the first ten photos on the film roll, which are used in our analysis. The worksheet, which is matched to each camera, provides further prompts for children to identify the locations and subject matter of their photographs. Providing structured photo prompts to participants will give more guidance to student, and produce an outcome that is easier to analyze and compare. These photo prompts draw directly from the participatory photography exercises of Dr. Jon Severcan, as well as international frameworks for child friendly cities.

We accompanied the return of the photographs with a workshop with the students, with conversations to further elicit perceptions of place attachment in the neighborhood. This exercise, accompanied with the workshop, attempts to better illuminate children's territorial ranges, perceptions of historical and cultural sites of significance, and where the children feel safe.

Interviews and Questionnaires

A similar worksheet to that which accompanied the cameras as part of our photovoice exercise was utilized to elicit elder's perceptions of their neighborhood. Created specifically for the members of the local Centro Anziani (Senior Center), we collected 13 responses following a Friday afternoon dance program. Utilizing both on site translation and retroactive translation, these responses were used to further qualitatively inform our engagement with the elderly.

The Physical Layer

The physical profile of Pineta Sacchetti is dominated by features that would prompt an impression of child and age unfriendliness. Many streets have narrow sidewalks, sidewalks on only one side, or no sidewalks at all. There are few public spaces, and the majority of the ones that do exist are institutional buildings, and not fully public. In contrast, since the majority of the traffic is on the outer areas of the neighborhood where the primary roads are, there is less need for sidewalks in the area. Less flow in the core of the neighborhood allows pedestrians to feel safe and converse on street corners.



Fig.2 The Photoessay provided narratives about the neighborhood's social character and informed our research design. This tree sits on a property passed down through generations. Photo: Gray Brakke.



Fig.3_ A nine-year-old student completes the Photovoice exercise. Photo: Giorgio Gibertini.

This helps to maintain the strong village-like character described constantly by interviewees and community actors. The interviews we have conducted in the neighborhood have indicated that the neighborhood is in fact quite desirable for children and the elderly. Despite hilly topography, poor transit connectivity, inconsistent streets and sidewalks, and aging housing stock, almost all of Pineta Sacchetti's aging population decide to stay in their homes.

Being self built and developed, Pineta Sacchetti's land use is homogeneously residential. The area of study consists of 0.55 square kilometers, containing 525 lots with over 95 percent of the neighborhood made up of residential or mixed-use housing. Commercial and institutional uses are generally relegated to the periphery represented by pink and orange, with the majority added to the southeast, mid-west regions alongside the retrofitted metro stops. This makes a very visible residential core represented in both dark and light blue with-in the boundaries. In terms of child and age friendliness, these mixed use facilities consist of hairdressers, underground grocery stores, pharmacists, and few cafes and restaurants, meaning most of the amenities necessary to daily life are well within walking range of citizens. As a self built and developed neighborhood, public green space was not given priority within the dense residential core. Other than the large Pineto Regional park shown in green in the far right outside of our research area, the only true public space open continually within our boundaries is the small Piazza Pio IX shown in yellow. It is a small concrete piazza at the heart of a seven road intersection that is regularly occupied by all ages. The institutions in this neighborhood make up for the lack of internal space by having both late closing times and regular activities such as concerts and parties open to all residents. The implications this lack of internal public space would be the inaccessibility of institutions or green space to people living on the far west or south of the boundaries as the park or piazza would require a lot of travel which is

not child or age friendly. But with transportation hubs on the periphery and organic blocks, Pineta Sacchetti has minimal traffic flow that mitigates this inaccessibility by making the sidewalks and streets safe and easy to walk on to access these peripheral public or semi-public spaces.

The Social Layer

One critical invisible asset of Pineta Sacchetti's child and age-friendly social layer was shared history among its inhabitants. Such history endows Pineta Sacchetti with a supportive community and strong institutional structures. These processes have largely occurred as a result of historical path dependence: as Mahoney (2000) notes, path dependence occurs when "an institutional pattern—once adopted—delivers increasing benefits with its continued adoption, and thus over time it becomes more and more difficult to transform the pattern or select previously available options."



Fig.4_ Pineta Sacchetti is characterized by 4-6 story apartment buildings and hilly topography. Photo: Gray Brakke.

Here the process of path dependence has developed through the aforementioned shared history, which in turn produces place attachment. The place attachment then results in communal and institutional norms of reciprocity. For Pineta Sacchetti, this pattern means that the increasing benefits of retelling a shared history translate into a community and institutions that support the social needs of children and elders. By sharing history, reciprocal interactions are strengthened across social groups and institutions.

This local history gave residents a strong sense of pride and ownership over the neighborhood; two anecdotes from Pineta Sacchetti highlight this point. First, we once encountered one house with a lemon tree in front, and the owner came out to tell us that the tree was planted by her grandfather when he built their house. This story reinforces an intergenerational attachment to the neighborhood and its history, to which many residents are palpably connected as a result of its self-built nature. Second, to protect their regional park, the community had to unite against private developers through the 1970s and 1980s and successfully staved off the threat of development. This shared sense of history provides the neighborhood with strong social reciprocity. This history is even being imparted upon new generations and new inhabitants in the neighborhood, as we found in our photovoice workshop that almost every child was excited to share anecdotes from Pineta Sacchetti's history.

Related to its shared history, another strong invisible asset of Pineta Sacchetti's social layer is a strong sense of place. Placemaking greatly informs Pineta Sacchetti's success through its ability to create place attachment, similarly engendering a strong sense of ownership over the neighborhood. Again, path dependency can be held responsible. As Pineta Sacchetti and its institutions develop as discrete places with discrete identities, residents buy into their ideological power. Mahoney (2000) writes that in this framework,



Fig.5_ Photovoice Results: Developed film photographs from students in the neighborhood.

“once a given institution is contingently selected, the institution will be reinforced through processes of increasing legitimation.” In Pineta Sacchetti, the residents collectively selected an institutionalized identity through history and sense of place. This identity is institutionalized through community hubs like the local school and through placemaking initiatives. As revealed by the nodes of activity chosen by children and elders in our research, these institutions and their relationship with sense of place are crucial for the children and elders of Pineta Sacchetti.

Sense of place in Pineta Sacchetti has been reinforced throughout its history and by its institutions. Some important incidences of this sense of place revealing itself have been the renaming of the neighborhood’s piazza and the work of a local street art group. The main piazza in Pineta Sacchetti, Piazza Pio IX, only recently acquired its name. Formerly, it was called Piazza di Primavalle, referencing the nearby *borgata* out of which Pineta Sacchetti grew. Collective resident efforts led to its renaming, which attempts to reclaim for Pineta Sacchetti an identity independent of neighboring Primavalle. This new name represents the institutionalization of Pineta Sacchetti’s independence and thus the strengthening of its ideological power for its inhabitants, particularly given the importance of the physical space that the name represents. Other elements of the neighborhood that our research uncovered as important were the murals created by local street art group Pinacci Nostri. They were one of the most frequent subjects of the photovoice exercise. Pinacci Nostri attempts to connect the neighborhood with its history through street art, empowering its independent identity and sense of place. In turn, these efforts legitimate the power of Pineta Sacchetti and thus its social cohesion as well.

A final element of Pineta Sacchetti’s social layer that we uncovered was its norms of reciprocity. Tying together shared history and sense of place, the social layer of Pineta Sacchetti creates norms of reciprocity among its in-



habitants through path dependence. Norms of reciprocity exhibit a moral code that bind together communities regardless of background, allowing for the initiation of social interactions (Gouldner 1960). Eventually, these norms of reciprocity create iterative behaviors that encourage common property regimes among the inhabitants of Pineta Sacchetti. As a result, they form social bonds that cohere them across generations and provide social supports. These social supports are what contribute to the child and age friendliness of Pineta Sacchetti's social layer. Furthermore, they characterize what many in the neighborhood described as a village-like atmosphere. The fact that Pineta Sacchetti has been able to retain this atmosphere is largely path dependent in that it is based on its founding as a peripheral village of the city.

One of the most common impressions of Pineta Sacchetti that we found was that it was like a small village within the larger city of Rome. Many residents expressed comfort in the neighborhood for precisely this reason. Through its history, Pineta Sacchetti has shifted from a village, to a peripheral area, to being a full part of Rome's urban fabric. Had it not been for these beginnings, the neighborhood would not have developed the strong social layer that it has today. Furthermore, without this strong social layer, it would not be able to develop the institutions and norms of reciprocity that allow it to compensate for poor physical design vis-à-vis child and age friendliness. Indeed, our photovoice workshop with children and questionnaires with elders were a testament to this fact, with most respondents citing it as one of Pineta Sacchetti's most important invisible assets. Essentially, given the neighborhood's poor physical design, Pineta Sacchetti's vulnerable child and elderly populations rely upon its invisible assets created by path dependency and social reciprocity.



Fig.6 Researchers interview a representative of Pinnaci Nostri, a neighborhood organization that promotes public art and placemaking. Photo: Pinnaci Nostri.

Conclusion

Through methods of participatory research, which engaged local institutions and neighborhood residents, we uncovered information about the use and quality of life in the neighborhood that an analysis of its physical features alone would not reveal. This focus on both physical and social conditions is vital to understanding the dynamics of a place that has now grown as the result of a central plan or cohesive design. Slow flow, shared history, sense of place, and norms of reciprocity are the invisible assets that help mitigate and overcome the poor design of the neighborhood. Despite being physically unfriendly to those most vulnerable, these assets and the norms of reciprocity help to reinforce the village mentality and lifestyle that the residents are deeply grateful for. The social layer of this community helps to make Pineta Sacchetti a favorable place to live and age in place. This however, does not mean that design should be discounted or continuously ignored. As the population ages it will be important to both strengthen and reinforce the social and physical layers--and not just the physical as the literature would recommend.



Fig.5_ Social nodes, identified through Photovoice, interviews and questionnaires, were important to the neighborhood's child and age friendliness.

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È stato bello fare la tua conoscenza!
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It was nice to meet you!

search us, find us, read us, follow us, tag us, contact us, ..

