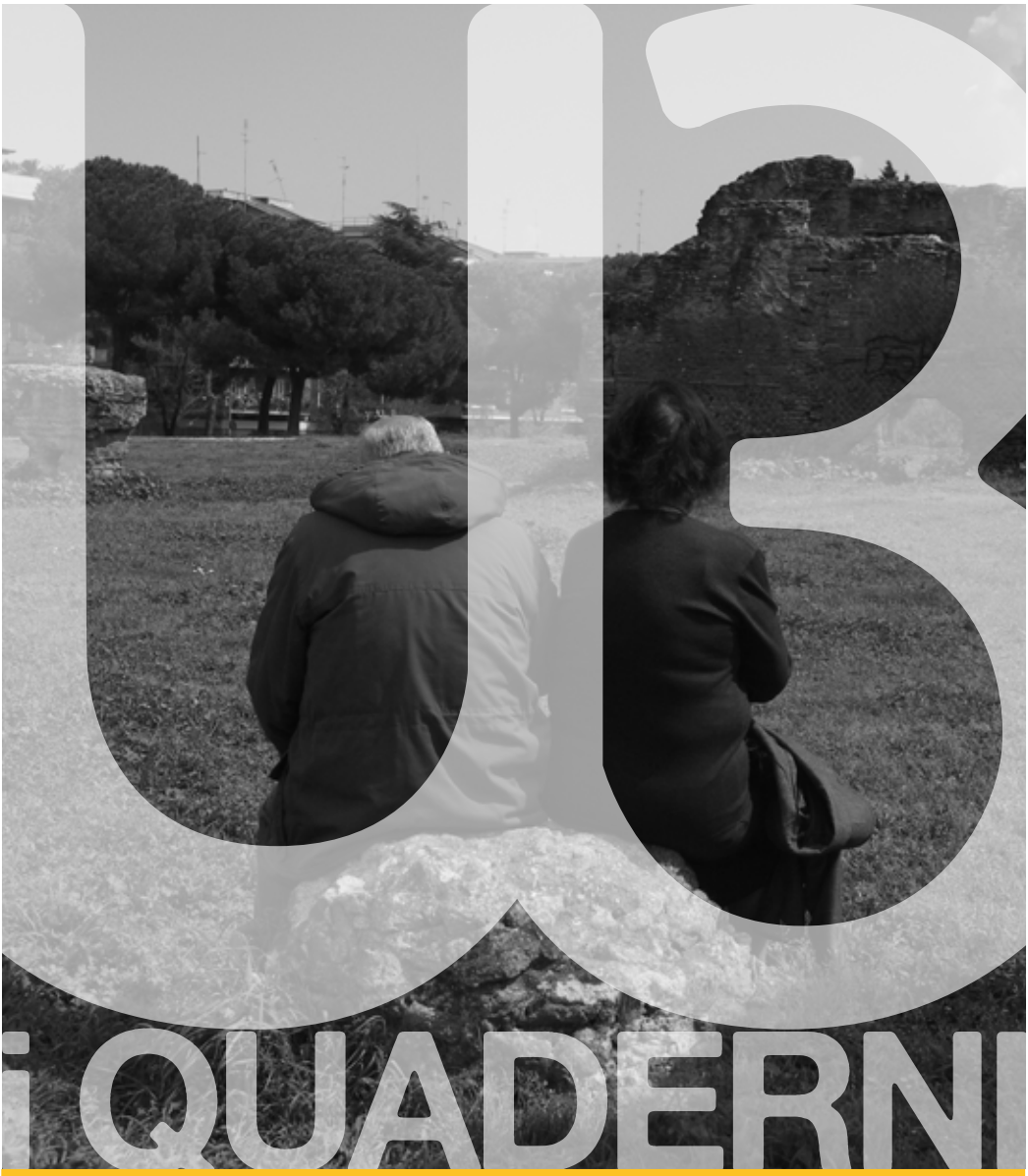

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#14

Planning for all generations

Per una pianificazione multigenerazionale

Edited by **GU | Generazione Urbana**

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i QUADERNI

in questo numero
in this issue

Topic/Tema >

Planning for all generations

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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**

Planning for all generations

Per una pianificazione multigenerazionale

>

Multigenerational Planning: Theory and Practice

La pianificazione multigenerazionale: teoria e pratica

@ Mildred E. Warner |

 # Multigenerational Planning |
 # Social and Physical Planning |
 # Cross Agency Partnerships |

 # Pianificazione multigenerazionale |
 # Pianificazione sociale e fisica |
 # Cross Agency Partnership |

Urban planners need to give greater attention to the needs of families with young children and to older adults. While planning has traditionally focused on working age adults, a broader view would give attention to the role of planning in creating communities that are good places to grow up, to work and to grow old. Demographic shifts toward an aging society have helped increase planners' attention to aging. But a focus on only one end of the life cycle is not enough. Planners need to address the needs of children as well as elders and their care givers. This article outlines the basic principles for a multigenerational planning approach. While planning has traditionally focused on physical design, a multigenerational planning requires planners also give attention to the social layer – and the importance of services and informal networks in ensuring access and social inclusion for all community members.

Introduction

Advanced industrialized societies, like Italy, face the twin demographic challenges of an increasing percentage of older adults and a decline in the percentage of young children. This makes imperative the need for planning to give more attention to the needs of children and elders. While the World Health Organization (WHO) promotes age-friendly planning and UNICEF promotes child-friendly cities, there are many elements in common. WHO's eight domains include three focused on the traditional physical aspects of planning – housing, transportation and outdoor spaces. WHO's framework also includes five additional domains that are more focused on social

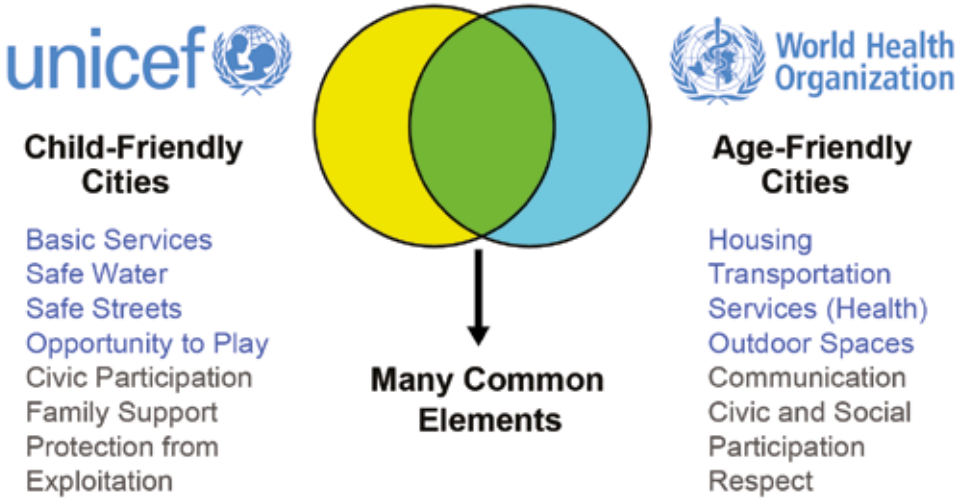

Fig.1_ *UNICEF and WHO – Domains and Common Elements.*

aspects - services (especially health), communication, civic and social participation and respect for elders (WHO 2007). Likewise, UNICEF gives attention to both the physical aspects of planning - safe water, safe streets – as well as basic services, and the support needed for healthy child development - the opportunity to play, civic participation, family support and protection from exploitation (UNICEF 2004). While WHO and UNICEF promote separate initiatives in cities around the world, planners at the community level can build on the similarities to promote age-friendly planning that addresses the needs of all ages.

What these two frameworks argue and what the neighborhood case studies profiled later in this special issue make clear, is that planners need to give attention to both the physical and the social layers within a community. While physical planning and formal services are typically the primary focus of planners, equal attention also needs to be given to the social layer. Let's look at each of these layers in turn.

Inclusive Design Promotes Access and Reduces Environmental Press

Environmental press occurs when the environment presents demands beyond a person's ability (Murray 1938), and this is especially important for the very young and the very old (Lawton and Simon 1968). For example, if sidewalks are absent or in poor repair, this undermines walkability, especially for children and older adults, and it increases the environmental press they feel in their neighborhoods. As the neighborhood case studies in this special issue will show, environmental press is a significant problem in many Roman neighborhoods. For example, Pineta Sacchetti lacks sidewalks or transit within the hilly neighborhood (Blandon et al 2017) while in San Giovanni, pollution and congestion reduce access and undermine liveability for elders and children despite the transit oriented design of the neighborhood (Shin et al 2017). The literature shows that environmental press undermines

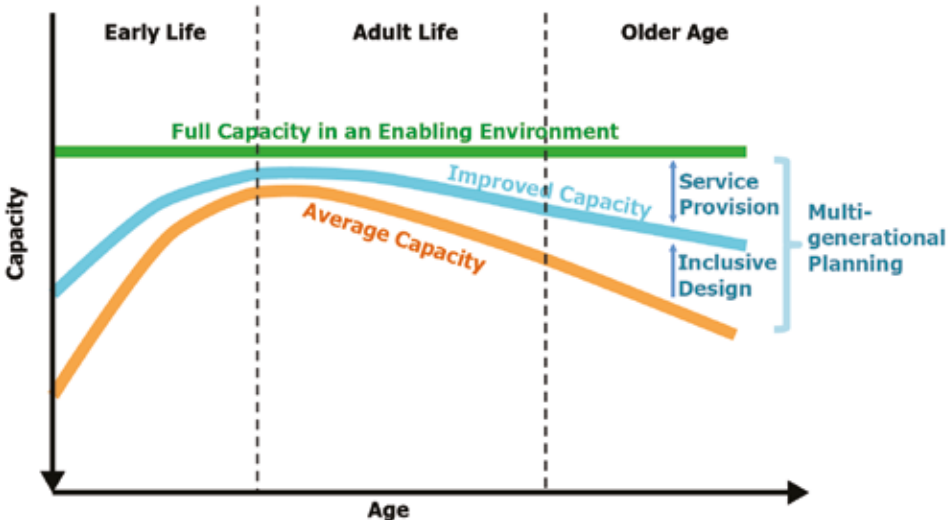

Fig.2_ *Functionality Curve. Source: Warner et al. 2016, Journal of Planning Education.*

access of children and older adults to their neighborhoods and this can lead to chronic stress and negative physical and psychological health outcomes (Kerr et al 2012).

Inclusive urban design reduces environmental press and enhances the independence of all members of society (Farber et al 2011). Safe streets and sidewalks make it possible for young children and elders to navigate their neighborhoods independently. This independence promotes healthy child development and active aging, but it also relieves pressures of caregiving by other family members. So everyone benefits from an age-friendly planning approach. This is why age-friendly planning gives significant attention to physical design characteristics in the built environment – walkability, mixed use, nearby access to parks, healthy food and services, and a variety of housing types to meet the needs of young families and older adults (Israel & Warner 2006).

Figure 2 presents a functionality curve which shows how children increase their functionality and independence as they grow up (e.g. learn to walk, ride a bike, take public transit) (Warner et al. 2017). The figure also shows how functionality can be compromised among older adults who need more assistance with basic mobility as they age (Kalache & Kickbush 1997).
Unsafe or inaccessible homes, transportation, businesses, public spaces, and neighborhoods present physical barriers that can keep elders isolated and more prone to depression, limit physical activity, and increase mobility problems. Inclusive design can enhance individual functionality and independence for both the young and the old – increasing the independence of both children, elders and their caregivers.

Figure 2 also shows a large gap exists in the ability of physical design to create fully enabled environments for children and older adults. Although good

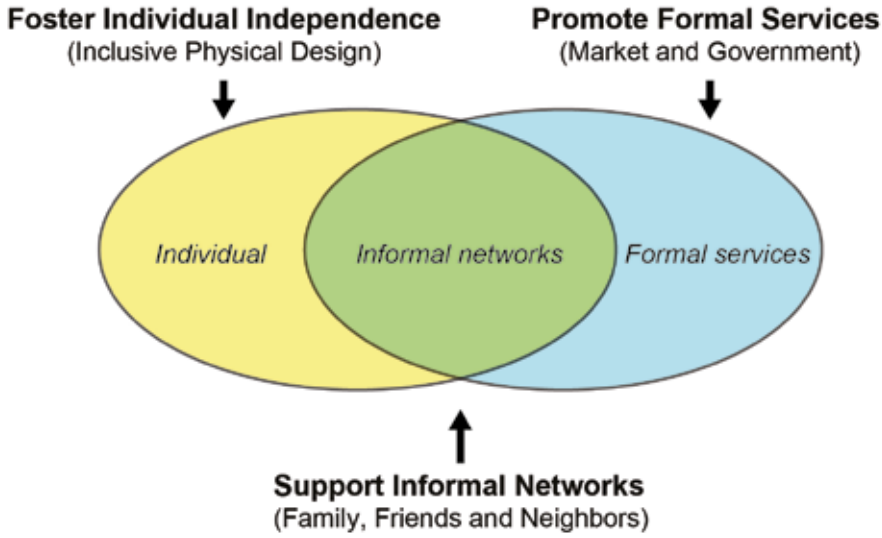

Fig.3_ *Three Roles of Planning.*

physical planning, which promotes inclusive design, helps meet demands of children and elders, good physical design alone is not sufficient. Services both complement inclusive design and ameliorate inadequate design as shown in the upper curve in Figure 2. This is why both the WHO and UNICEF frameworks give so much attention to services.

Services and Informal Networks
Can Overcome Deficiencies in Physical Design

Planners typically give priority attention to transportation, housing, land use and economic development. However, human services are equally important. Neighborhoods must be good places to work, live and play. They must provide adequate caregiving support – through easy access to child care, elder care and the range of services children and elders needs for engagement in community life. Some of these services may be provided by government; but many are provided by the private market. "Third spaces" like cafes and local shops provide critical services for neighborhood residents who have limited geographical range. In addition to providing needed goods and services, such "third spaces" also provide places for social engagement and a sense of belonging. A study of services for elders in the US (Warner et al. 2016) found that market provision of services could be enhanced by planning for aging. This study, based on a survey of 1500 US communities in 2010, found public planning and engagement of elders in the planning process helps private entrepreneurs see new market possibilities in serving the needs of elders. A 2008 national US study of child friendly planning also found a critical role for participation of families with young children in explaining which communities were more likely to have family friendly planning and zoning codes (Warner & Rukus 2013).

Beyond formal market or government based services, planners need to give attention to informal family friend and neighbor networks. Access to

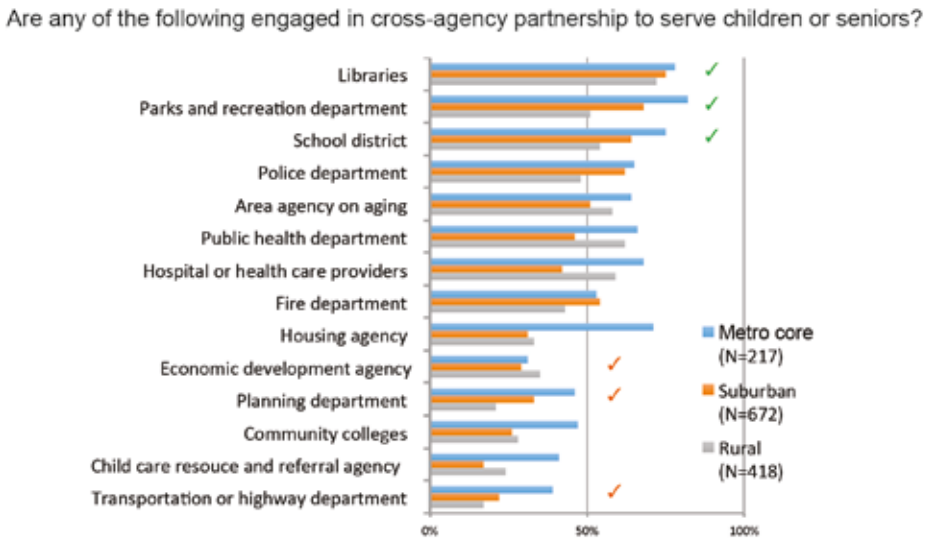

Fig.2_ *Cross Agency Partnerships. Source: Planning Across Generations Survey, 2013, 1478 city managers responding.*

services for children and elders is heavily determined by their family friend and neighbor networks. A study in Sullivan County, NY found that elders and families with young children who did not have relatives living in the same community reported greater barriers to access (Tou & Stein 2017). Informal networks can provide many services that enable older adults to age in place – a neighbor helps with groceries or transport, or in watching over a child or elder. These networks are critical to building community and to enhancing individual independence. See Figure 3.

Planners typically give most attention to physical design, which promotes individual independence, and formal government or market-based services. Informal networks are often ignored. But they may be the most important layer in helping to create child and age friendly communities. Informal networks provide more than service support and access, they also help create neighborhood norms of sharing and caring. The case studies which follow illustrate how norms can enhance access, for example, slowing traffic flow to make streets walkable even in neighborhoods without sidewalks such as Pineta Sacchetti (Blandon et al 2017). This makes age friendly neighborhoods possible even where physical design is inadequate. But norms cut both ways. The case studies which follow also show how norms can undermine access, for example, when cars park in cross walks and block sidewalks as shown in the case study of Piazza Alessandria (Bronfin et al. 2017). Norms and informal networks are critical to promoting child and age friendly planning.

Collaborative Planning is the Way Forward

While planners often focus primarily on the physical layer – transportation, land use, the built environment - multigenerational planning requires a broader view. Expanding planners' remit from physical design to service delivery requires planning for a broader range of services in neighborhoods. Planners need to pay attention to services such as child care and elder care.

It also requires looking beyond planners' traditional focus on land use, transportation and economic development, and building partnerships with different types of neighborhood agencies. Collaboration is key. In a 2013 national survey of over 1500 communities in the US, Choi and Warner (2015) found that libraries and schools are key partners for cross agency partnerships to meet the needs of children and elders (see Figure 4).

The case studies in this special issue showcase the critical role played by schools and libraries in helping neighborhoods become more child and age friendly, especially in peripheral lower income neighborhoods like Tufello (Ebed et al. 2017). However, Choi and Warner also found that the Housing, Transportation and Economic Development agencies, which are the traditional focus of planning, are the least likely to engage in cross agency partnerships to meet the needs of children and families. This needs to change. The opportunity for planners to reach out to new partners at the community level offers the potential to develop a more responsive planning to the needs of an aging society (Lehning, Chun & Scharlach, 2007).

Conclusion

Our communities are changing. An aging population and the need to provide more support to families with young children requires a broader planning approach. Traditional planning has been biased toward the needs of workers, typically assumed to be male. Planners can no longer adhere to an androcentric approach that fails to adequately address the needs of children or elders and the women who still bear the primary responsibility for their care (Micklow and Warner 2014). A primary focus on physical design is not enough. We must also address the social layer – public participation, community norms and services, especially care services for children and elders as noted in the editorial overview to this special issue (Andriola & Muccitelli 2017).

Planners most create communities for all ages – neighborhoods that are good places to grow up, to work and to age in place. 21st century planning requires an integrated approach that gives attention to all ages and those both working and living in the urban environment. A multigenerational approach is key to neighborhood vitality. To create communities livable for all ages, the needs of children and elders must be considered alongside the needs of working adults.

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