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Museum-city and museum of the city: reflections on an utopia

Anna Maria Colavitti,
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Despite of different evolution forms traceable in the settlement process of various urban context, European cities still keep identitarian elements recognizable in shared histories and common morphogenetic roots that built social and economic space able to generate administrative-political relationship and cultural landscape. The city, as representative place of memory and history, tends to enhance its own competitiveness through the promotion of local development models and policies based on environmental sustainability and on endogenous economies on which it is possible to build the social and cultural relationship of the *framework community*. The aim of this paper is to investigate how today it is possible to correlate the environmental and cultural-historical heritage spread all over historical city centre and urban texture to focus on the idea of *urban ecomuseum*, being compared with innovative forms of city fruition offer and being able to affect the urban plan building process, involving, in a comprehensive cultural offer vision, different government and urban management public systems, economic and enterprise private systems. One of the main problems inherent the disciplines related to evolution processes of anthropization of the territory is to interpret the modifications of communication systems and knowledge sharing. In the urban regeneration process management it is useful to change times and ways of use of the urban relationship spaces. In the past they could be

identifiable with a static symbol image reflecting the selective community choice that preferred them to other less attractive settlement contexts and spaces. The communication technological innovation, the growing reduction of spatial proximity, allows to enjoy singular places, delegated to perform high-rank urban duties in the contemporary cities. Through the purpose of perceptive and functional codes these places could rapidly become ephemeral and obsolete, while the historical city still keeps its privileged functions. The historical city centre has kept, together with its key-role of community long-lasting material and immaterial signs container, the capability to make recognizable a kind of operational statute linked to the presence of an historical environmental heritage and to the relationship with contemporary society still able to understand those signs. Looking at the recent regeneration urban policies deploying their effects in most of the Italian cities, it can be argued that this process could be enhanced through the integration of new forms of environmental and cultural goods use economies building a comprehensive vision of local development model, experimenting ways of reintegration of historical evidences, of memory values, cultural identity, artistic and technical environment quality. A reintegration to be up-to-dating either through the attribution of new social functions, aiming at creating new relationship contexts, or through aspects linked to management models and knowledge valorization and heritage fruition for the city use. The spreading of new communication forms allows relationship tipology at local and territorial scale that can modify the up-to-dating processes of urban policies. As a consequence, the

purposal of *complex projects* allows to manage wisely shared information flows able to create the conditions for a correct management of the historical and cultural resources in a framework of effective government of physical transformation of the city. Some modernization processes coming from the innovative use of historical territory contribute to build knowledge platforms where economic, social and cultural aspects can draw together. One of the most innovative element of cultural promotion in the city governance could be represented by the urban ecomuseum that could allow an happy cultural-historical review of the idea and the shape of a museum, including the exhibition techniques. It has to be sorted out what kinds of contents should contain an ecomuseum and its meaning. Since ecomuseum involves the construction the community economic, social, cultural space and it is the place delegated to keep and conserve these values, it has to be settled how to share the identity enclosed into paths and functions. A typical ecomuseum reference could be the *stone city*, or rather the global context in which the collective identity has built and shows its own culture, a way of life, a tradition, an art. All these aspects characterize under the identitarian point of view those urban places. Not only the searching of the *curieux*, but also of the *quotidien* in a new perspective that compress the space in which lives and feeds the cultural good, an historical place, often immaterial, full of spread values that consolidates the awareness of the transformations lived by local community through the time in a given territory. The awareness of the existence of a value heritage strictly linked to a framework

territory is defined from the anglosaxon literature as *sense of place* or more commonly as *genius loci* (1). To make evident the complex cultural plot that connects typical elements of a given space or territory helps to consolidate identity as premise for any local development action willing to be long-lasting and consistent with historical-cultural heritage.

The evolution of the ecomuseum idea

The ecomuseum idea comes from the awareness of the recognized value due either to goods belonging to historical-cultural heritage or to social and economic reasons of their production and hence to the space that they represent and identify themselves. Since 1960 the concept of heritage has been enlarged and a new model of museum was created: the *spread heritage*, overcoming the traditional concept of museum. The *petit patrimoine* traceable in a multiplicity of immaterial aspects belonging to community life space constitutes an impressive carrier of meanings and relationships that link together cultural heritage and place. The birth of *field museum* shows the need of new interpretative tools that help to perceive the material and the immaterial sense of the territory. Speaking about ecomuseum means to amplify this perception because city represents the place that "absorbes time and ... consecrates the social relationship" (2). That's why the Framework Plan experience allows to individuate a possible extension of the ecomuseum idea to the historical city context. In the urban scenarios of the richest countries, the production and the information flows have a leading role for economic growth and inter-city competition and territorial marketing. The new pointed

out operational management models seem to be oriented to an urban planning practice turned to a comprehensive resource recovery, to a more flexible use of the foremost places and buildings, to the opening of communication platforms between virtual and physical space. The stratified historical cultural heritage in the city and in the territory can make understandable the place identity matrix, and at the same time, to purpose itself as a tool for a self-sustainable local development. Historical centres offer unique material to interpret city relationship networks founded on the phylogenetic framework community matrix. In a beginning approach these issues were analysed during the drawing up of the Framework Plan for Historical Centre Recovery of Cagliari. According to urban regeneration and economic development expectations and to shared principles of sustainability, were purposed new possibilities of use and management of the city historical cultural resources, through innovative transmission forms of the local heritage knowledge (3). The procedures and the decision support techniques allow to evaluate the consequences on the environment and on the economy of the transformations provoked by tools for the territory programming and by strategies implemented through complex projects. The set of rules prepared for the Framework Plan to achieve the objectives and to define strategic actions implement a technical-operational method oriented to recognize in a specific context stratified values from which drawing behaviors and ways of use and transformation suitable to environmental, historical, cultural resources spread in the urban texture.

The Framework Plan recognizes and classifies, on the basis of the permanence of environmental historical values, the settlement type-morphologies operating to give an effective functional role to the environmental-historical units. The context knowledge, based on a GIS georeferenced platform, is main condition to implement the set of rules of the Plan to the historical-environmental units. The urban texture of Cagliari has been shared in units to which it is possible to refer historical-architecture heritage and conservation, recovery and suitability criteria. In the recovery project and in the urban regeneration is essential the evaluation moment both for the existing resources and for the actions purposed. This approach allows, through shared knowledge forms, to orient support policies to the recovery problem and to the fruition of the historical-environmental resources existing in the historical texture. Beside the general urban recovery is actual the tendency to regenerate for non-residential use dismantled buildings. This process foster also the recovery of obsolete social spaces and the valorization of the existing cultural deposits. Paying attention to the sustainability of the purposed transformations, the Plan experiences an ecomuseum approach towards historical city. The local identity, its culture and its society, is made understandable through a system of memory paths allowing the perception of ordinary relationships and morphologies (historical, cultural and social). Spaces, landscapes, urban functions of the historical quarters are made clear and enjoyable, rebuilding the sense of a pluristratified context full of impressive architectural and cultural evidences. The advanced fruition

purpose, operating discovering synergies between environment, social and economic context and cultural goods, appears compatible with the comprehensive framework of uses. And it is consistent with the interpretation of the urban structure as ecosystem in co-evolution with its unitarian palimpsest, on which manage to get into innovative processes of socioeconomic development and of historical texture regeneration. It has to state beforehand that the potentialities of communication instruments are of the greater importance as elements of added value for plans based on a cultural matrix. Development and management promotion of the urban renewal process allow in cooperative way to start sequences of actions and complex projects capable to bring again interest to historical centres. The idea of structuring knots and paths of memory in an ecomuseum network of the historical city has offered the possibility to obtain important synergies with the renewal actions foreseen by the Framework Plan. The consequences of this approach can originate new ecosustainable local development and generate projects aiming at the integration of valorization process of the whole territory resources. This means to consider the recovery of urban cultural heritage (here intended as the systems of local community historical values, typical of the historical city centres) as a founder of the evolutive process of the contemporary city. The knowledge of the invariable parts of ancient city is not merely confined to the single monument, and discovers slow social, cultural, economic stratification processes that gave continuity to settlement models. The acknowledgement and the valorization of these value

systems are hence the basis of the projects of an ecomuseum.

Notes

1. In France Malraux law, since 1962, valorizes cultural space.
2. See Perrot J.C., "Rapport sociaux et villes au XVIIIème siècle", *Annales ESC* 1968, p. 252.
3. The Framework Plan for the historical centre of Cagliari has been elaborated between 1996 and 1998 on behalf of City of Cagliari, by an interdisciplinary group led by Giancarlo Deplano.