ADOPT A NEIGHBOURHOOD: WHEN PLANNERS MEET SCHOOLCHILDREN

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Keywords: youth, neighbourhood, Palermo

Abstract
Throughout this paper we will present a project that revolves around the idea of the neighbourhood as an 'identity container' and aims at bridging the gap between traditional planning programmes and the new challenges linked both to the crisis of public spaces and to participatory planning.
During the last two years, our University has been working in cooperation with the Municipality of Palermo and many primary and secondary schools of the city on a project called 'La scuola adotta il quartiere' ('Schools Adopt Neighbourhoods'). Within the project, planning students from the University guided the schoolchildren (8- to 13-years old) to the discovery of their neighbourhood and its community. Planners also had a key role in helping their younger 'colleagues' in the proposal and development of collectively discussed renewal policies: for instance, some of them proposed an urban renewal intervention in the well-known and deprived ZEN neighbourhood, and this proposal was later approved by the Municipality.
This process caused a mutual beneficial effect: on the one hand, schoolchildren became more conscious of the idea and nature of their neighbourhood and of the notion of ethical participation. On the other hand, planning students began to concretely explore the social role they are called to play in our contemporary society, and the ethical dilemmas that every participatory project involves.

1. Introduction

This paper revolves around the idea that active and ethical participation must include not only the adult part of the population, but also younger people. The paper stems from an action research held in Palermo during the last two years (2013-2015), and draws upon previous experiences that we have already documented (Picone and Schilleci, 2012 and 2013).
Being the result of the cooperative work of a geographer (Marco Picone), a planner (Filippo Schilleci) and a landscape scholar (Francesca Lotta), this article mostly deals with interdisciplinary topics. Particularly, we will build the foundations of our reasoning on three key aspects: the notion of neighbourhood (arguably the *ideology* of neighbourhood: Lefebvre, 1967; see also de Certeau, Giard and Mayol, 1994; Galster, 2001; Borlini and Memo, 2008; Moulaert *et alii*, 2010; Picone, 2010; Picone and Schilleci, 2012), the generic practice of participatory processes and their ethical implications (Sanyal, 2002; Watson, 2003; Lo Piccolo, 2008 and 2009; Campbell, 2012; Picone and Lo Piccolo, 2014), and finally the inclusion of schoolchildren and young people in participatory planning processes, along with its peculiar ethical consequences (Checkoway, 1998; Driskell, 2002; Dennis, 2006; Gulson and Symes, 2007; Sclavi and Giornelli, 2014).
We will then mainly focus on the third point, and describe in full details the two-years experience we held in Palermo. Within the project to be discussed, planning students have played an essential role, and this has compelled us to speculate on the repercussions of this involvement for our academic programmes. We will also relate the practical, political and ethical issues that arose from this experience, as this will allow us to debate the future guidelines of this project within a larger conceptual framework, based on the notion of ethical participation.

Throughout this paper, we will suggest a few answers to the questions we have incurred, which are briefly summarised hereinafter.

1) How do we need to theoretically redefine the role of neighbourhoods, considering the geographic specificities of neighbourhoods between different cultural areas? In other words, do Italian neighbourhoods (*quartieri*) work exactly like their Anglo-American (or French, or German, etc.) equivalents, or are there any peculiar differences that we must account for?
2) What sort of participation can enhance the active role of citizens in the peculiar Southern-Italian context, which shows a strong (if not complete) lack of collaborative approaches from local institutions? Is there a way to overcome the contradictory (or weak) requests by either institutions or disadvantaged groups, in order to design a shared and community-based redevelopment programme? How do we strengthen the precarious notion of public spaces, when these are almost entirely replaced with private areas, often controlled and managed by wealthy entrepreneurs?
3) Which ethical issues arise from the participatory practices we are employing, particularly if we want to include young people in those practices? Do we have to use particular techniques of inclusion, or just set easy goals, so that the youth can effortlessly grasp the main points of action? What is the role of planning scholars and, most notably, planning students in these processes? Should we—as professional educators—adapt our traditional teaching curricula to train students to work with under age youth? And do ethical issues arise from this decision? Moreover, is there any peculiar kind of planning tasks that students should be trained to deal with, or are planning students able to cope with all the steps included in managing these participatory processes?

2. Research Background

One of the authors of this paper, coming from a social sciences background, has spent some years (2003-2005) as a junior high school teacher before starting his work as a researcher. Drawing from this doubly privileged point of view (both schoolteacher and academic researcher), he was able to design a scientific research starting from the field notes and participant observations that he collected during those years. Most of the notes revolved around the condition of schoolchildren in deprived Palermo slums, and later led to the publishing of some articles on the infamous ZEN neighbourhood (Picone, 2011).

During the spring of 2005, a group of young Dutch planning students from the University of Utrecht came to visit Palermo. They asked us (the authors of this paper) to be guided in a visit to the most important places of the city, and we proposed them to visit the ZEN neighbourhood along with some 12-years old schoolchildren (Alaimo and Picone, 2009). The goal of this visit was not just to show a socially deprived slum within the city, but most notably to help the Dutch understand *how* that particular slum was lived, represented and performatively enacted by the local youth. This experience inspired a great deal of ideas on the role of young schoolchildren, if one wants to truly understand how some troublesome social realities work.

An additional experience that is worth mentioning as part of our research background is more directly tied to academic teaching. We have been teaching Planning and Urban Geography to young planners at the University of Palermo for more than ten years now. As part of our teaching, we have always led young planners in several inspections that called for both traditional planning analyses and social observation (Picone and Schilleci, 2013). As the years passed, we realised what an important role schoolchildren played in these analyses and observations: not only did they account as essential city-users and social actors for the future of the city, but they were among the most interesting cases when it came to studying the perception of a neighbourhood. In other words, data collected from schoolchildren were proving to be more and more significant.

One last element that we feel like discussing here is our research work on the notion of neighbourhood in Palermo. The Municipality has recently (1997) put the 25 existing urban neighbourhoods together into 8 larger land units, called *circoscrizioni*. Therefore, the city of Palermo is now divided into 8 administrative sub-regions, none of which has any peculiar element, be it social, historical or geographical, that can help its residents acknowledge or recognise it. Most citizens do not even know which *circoscrizione* they live in. We have claimed (Picone and Schilleci, 2012) that this approach is a failure in urban policies, as it completely denies or ignores the role of neighbourhoods in shaping urban identities. Thus, this lack of relationship between the citizens and the administration got us persuaded that schoolchildren and the youth in general are to be included in participatory practices, as we believe that childhood and adolescence are most suited for stimulating a political awareness of what it means to be part of a community, and therefore to be part of a neighbourhood.

3. Relevance and Objectives

Our research exploits the educational role of the university in our city: we consider education not simply as the transmission of technical knowledge to our students; instead, we are training planners and geographers as 'cultural mediators' whose task is—amongst others—to build bridges that can connect the different social actors and mediate negotiations in conflicting situations (Forester, 2008). It is not only a matter of understanding the different points of view of social actors, but also an ability to employ active listening (according to Sclavi, 2007, based on the work by Bateson, 2000), conflict resolution (Deutsch, Coleman and Marcus, 2006), and many other qualitative techniques (DeLyser *et alii*, 2010).

Therefore, our duty as professional educators is not only to deliver scientific ideas to our students, but also to train them as mediators. This means that the university leaves its ivory tower to 'meddle' in everyday conflicts. If we want to reach out to the world out there, there is no better way than to take an active role in the educational processes that include not only university students, but also the urban population as a whole.

So far, we can actually state that there seems to be a shift in the general attitude towards our project and ideas: whereas, at first, we experienced mistrust and scepticism—most schoolteachers, for instance, considered us according to the cliché of the academic researcher, the expert technician uninterested in delving into everyday problems—, the last two years have brought a significant change in the way the municipality and the schools perceived our role as academicians. In a sense, these projects help the university in accomplishing its third sector mission and, meanwhile, help schoolteachers and other social actors in understanding a core idea of urban studies, i.e. what it means to design a city in a participatory way.

The reason why we are inciting the university as an institution to this practical approach is that we are experiencing a profound need to reconsider the role of planners in our city and, more generally, in Italy. Apparently, all planners in Italy talk about participation, social inclusion and reducing the disparities between the rich and the poor. However, politicians generally misinterpret or blatantly distort these guidelines, by repeating the same *totem words* (like participation, inclusion, etc.) even in non-participatory and non-inclusive practices. Meanwhile, the integration of the young planning graduates in the labour market is becoming more and more complicated: «with the crisis of funding for planners in public government, the diffusion of planning consultants has drawn the attention of many architects and engineers, who are backed up by stronger and more powerful professional associations. This has caused many problems for young planners trying to find their way into public administration» (Lo Piccolo, Picone and Schilleci, 2015, p.53).

Since the condition of young planners is so frail in Italy today, reinforcing their position as mediators between the administration and the youth could somehow enhance their chances to be acknowledged as experts in a field of knowledge that neither engineers nor architects can adequately master.

There is one additional consequence to our research. Not only can young planners benefit from working with the youth, but the whole city could get some benefits as well. As we stated earlier, the population of Palermo seems to ignore the administrative boundaries and sub-regions disposed by the Municipality. By working on the connections between neighbourhood and identity, we are supporting bottom-up participation and social inclusion in planning processes, as we have discussed elsewhere (Picone and Lo Piccolo, 2014).

4. Conceptual Framework

In order to structure our research, we have drawn upon three concepts that we will present here: neighbourhood, participation, and including young people in participatory processes.

4.1. Neighbourhood

It would take more time than we can use here to discuss all the scholarly positions on the notion of neighbourhood (Picone and Schilleci, 2012). For instance, Galster (2001, p.2111) has observed that «urban social scientists have treated "neighbourhood" in much the same way as courts of law have treated pornography: as a term that is hard to define precisely, but everyone knows it when they see it». In our research, the neighbourhood becomes an ideology[1] (Lefebvre, 1967) that is actually able to "save the city" (Moulaert *et alii*, 2010).

Now, one could say, why stressing the role of neighbourhoods, in an era that disregards spatial proximity in favour of virtual relationships (Borlini and Memo, 2008)? In other words, why should we still consider the neighbourhood as a significant scale of analysis and action, if we can easily keep in touch with our friends and family even if they live a thousand miles away from us? What is the point of putting neighbourhoods back to the centre of our discourse? The answer lies at the core of contemporary social and political life. We shall try to explain this concept by showing the link between neighbourhoods and urban governance in the words of some very influential scholars.

A few years ago, Patrick Le Galès (1998, p.79) described urban governance as the ability to integrate and shape local interests, organizations, social groups, and also as the ability to represent them outside the city, to develop more or less unified strategies of relationships with the market, the state, other cities and the other levels of government. In 2003 he claimed that governance is "the art of governing", and pointed out that Medieval European cities are one of the fundamental elements of modern European societies. They act as the melting pot of the social, political and economic organization of European Nation-States. European cities become the "incomplete societies" where new, multi-scale governance modes are structured.

We acknowledge that urban governance is particularly affected by the economic crisis, the neoliberal trends and the cosmopolitanization of our world (Beck, 2006; Harvey, 2009). Traditional urban governance is experiencing deep changes, with the private sector getting more and more predominant when compared to the public sector in crisis (Peck, Theodore and Brenner, 2012). This compels us to find new levels of interaction between the public sector and private social actors, especially if we consider the latter as more than the sum of wealthy entrepreneurs and politically engaged businesspersons. Here comes the neighbourhood: in our opinion, Michel de Certeau's idea of neighbourhood as the middle ground between the private sphere (the house) and the public one (the

[1] «Nous commençons par rappeler qu'il y a une *idéologie* du quartier, en déclin, mais qui n'a pas perdu son audience et son influence. […] le quartier n'est pas un détail accidentel, un aspect secondaire et contingent de la réalité urbaine, mais son essence» (Lefebvre, 1967, p.9). Lefebvre then actually debates the ideology of neighbourhood and proposes his own ideas on the topic, but we want to point out the importance of neighbourhoods in social sciences, as the author would acknowledge them as key elements for the comprehension of the city, just in the time when he was writing some of his masterpieces (like *Le droit à la ville*, 1968).

city) can prove particularly useful: «The neighborhood is, almost by definition, a mastery of the social environment because, for the dweller, it is a known area of social space in which, to a greater or lesser degree, he or she knows himself or herself to be recognized. The neighborhood can thus be grasped as this area of public space in general (anonymous, for everyone) in which little by little a *private*, *particularized space* insinuates itself as a result of the practical, everyday use of this space. The fact that dwellers have their homes here, the reciprocal habituation resulting from being neighbors, the processes of recognition—of identification—that are created thanks to proximity, to concrete coexistence in the same urban territory: all these "practical" elements offer themselves for use as vast fields of exploration with a view to understanding a little better the great unknown that is everyday life. […] As a result of its everyday use, the neighborhood can be considered as the progressive privatization of public space. It is a practical device whose function is to ensure a continuity between what is the most intimate (the private space of one's lodging) and what is the most unknown (the totality of the city or even, by extension, the rest of the world). […] The neighborhood is the middle term in an existential dialectic (on a personal level) and a social one (on the level of a group of users), between inside and outside» (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol, 1998, pp.9-11). Considering the neighbourhood a "middle term" between the public sphere (*the city* or even *the world*) and the private sphere (*home*) offers an insight on why neighbourhoods are still very important for the unfolding of the everyday life. They become even more important within the contemporary economic crisis, which impairs the role of public spaces.

Neighbourhoods, thus, play a key role in European cities, although there is a distinction to be made. In the Anglo-American context, a neighbourhood is not just a spatial entity: it is also a social network of people connected by common values, ways of life and geographic imaginaries. The Italian equivalent of neighbourhood (*quartiere*) seems pretty much focused on spatial categories. It could probably be translated with the word *district*, therefore losing most of its social connotations. Similar observations could be repeated for other countries, like Switzerland (Giordano, 2015). This means that the social role of neighbourhoods in Italy is something that must be rediscovered and enhanced by stimulating citizens to a greater awareness of the connections between neighbourhoods-as-spatial-entities and social communities. Neighbourhoods must be considered as 'identity containers' that set up the social bases of community life (Picone and Schilleci, 2012 and 2013), a notion that is quite common in the Anglo-American world.

4.2. Participation

Discussing participation and the ethical issues that it provokes would probably require an entire paper or two. Henri Lefebvre (1968) was arguably the most influent scholar in introducing the notion of social inclusion. We have used Jürgen Habermas's (1981; 1989) theories of consensus and communicative rationality as a warning to the risks that participation incurs, and Patsy Healey's (2009) *caveat* on participatory democracy. In discussing the ethical implications of participation (Campbell, 2012) we have also tried to assess the notions of ethical compromise (Sanyal, 2002) and conflicting rationalities (Watson, 2003).

One of the foundations of our discourse is that participation is a set of qualitative techniques of action-research (deLyser *et alii*, 2010), with its own rules that must be followed, and yet, at the same time, adapted to the contexts in which we practice it. We have experienced participatory techniques within the last ten years in Palermo (Lo Piccolo, 2008 and 2009; Bonafede and Lo Piccolo, 2010; Picone and Lo Piccolo, 2014), although the Southern Italian condition is quite peculiar: «the context we are referring to differs for two main aspects: 1. The weakness of local institutions; 2. The consequential de-legitimization of the public administration (politicians and professionals) by hook (corruption) or by crook (violence/intimidation), which guarantees a general condition of inertia, inaction, inefficiency and mistrust» (Picone and Lo Piccolo, 2014, p.67). This does not imply that one cannot use participation in Palermo or in other unprivileged areas, but particular caution must be exercised to

avoid the trap of the municipal administration using participation in a poor, sometimes even unfair or utterly rhetorical way.[2]
Amongst the various participatory techniques that can be used today, we have chosen to investigate and employ Lawrence Susskind's consensus building (2014a) and 'serious games' (2014b) approaches, as they seem to work very well with the young age category of the people we have involved in our research.

4.3. Including the Youth

In 1998, Barry Checkoway looked at the connections between the topics we have so far discussed, and distinguished five types of participation that involved young people and neighbourhoods: «"youth action" and "citizen action" in which people take initiative and organize themselves for social change; "youth development" which promotes the positive development of young people rather than only overcoming their deficits; "neighborhood development" through which people implement programs of their own at the neighborhood level; and "neighborhood-based youth initiatives" which emphasize youth participation and neighborhood development in the same single program» (Checkoway, 1998, p.788). Several years later, however, he emphasised the lack of any agreement on the basic idea of what youth participation is, or should be (Checkoway, 2011). There has actually been some debate on the role of young people in participation, both in general terms (Ward, 1979; Driskell, 2002; Gulson and Symes, 2007) and in very peculiar approaches, like the use of qualitative GIS (Dennis, 2006). However, there is a need for further speculation on this topic, especially if one considers how young people often have a very low interest towards the public sphere.
Regarding this particular topic, we believe that Italy has displayed a decent degree of attention towards the inclusion of young people in participatory processes. Most important in this direction was the work of Francesco Tonucci, whose book *La città dei bambini* (2005) marked a significant step in this field of research; in particular, Palermo has hosted several experiences in working with schoolchildren to include them in urban participatory processes (Pinzello and Quartarone, 2005). More recently, some influential social scientists have discussed how to apply qualitative techniques of participation to schoolchildren (Sclavi and Giornelli, 2014).[3]
Including young people in participation means facing several ethical issues. Despite the general agreement that participation is essential and valuable in contemporary societies, practicing participation with young people requires an additional amount of caution, as it is extremely easy to manipulate the young for unfair reasons. Supporting or opposing the realisation of a public park or a shopping mall, for instance, is not something that should be easily done without any political awareness of the pros and cons, as well as of the consequences it can have. Persuading schoolchildren of the goodness of a shopping mall could be a piece of cake, but it might foster the profits of wealthy entrepreneurs over the general advantage of the community as a whole. These ethical issues definitely deserve additional analysis, although some steps in describing the relationships between planning and ethics (Watson, 2003; Campbell, 2012) or geography and ethics (Valentine, Butler and Skelton, 2001; Valentine, 2005) have actually been taken. Virginia Morrow, who has recently related an experience she conducted in a town in South-Eastern England, aimed at grasping the perception of 12- to 15-years old school students about their neighbourhoods, points out the ethical issues she has faced: obtaining consent from young people, reporting back to the research participants, confidentiality and privacy, pseudonyms, and drawing out policy implications from the study (Morrow, 2008, p.53). Morrow's

[2] See for instance the Electronic Town Meeting experience in Palermo: the administration wanted to provide the city with a way to empower deprived social groups, but ended up (ab)using the tool in order to build consensus over its own pre-existing goals (Picone and Lo Piccolo, 2014, p.66).
[3] We would like to acknowledge Marianella Sclavi's role in diffusing the Anglo-Saxon tradition of participation tools in Italy. Her books (see Sclavi, 2007 for the English translation of one of her most well-known writings) have deeply influenced the scholarly approach to participation, active listening, planning for real, etc.

concerns are of utter importance, but there might be many more addenda, particularly regarding the possible misuse of the collected data for unforeseen or inappropriate political means.
Additionally, we want to stress that our action-research was based on *young planners* dealing with *younger schoolchildren*. We have coordinated the whole project, but it was our planning students who were actually getting in touch and working with their younger counterparts. This raises questions about the suitability of traditional academic planning education for working with schoolchildren. Most planning curricula in Italy fail to provide the students with competences for dealing with young children and involving them in participatory practices: social sciences in planning curricula still have to be strengthened, in place of the abundance of technical courses (both from architecture and engineering; see Lo Piccolo, Picone and Schilleci, 2015). In order to get our planning students ready for dealing with schoolchildren, we have shaped our courses so that they provide the tools and methodologies needed in such cases, including a particular attention to qualitative techniques of analysis. However, there are still issues that cannot be ignored: how to build positive interactions between young planners and children, the role of planners with regards to schoolteachers, the risk of dictating choices that are considered inherently better or more suited to solve urban issues, etc. Considering that our research is not over yet, we can only produce some initial insight on these topics; however, we are fully aware that more work has to be done on this subject.

5. Methodology

In designing the methodology of our research, we aimed at mixed-methods approaches that recognised «geography's new turn to synthesis and holism. […] The interdisciplinary nature of geography […] can foster a methodological hybridity in the mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods and methodologies» (Sui and DeLyser, 2012, pp.112-115). The scientific reasons for this choice are drawn from the contemporary debate on mixing qualitative and quantitative techniques of analysis (Crang, 2002; DeLyser *et alii*, 2010; Sui and DeLyser, 2012; DeLyser and Sui, 2012 and 2014; Alaimo and Picone, 2015). Particularly, from the various qualitative techniques of analysis we have picked qualitative interviews (McDowell, 2010), mental maps (Lynch, 1960; Gould and White, 2002; Coverley, 2006), *shadowing* and participant observation (Czarniawska, 2007; Sclavi, 2007; Alaimo and Picone, 2015), rhythmanalysis (DeLyser and Sui, 2012), planning for real (Gibson, 1991; Sclavi, 2002), and qualitative GIS (Picone and Lo Piccolo, 2014). We have mixed them with several more traditional quantitative analyses, both demographic and technical. Most of the techniques we have used were already presented in Picone and Schilleci, 2012. Before starting our action research with schoolchildren, we have trained our planning students in the use of these techniques through specific courses (including Social Geography and Planning Workshops).

6. Findings

In 2012, following the publishing of a book on the neighbourhoods of Palermo (Picone and Schilleci, 2012), our University signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Municipality. This was aimed at studying the existing administrative partition of the city and proposing a new partition that would be more connected to community ties, to the sense of belonging to a place, and to the geographical and historical traditions of our city. However, the feedback from the Municipality has proved quite ambiguous. After an initial appreciation, in the last few months the administration turned to other partnerships and deprioritized our agenda. We have already remarked how the reason for that lies probably in the instrumental, rhetoric use of participation from the administration (Picone and Lo Piccolo, 2014).
In the meantime, we have started working with the Department of Education (*Area della Scuola*) of our Municipality, which deals with public schools. We have started cooperating on a project called "*La scuola adotta il quartiere*" ("Schools Adopt Neighbourhoods"). The project stems from a

previous[4] experience called "*La scuola adotta un monumento*" ("Schools Adopt Monuments"), which picks up abandoned, closed or otherwise unvisited pieces of the artistic heritage of Palermo and revitalises them for one week per year, with young schoolchildren guiding the visitors (parents, families, friends, tourists, etc.) to the discovery of those monuments.

It might seem that our project works exactly like the previous one, only that instead of a single monument the school would adopt an entire neighbourhood. However, something sets the neighbourhoods project apart, and it is the role of planning students. By signing an agreement with the Department of Education and with several primary and secondary schools of the city, we have arranged an internship programme for our students. After attending courses dealing with the techniques that best work with schoolchildren,[5] they would spend some months in the schools working side by side with schoolteachers on the notion of neighbourhood, on its boundaries and relationships with the other parts of the city, on their strengths and weaknesses, and so on. They would start their internship by asking schoolchildren the simplest, yet most complicated question: what is a neighbourhood? On that base, they would build the foundations of a research aimed at raising awareness of the social, urban and administrative implications of neighbourhoods in our city. Planning students have employed all the qualitative and quantitative techniques of analysis we have discussed earlier, by asking the schoolchildren to draw pictures and maps of their neighbourhoods, by taking them for walks in their neighbourhoods, and—towards the end of the internship—by asking them to design some changes that were suitable to improve life quality in the neighbourhood. Some renewal proposals were actually presented to the Municipality as the result of the cooperation between the University, the schools and the Municipality itself; one of these proposals (calling for a local renewal intervention in the ZEN neighbourhood) has been approved and funded by the Municipality (Brinch and Montalbano, 2015),[6] while others are still in the evaluation process.

The main outputs of the whole project were some weekends during which the young schoolchildren led all visitors in a guided walk through their neighbourhood. We had 26 guided tours in 26 different neighbourhoods over two years. For each of these tours, particular attention was paid in pointing out that the schoolchildren were not supposed to deliver history lectures or show any degree of academic knowledge; rather, they were simply called to show the visitors the neighbourhood according to their own perception. This caused lots of surprises when those visitors who were accustomed to only look for pieces of art were actually taken to secondary alleys where, for instance, an improvised soccer field had become a meeting point for the young—a proof of the need and desire for more playgrounds and public spaces. During the weekends, the schoolchildren would hand out some guidebooks they had written during the previous months, along with the planning students from the University. All of these guidebooks contain the shared definition of neighbourhood that the children have agreed upon, the emblem (a sort of stylised logo) of the neighbourhood (a result of a democratic vote to choose the best among the many emblems drawn by each and every schoolchild), a geo-referenced map of the guided tour, and a glimpse at the renewal projects proposed by the children for their neighbourhood. A few examples of these guides are shown in Figures 1-4.

[4] The project *La scuola adotta un monumento* started in 1992 in Naples, and was later brought to Palermo in 1995 by the *Fondazione Napoli Novantanove* (see http://en.lascuolaadottaunmonumento.it/, accessed May 16, 2015).

[5] During our first year (2013-2014), a grand total of ten schools were involved in the project (six were primary schools, with 8- to 10-years old students, while four were secondary schools, with 11- to 13-years old students). In the second year (2014-2015), we included thirteen schools (seven primary, six secondary). All these schools are inside the administrative boundaries of Palermo, quite evenly covering all the different city parts.

[6] As a consequence of the project, our students have produced almost a dozen degree theses on neighbourhoods and schools.

Figures 1-4. Pages from Neighbourhood Guidebooks (Cruillas, ZEN, Pagliarelli, Borgo Vecchio).

During the second year of the project, the presidents and councillors of the *circoscrizioni* were involved in the event. They first went to visit the schoolchildren to explain the role of the *circoscrizioni* within the city, and thus confirmed that almost no student (or teacher, for that matter) had a clear idea of what the *circoscrizioni* were. Then, they took part to the guided tours arranged by the schools, and played an active role in discussing and revitalising the notion of neighbourhood.
Even in this very brief summary of the project, it seems clear that planning students arguably played the crucial role of mediators between the administration (Municipality, *circoscrizioni*), social groups (schoolteachers and children) and the academic world. This was exactly one of the main goals of the project: to help planning students recognise their role as mediators, and to make them aware of the social function of planning today, but also of the ethical dilemmas that stem from participatory processes. For instance, many planning students had to face the aftermath of their internships, with schoolchildren still trying to keep in touch with them and inciting them to provide feedbacks on the renewal interventions they had designed together (precisely the "reporting back" issue addressed by Morrow, 2008). The renewal proposal for the ZEN neighbourhood, for instance, is the result of the schoolchildren's pressure on our planning students: in a sense, the children were afraid of being let down and abandoned after their inclusion in designing a better neighbourhood.
As a whole, we might state that this project had two major positive effects. First, it made young people more aware of what a neighbourhood is: not just as a place you live in, but also a community you live with. In a sense, it means working on the notion of ethical participation, with all the *caveats* we have discussed before. Second, it prepared planning students to the challenges of working with (and for) a community, with all the inner conflicts that may arise, and to explore their role as not just "urban technicians", but as active members of the community.
Naturally, there have been issues and situations that need additional thoughts and efforts. To name a few: the ambiguous role of politicians, the inability to fulfil these kinds of projects for a long time without proper funding from the administration (so far we received no funding of sort), the need to revise planning curricula within our universities to suit these projects, and many more. Still, we believe that the pros outweigh the cons.

7. Conclusions

In order to draw a few conclusions, we want to get back to the questions we have posed in our introduction, and provide a few answers to them. These are not state-of-the-art, of course, since the project is not over yet and we plan to collect additional elements of reflections in the future. Yet, some considerations follow:

1) Considering that Italian neighbourhoods are not mostly perceived as community-based places but as administrative districts, our project tries to build on the notion of neighbourhoods as "identity containers", places that host a sense of belonging. It is not a matter of mimicking the Anglo-American idea of neighbourhood, for it has its own peculiarities and issues; rather, it is a way to get back to the roots of what neighbourhoods are: places of proximity that bridge the private sphere (the individual) to the public one (the community), as de Certeau suggests.
2) The Southern-Italian situation is not easily solved with a magical formula. Criminal organizations, weak or corrupt administrations and an embedded distrust in everything that is public still exact a very heavy toll. However, the lack of state-centred funding (that have diffused political nepotism and corruption to unimagined levels) is also producing the paradoxical effect of stimulating bottom-up responses to the crisis. Many third sector associations are supporting participatory processes that enhance life quality in the cities. In this paradoxical context, the universities—and urban studies in particular—are called to play a major role in creating new forms of active citizenship and participation. This may also empower disadvantaged groups over wealthy elites, and revamp the notion of public spaces.

3) In order to face the ethical issues tied to participation with the youth, our educational system should strengthen the study of qualitative methodologies in planning. The contents of our researches, as good as they may be, are not enough if a strong methodological background does not support them. This is especially true when one works with young people and their naïveté. First, we—as urban scholars or planning students—must understand what participation implies, what it means to give feedbacks even when our research is done, how to politically support our claims and proposals. It is planning education's duty to teach our students the "how to" of participation, even more so when young people are included in participatory processes. This concretely means revising our planning curricula, maybe at the expense of some technical details that are best left to engineers, so that future planners are better prepared for the challenges posed by contemporary cities.

8. References

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