INCLUSION: LOOKING FOR A NEW DESIGN APPROACH
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY FOR ALL

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Fig 1: Piazza della Repubblica, Florence. A public space where everyone can participate in the public realm

A NEW INCLUSIVE DESIGN APPROCH FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY FOR ALL AND A MORE EQUAL AND COHESIVE SOCIETY

Research summary

An interesting definition given to sustainability is "for everybody, forever". Unfortunately, if we consider Italian cities, although many of them are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, they can not fit in this definition. First of all, in a world with aging population and where disability is no longer the exception, cities still present too many physical barriers that prevent people from using public space. Secondly cities have not been able to respond to the dynamism of migration flows and the progress of multiculturalism, causing episodes of inequality and social decay. Although these issues have always been at the center of the attention and the assumption underlying any design process is the identification and satisfaction of users' needs, there are numerous project interventions that in recent years are not able to provide appropriate responses to these needs. For this reason, in particular for the city as the place of daily activities and social relations, it's necessary a transition to a new design approach which ensures a fully inclusive view of the project and the effective well-being of people. Through the research it has been possible to define this new inclusive approach, which is primarily based on a cognitive phase to know users, their real needs and expectations. Then it's necessary to define the tools for the development of a city for all, to be achieved through integrated design solutions, fitting to the different users' skills. It's also important to recognize the need for management actions to work alongside the architectural solutions to ensure their real effectiveness. In conclusion, this new design approach allows to obtain many benefits, from social to economic ones, but above all to rediscover the role of the city on the quality of people's lives, especially in the Italian contest.

Keywords: Inclusion, City for all, Integrated design approach, Accessibility, Multiculturalism, Public Space, UNESCO World Heritage Sites

1. A consideration on the condition of Italian cities

A UN delegate gave an interesting definition of sustainability: "for everybody, forever". Although many of them are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Italian cities can't still be considered "for everybody".

Considering the overall picture of problems related to the urban environment, there are two main issues to which cities are not able to give an appropriate response.

First of all, in a world where life expectancy has increased considerably and disability is no longer the exception but is a condition that can be expected, cities continue to present physical barriers that prevent people with several disabilities from using the public space.

On the other hand cities have not been able to respond to the dynamism of migration flows and the progress of multiculturalism, causing episodes of inequality and social decay.

These consideration lead us to think about how a city can be defined as sustainable. To be "for everybody", a city should place man at the center of attention and consider his real needs.

Fig 2: A view of Naples. An example of Italian city which contains many UNESCO Sites that can't provide an accessible environment

2. Inclusion: Targets for cities "for everybody, forever"

Usually, whether it concerns the realization of a public space, a building or a product design, a design process involves the identification of a need, the realization of solutions that satisfy this requirement and a final control to ensure that the initial need has been met. By its own definition, public space and urban design aim to build places to satisfy people's need, where the word people refers to all potential users of the urban environment and not to a defined category of persons.

This principle is the basis of inclusive design, an approach to the project for the largest number of users without any kind of distinction due to physical, social or cultural conditions. It requires that the interaction between man and the project is at the center of the design process, focusing much more on users, in order to remove unnecessary obstacles to the everyday life and make it easier for everyone. The failure of a project is caused by not providing appropriate answers to users and not because of the latter. It is responsibility of designers and contractors ensure not to cause unnecessary difficulties as a result of not being aware of the needs of the broad population. Attention to inclusion can not be an activity separated from the main design process and considered only in the closing stages; on the contrary, it must be a central activity, closely integrated in the design process.

To be for everybody, a sustainable city must be able to ensure an inclusive environment, capable to satisfy not only people's several needs but also their expectations.

The quality of public spaces and buildings has a strong influence on the quality of people's lives. Planners and designers need to examine more carefully the impact of their choices, because decisions about the design, planning

and management can affect many aspects related to the use of the built environment, such as promote or reduce mobility and increase or decrease the cultural integration.

Considered what was said previously, it's possible to define two main goals for the development of inclusion. The first is the full physical accessibility of public space, which ensure a minimum access to all potential users to public space and the implementation of social integration processes. The second purpose is the cultural accessibility, provided by an environment that can develop the identity of the place, which allow to satisfy the human need to feel part of a community and to express their own personal identity. Finally, through the strengthening of the identity of a place, it's possible to promote intercultural dialogue and the development of the multicultural society.

To achieve this result, it's necessary to define a new design approach that ensures an inclusive environment and considers inclusion not only as an option, but as an interpretative key of the project.

Fig 3: High Line, New York. An example of inclusive environment, where everyone can partecipate regardless of physical abilities and cultural background

3. Inclusion: A new integrated design approach

Before otulining this new design approach, it's necessary to recognize the importance of developing a first cognitive phase to know users, their real needs and expectations. Particularly, it's important not to consider the users for their characteristics but for their needs, because in this way designers are pushed to think of solutions that meet the same need demanded by people with different physical or cultural characteristics.

Once defined these cognitive tools, it's possible to develop a new design approach capable of prefiguring a public space not only physically accessible but also where it's possible cultural exchange. Integration is the key word that characterizes this approach, which can be recognized at two different levels in the design process.

First of all, a city is a complex system, so it's necessary to think an inclusive project as a system of actions involving all the elements that compose the public realm: public spaces, buildings and transport. It's important that actions taken to ensure full accessibility of public space will be designed not as episodic solutions, but as an integrated system of projects. In fact, in the urban environment it's really important that are guaranteed both the continuity of the paths and the possibility of access to various places of interest, otherwise people will be prevented from the opportunity to partecipate in the public realm. Therefore, to design inclusion is always recommended the use of planning tools and not the execution of specific interventions. Even the single solutions adopted don't have to be thought as specific answers for a given type of user, but as actions addressed to all. In fact, the needs of different users of public space may require solutions in conflict with each other, so it is important that

interventions provide integrated solutions or adaptable to different users' needs. In this way it's possible to prevent what A. Accolla (2009) defined as "Social discrimination functionally accessible" (Discriminazione sociale funzionalmente accessibile), which means the execution of projects that provide particular design solutions to meet exclusively specific needs of a defined group of users and not included in a synergic system, with the result to recreate discriminatory situations for those users for which that solution has been designed.

A simple but effective example is the use of signage. As it's possible to see from figure 4, which represents the signs used within the Brooklyn Bridge Park to report the functions of the different areas of the park, the use of an integrated solutions has allowed a better communication.

In this case a signage through symbols allowed people with different cultural and linguistic background to understand the function of the different places. The dimension of these symbols and the use of color contrast between blue and grey also help visually impaired persons to acquire informations represented.

Other peculiarity that distinguishes this approach from the others is that inclusion is not only provided by design actions, but also by parallel management actions, which are very important to guarantee the effectiveness of design solutions, that can apply to both the urban scale and the detail scale of the project.

Looking at European experiences with the aim of this research, these show that the most effective projects are followed by other management actions that can be traced back to four main categories: education, communication, culture and sharing. For example, the first two approaches are very useful in terms of improving urban accessibility. With education it's possibile to

train professionals in the constructions field, in order that the new projects ensure complete accessibility to public spaces, but also to raise awareness of private citizens and business owners, so it's possible to improve the quality of the services and to deter bad behaviors that prevent disabled users from attend public space.

Fig 4: Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York. Example of an integrated solution for the realization of signage

Fig 5: Marketplace, Brussel. A marketplace is an example of an activity that promotes cultural integration, because in its simplicity it offers opportunities for interaction and dialogue

It's also really useful to adopt a communication system to present to the people the new possibilities offered by the implementation of accessible projects. Finally, if we considered the multicultural theme, the cultural and participatory approach are very important, because with the simple organization of cultural events and activities in public space,

therefore with actions at the small scale, it's possible to promote aggregation and the cultural integration.

Only this integrated approach can provide inclusion and the development of the "city for all", where everyone can take part in the daily life and feel part of a place.

4. Inclusion: The potentials of better places

The urban environment can contribute to a more equal and cohesive society if the places where we live, the facilities that we use, our neighborhoods and public spaces are designed to be inclusive. With this new approach it's possible to ensure the transition from a design aimed at ensuring the only physical or cultural accessibility of the places to a fully inclusive view of the project, aimed at ensuring the effective well-being of people regardless of their skills level.

An inclusive approach to the project has lots of potential, as supported by S. Keates and J. Clarkson (2004), which identified a series of arguments in support of inclusive design:

- The societal argument, which reflects the need to take care of the changing nature of many societies, such as in Western Europe, where the aging population and the wish for integration made by persons with disabilities have brought new demands to public attention;
- The sociological argument, which comes directly from the population, become more demanding and less willing to accept the conditions of disadvantage as the norm;
- The self-interest argument, because many people, even designers themselves, at some point in their life will experience a reduction in their functional capabilities;
- The legal argument, which has been born from the attempt of different governments to give answers to these ethical arguments in favour of greater social inclusion, through new legislations focused on prohibit discrimination;
- The financial argument, because the way the urban environment is built has an important influence on the consumers and employees base to which companies have access and the ability through which it can be preserved. In addition, for the public sector, an inclusive environment would reduce the expenditure on the need of special projects for the integration of those groups otherwise excluded;
- The good design argument, because the inclusive design is, by its very nature, centered on users and its ability to respond to users' needs is a guarantee for good urban design.

As it is possible to understand from this list, inclusion not only lets the greatest possible number of users to be able to participate in activities within urban space, but also it can improve the conditions of use of public space for everybody, allowing all people to live a better life.

Fig 6: City for all. Where everyone is allowed to partecipate in the public realm and to live a better life

INCLUSIVE DESIGN APPROACH

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY FOR ALL

COGNITIVE PHASE

First unavoidable phase for the development of an inclusive environment to know the **users** and their **real needs** and **expectations**, so that the project will satisfy them to ensure the well-being of people .

PLANNING PHASE

A city is a complex system. It's necessary to ensure the opportunity to partecipate in the public realm with a **system of actions** that involves alla the elements that compose the public realm: **public spaces**, **buildings** and **transport**.

DESIGN PHASE

The single solutions adopted don't have to be thought as specific answers for a given type of user, but it is important that the interventions provide **integrated solutions** or adaptable to different users' needs.

MANAGEMENT PHASE

To guarantee the effectiveness of design solutions, it's important to adopt parallel **management actions**, that can apply to both the urban and the detail scale of the project. This kind of actions can be traced back to four main categories: **education**, **communication**, **culture** and **sharing**.

CITY FOR ALL

Where is given to everyone the opportunity to express their potential and to live a better life.

Fig 7: Diagram that describes the inclusive design approach, necessary for the development of the city for all

5. Conclusions: New possibilities for Italian Cities

As has been said previously Italian cities are far away from being inclusive. Nevertheless, thanks to their characteristics they can be considered as ideal places where could be experienced this new inclusive design approach. In particular, it is their high cultural and historical value, which made some of them to get listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site, to provide the opportunity to design inclusion.

A first consideration should be made about cultural accessibility and the construction of a multicultural society. As briefly mentioned before in the document, multiculturalism can be developed by a strong cultural background and the cultural exchange/dialogue. The Italian city itself is a testimony of our culture and the high presence of sites devoted to culture and related activities offers great opportunities for the development of cultural policies to promote integration. For this reason it's necessary to facilitate meeting opportunities ensuring the accessibility to the urban environment to as many users as possible.

In conclusion, given its social role as a place of meeting and cultural exchange as well as place of the main activities of daily living, it's our responsibility that the city will be, or will be again, for everybody, a "City for all", where man is at the center of the design process. This is why it's clearly necessary to adopt this new inclusive design approach, so that is given to everyone the opportunity to express their potential.

6. Ackowledgments

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