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Managing Urban Space towards Intercultural and Sustainable Cities. A Case Study of the Neighbourhood Arcella, Padua¹

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Abstract

Cities are at the forefront to find effective solutions to address the challenges of environmental sustainability and of living together with difference. This article aims to investigate how a multicultural urban reality can evolve into an intercultural and sustainable city. It is based on research conducted on the multicultural neighbourhood Arcella, located in Padua, Italy.

The article presents the positive and constructive processes that emerged in the neighbourhood, specifically: the creation of new narratives that foster a new image of the neighbourhood, strengthening the identity of the place and encouraging people to participate in urban life; the new tools applied for the creation of these new narratives; the role of agents of change, whose actions and ability to collaborate inspire others.

The article suggests the viability of an integrated, interconnected, multidirectional and intertwined approach to boosting the creation of intercultural and sustainable cities. This approach suggests that cities can provide the possibility of becoming intercultural and sustainable if they are able to involve everybody, to favour participation, to benefit from local expertise and ideas, to offer places of conviviality and moments of meaningful encounters, to host diversity in terms of people, spaces and services.

These features favour the emergence of lively and vibrant urban communities, where new visions and realities might emerge. These lively and visionary neighbourhoods, being laboratories of conviviality, offer the right and appropriate space and place for building the “cities of the future”.

Key-words: *interculturalism, sustainability, urban regeneration, identity*

¹ The article is based on a research conducted as final Master Thesis for the M.A. in “Human Rights and multi-level Governance”, University of Padova. The full version of the research is accessible at the following link: <http://tesi.cab.unipd.it/57104/>.

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1. Introduction

Walking through the streets of a city, particularly in its so-called suburban areas, might offer the possibility of encountering a variety of elements that are emblematic of broader urban challenges, specifically: the steady expansion of cities; increased traffic and pollution; the cumbersome legacy of an industrial past; the blight of some urban areas; the adaptation of inhabitants to evolving urban and collective identities; and the challenge of living side by side with different lifestyles, cultures, and religions.

Cities are therefore at forefront of the struggle for finding effective and innovative solutions to address some of the most complex, urgent, and arduous challenges of the world; namely, environmental sustainability and living together with difference. It is this 'glocal' role that cities play that has directed this research to consider a local and small-scale urban reality as an opportunity for analysing how these challenges are faced on a daily basis by the people that live and cross the urban world.

The observation of this urban world might offer important contribution regarding ways and modalities to approach these challenges. In fact, in the midst of trafficked streets and neglected buildings, new signs of hope appear in the bustling life of the streets, in the bike paths, in the murals that colour the walls, in the squares that become spaces of conviviality and in the parks that become places of encounters.

This research aims therefore to investigate how a multicultural urban reality can be transformed into an intercultural and sustainable city. 'Multicultural' is considered as a term that can aptly describe the multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious reality of modern cities; however, while it describes this reality, it does not offer any explanation on how it is perceived or experienced by its inhabitants. 'Intercultural' means instead the ideal objective of creating a city characterized by the emergence of a 'urban civitas' (Bekemans 2013). 'Urban civitas' is a society guided by principles of solidarity, human dignity and equality, a society based on inclusion, respect of diversity, dialogue, awareness of the benefits of encounters and respect of human rights.

The wish to investigate how urban societies might be guided towards the creation of intercultural cities starts from the premise that the concern about environment cannot be separated by any action that aims towards fostering change and favouring human beings. Hence, the project of creating different cities and 'urban civitas' must inseparably combine the aim of interculturality with that of sustainability and environmental protection. UN Habitat, the program of UN working towards a better urban future, declared in the 2012 'Manifesto for Cities' that 'the battle for a more sustainable future will be won

or lost in cities' (UN Habitat 2012, 6). The manifesto highlights that the ways cities are planned, built and managed now will determine the outcome of our efforts to achieve a sustainable and harmonious development tomorrow.

To offer new contributions about how to manage urban space towards intercultural and sustainable cities, this research presents a case study of the neighbourhood Arcella, located in Padua, Italy.

2. The Crucial Role of Cities for Interculturalism and Sustainability

The increasing diversity, interconnection, economic instability, migration flows, fluidity of the present and uncertainty of the future are some of the elements that have contributed to the new hurdles placed on cities. Zukin (1995) thinks that in our cities *'the old civic virtues for mingling with strangers – civility, security, tact and trust – have lost their meaning in the fear for physical safety and the dramatization of ethnic diversity'* (idem, 42), and she wonders whether all of us, children of various Diasporas, can find a home in the city (idem). Cities are now characterized by super-diversity, as Vertovec calls this condition, that is a situation *'distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade'* (Vertovec 2007, 1024). The diversity faced by cities is increasingly more complex, multi-faceted and multi-layered.

States, institutions and international organizations have proposed different approaches and initiatives for addressing the issues of multicultural societies, spanning from assimilationist to multicultural approaches. With the multiculturalism approach, states recognize the value of minorities and of their culture, according to them equal rights of the majority. Recently, there has been an increasingly rejection of this approach. One reason of the critics against multiculturalism, as Beck (2006) highlights, is that cultures are considered as homogeneous factors and entities. Sen speaks about 'tyrannical implications of putting persons into rigid boxes of given "communities"' (Sen 2007). A major critic to this approach has been also a tendency to cultural relativism, with the result of acceptance of illiberal practices. Agustin (2012) outlines that if assimilationism is characterized by domination, multiculturalism produces retreatment. Multiculturalism has focused on a vertical relation between state and cultural groups, whereas horizontal relations between different group have been disregarded. The major negative result of this approach is the co-existence of different cultures,

leading to parallel lives, conflicts, communal segregation, incomprehension and emergence of fundamentalist tendencies.

The debate among scholars and experts have prompted the attempt to provide an alternative way to solve what multiculturalism had disregarded, namely interactions between people (Zapata-Barrero 2015). New visions, ideas and approaches have been encompassed under the name interculturalism. (idem) presents interculturalism as an approach that does not focus in what is different but rather on what is similar and common. He stresses that *'interculturalism emphasizes [...] what is (or can be) shared between people or groups, rather than exhibiting what is unique and 'must be recognized and respected' among people who see each other in terms of "otherness"'* (idem, 157). As Parekh (2000, 204) points out, it could be seen as an approach that moves forward from mere co-existence, and take into consideration that *'we cannot integrate "them" as long as "we" remain "we"; "we" must be loosened up to create a new common space in which "they" can be accommodated and become part of a newly constituted "we"'*.

Interculturalism is therefore an approach that builds upon the basis of multiculturalism, but it is characterized by a further evolution that combines cultural diversity, integration and the building of new collective identities. Bloomfield and Bianchini (2004) define it as an approach that *'goes beyond equal opportunities and respect for existing cultural differences to the pluralist transformation of public space, institutions and civic culture. It does not recognise cultural boundaries as fixed but in a state of flux and remaking. An intercultural approach aims to facilitate dialogue, exchange and reciprocal understanding between people of different backgrounds'* (Wood et al. 2006, 13-14 citing Bloomfield and Bianchini 2004).

Interculturalism encompasses an approach that aims at the personal engagement of different groups and individuals in a dialogue, based on the assumption that culture and identity are not impenetrable conceived, but rather they develop through the encounters and interaction with the Other. This approach is transformative, characterized by a two-way process where both majority and minorities make mutual accommodations, and are open to changes. It has at its core the concept of intercultural dialogue. An important institutional document in this regard is the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. Living together as Equals in Dignity* (Council of Europe 2008). Intercultural dialogue can be seen as an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other's world perception, as stated in the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue.

The major aim of this approach is the development of a sense of community and common belonging, as expressed by UNESCO with the concept of

‘learning to live together’. It embraces a commitment to efforts aimed at the understanding of others history, traditions and spirituality, that *‘would provide a basis for the creation of a new spirit which, guided by recognition of our growing interdependence and a common analysis of the risks and challenges of the future, would induce people to implement common projects or to manage the inevitable conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way [...] and to escape from the dangerous cycle sustained by cynicism and complacency’* (Delors 1996, 20).

In dealing with such a complex issue such as the one regarding how to accept, manage and appraise diversity in our society, it is necessary to recognize the potential of new myths and narratives to guide and to frame new collective visions. Therefore, terms that carries strong and new semantics capital can prove to be extremely helpful in creating new inspirations, narratives, visions and myths. New terms can serve to express something that is ‘an idea but also an ideal’, which is able to influence deeply public perceptions, inspire, serve as a guide and underpin public and state policies (Marconi 2016). In this regard, interculturalism appears not just a political project or a set of policies, but it offers especially a powerful new vision and ideal to follow. Kymlicka (2012) talks about a new myth, stating that *‘the “interculturalism as a remedy for failed multiculturalism” trope is not really intended to offer an objective social science account of our situation, but is rather [...] intended to serve as a new narrative, or if you like, a new myth’* (idem, 213).

Kymlicka (2003, 148) captures the possible interconnection of multiculturalism and interculturalism in shaping the idea of creating “multicultural states and intercultural citizens”:

‘On the one hand, we can ask about multiculturalism at the level of the state: what would it mean for the constitution, institutions and laws of the state to be multicultural? I will call this the question of the nature of the ‘multicultural state’. On the other hand, we can ask about interculturalism at the level of the individual citizen: what sorts of knowledge, beliefs, virtues, habits and dispositions would an intercultural citizen possess? I will call this the question of the ‘intercultural citizen’. Ideally, these two levels should work together in any conception of citizenship: there should be a ‘fit’ between our model of the multicultural state and our model of the intercultural citizen. The sort of multicultural reforms we seek at the level of the state should help nurture and reinforce the desired forms of intercultural skills and knowledge at the level of individual citizens. Conversely, the intercultural dispositions we encourage within individual citizens should help support and reinforce the institutions of a multicultural state’

Especially in the urban realm, the idea of applying the paradigm of interculturalism could favor the creation of the intercultural city, where the interculturalism approach could ease the disparities and difficulties of the increasingly diverse cities, enhancing the promotion of peaceful cohabitation, equal right to the city, social cohesion across differences, and collective civic growth (Marconi 2016).

An intercultural city could be described as this ideal reality:

‘The intercultural city has a diverse population including people with different nationalities, origins, languages or religions/beliefs. Most citizens regard diversity as a resource, not as a problem, and accept that all cultures change as they encounter each other in the public space. The city officials publicly advocate respect for diversity and a pluralistic city identity. The city actively combats prejudice and discrimination and ensures equal opportunities for all by adapting its governance structures, institutions and services to the needs of a diverse population, without compromising the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In partnership with business, civil society and public service professionals, the intercultural city develops a range of policies and actions to encourage greater mixing and interaction between diverse groups. The high level of trust and social cohesion help to prevent conflicts and violence, increase policy effectiveness and make the city attractive for people and investors alike.’ (Council of Europe 2009, 17)

The intercultural city concept was promoted especially by the Council of Europe and the European Commission with the joint initiative *Intercultural Cities*, a project that is striving to develop a model for intercultural integration within diverse urban communities (Council of Europe 2009). An intercultural city is characterized by openness, interculturalism and the recognition of the diversity advantage (Wood, et al. 2006).

The policy and legal frameworks are not the only contexts that should be taken into account when fostering the creation of intercultural cities. The action of states is fundamental in order to create the conditions of equality and recognition of human rights, issuing non-discriminatory laws, guaranteeing a universal access to services and the right to the city for everybody. Nonetheless, it is only one of the strategic elements of change. In order to create the conditions that could prompt the emergence of ‘intercultural citizens’ in ‘multicultural states’ (Kymlycka 2003) it is necessary to analyse which mechanisms appear when people meet with diversity and how encounters might be considered for their potential of mutual enrichment and not as causes of fear and retreat. The issue of daily life coexistence with diversity has been analysed by many scholars (see Valentine 2012; Amin 2002),

who warn about the fact that simple coexistence in urban life might lead to the strengthening of prejudices and attitudes of closure. On the contrary, a positive approach to diversity might happen through ‘meaningful contacts’ (Valentine 2012) and ‘meaningful encounters’, that can challenge personal views and let new perspectives grow. A way to stimulate this ‘meaningful contact’ could be found in the ‘micropublics of everyday social contact and encounters’, as Amin (2012) proposes. Amin recognizes that proximity (whether in public spaces or mixed housing estate) is not enough to bring about social transformation. Urban environments offer the opportunity of ‘negotiation of difference within local micro-publics of everyday interaction’ (idem, 960). These micropublics foster cultural understanding and social transformation because they create spaces of interdependence and cultural destabilization. They are sites of purposeful organized group activity that provides the opportunity of breaking out of fixed patterns and learn new ways of being, relating and interacting.

Amin (idem, 967) argues that public spaces are not ‘natural servants of multicultural engagement’. Nonetheless urban planning should take into consideration three different types of planning for diversity, as suggested by Fincher (2003): planning for diversity (for the diverse range of people who cross and use the city), planning to reduce difference (equality of access across places) and planning for encounter (to encourage interaction and contact).

Much attention should be given also to Sandercock’s (2006b) focus on the role of urban planners. They are crucial actors not just in order to create urban spaces that possess the potential of becoming lively, welcoming and accessible to everybody, but also actors that can play a role in guiding communities to grow, share and face their rivalries, oppositions, fears and desires together. As Sandercock highlights (2000), managing diversity in cities is always a matter of managing fears. This problem has been often addressed with attempts to create rational cities through control, containment and manipulation. However, she proposes the idea of recognizing that fear is an unavoidable element of individuals identities, and therefore of cities. It should be recognized that *‘individual identity is often suffused with anxiety, and that these anxieties are projected onto the figure of the stranger, whose very presence seems to challenge and undermine the known social order on which our identity is based’* (idem, 22).

Intercultural dialogue could become the key of ‘mongrel cities’, as Sandercock (2006a) calls them. Mongrel cities are places characterized by difference, otherness, multiplicity, heterogeneity, diversity and plurality (idem). These cities in the opinion of Sandercock offer the possibility to *‘living alongside with others who are different, learning from them, creating*

new worlds with them, instead of fearing them' (Sandercock 2006a, 38). Citing the author Rushdie, Sandercock envisions the idea that through dialogue and encounter new 'mongrel identities' or 'mongrel selves' could be created in cities, because of the 'change-by-fusion, change by-conjoining' (Rushdie 1992) and the celebration of *'hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combination of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs'* (Rushdie 1992, 394).

Our 'mongrel cities' could become places that nurture 'mongrel identities' if they manage to foster the emergence of *'such essential political virtues as mutual respect and concern, tolerance, self-restraint, willingness to enter into unfamiliar worlds of thought, love of diversity, a mind open to new ideas and a heart open to others' needs, and the ability to live with unresolved differences'* (Parekh 2000, 340), which are at the basis of the paradigm of intercultural dialogue. Parekh warns that an intercultural political community *'cannot expect its members to develop a sense of belonging to it, unless it equally values and cherishes them in all their diversity, and reflects this in its structure, policies, conduct of public affairs, self-understanding and self-definition'* (idem, 342).

3. A Proposal for an Approach for Intercultural and Sustainable Cities

The combined analysis of the case study and of the relevant academic debate offered the possibility to develop the suggestion of an *integrated, interconnected, multidirectional* and *intertwined* approach. This approach could be applied in multicultural contexts to boost the creation of intercultural and sustainable cities.

This approach takes into account the different elements of diversity and vulnerability that characterize each individual, taking inspiration from the theories of intersectionality. It considers the necessity to foster collaboration and synergies among different sectors in order to share skills and knowledges. It recognizes the necessity to build bottom-up strategies, together with multidirectional collaboration between civil society and institutions. This approach suggests looking at all challenges and shortcomings with a comprehensive vision, finding innovative and creative solutions that can let problems be mutually solved. A strategy that responds to urban challenges (i.e. integration, neglected spaces, isolation, environmental protection) in a comprehensive way should be favored. Finally, it is an approach based on dialogue, recognizing the importance of moments of agonistic dialectics that lead to meaningful encounters.

3.1. The Approach

The approach should be *integrated* means that it takes into account all the elements of disparities and inequality, not only the most apparent elements of diversity such as ethnicity and culture. It considers carefully the intersection of different aspects that shape and form identity, considering the entire set of variables, affiliations and also vulnerabilities, in what can be called the intersectionality of multiple identities (Valentine 2012).

Alongside the recognition of multiple identities, socio-economic differences and differences in powers have been recognized as major elements that influence the way people belonging to different groups consider each other and to which extent they are prone to adopt positive approaches towards the Other (idem). In the opinion of Valentine, first and foremost *'we need an urban politics that addresses inequalities (real and perceived) as well as diversity, and recognizes the need to fuse what are often seen as separate debates about prejudice and respect with questions of social-economic inequalities and power'* (Valentine 2008, 334).

States and institutions play the biggest role as actors of change in this context, as Kymlicka (2010) reminds. The state should be responsible to issue policies and laws for a broad and encompassing citizenship, facilitating accessibility to services and ensuring the right to the city for everybody. This is the level where central governments and other level of governance (municipalities, local governments) can work, issuing policies, regulating, and ultimately creating an enabling environment.

The approach should be *interconnected* means that it takes into consideration all the actors concerned in the urban realm. It is a comprehensive approach built on the joined forces of each of the actors involved. This fosters the emergence of alternative ideas, creative solutions and imaginative different approaches. Each sector and actor brings its unique perspective, expertise, set of skills and resources. All the sectors could offer their own specificities and prompt a process of mutual learning thanks to a practice of dialogue and confrontation. This process could bring benefits similar to the ones brought by intercultural dialogue, in terms of cross-fertilization of ideas and personal growth.

The approach should be *multidirectional* means that it is simultaneously a conjunction of top-down, bottom-up and transversal forces and contributions. Civil society should be granted voice and power of decision. Efforts to make all the groups of civil society dialogue together should be promoted. Civil society is the one that best possesses knowledge of the necessity and problems, as well as potential and resources of the local areas they live in. Nothing built or provided from the top could manage to become

as meaningful as a project that have taken into consideration the needs of the local population, that have listened to their ideas and brought their forces together for the realization of the project. In this way projects that are relevant and significative for the city (i.e. cultural festivals, regenerations of urban spaces, courses and any other type of shared initiative) could foster the coming together of people around a shared objective and common purpose. These initiatives could enable the creation of material or immaterial projects that strengthen the sense of belongingness to a place or to a community. Therefore, the ability to listen and be open to contributions from all the directions should be one of the aims of this approach. States and institutions are the actors responsible for providing new narratives, ideals to strive for and common imagined futures, but they should listen and take advantage from the local expertise. For example, as Cancellieri (2017) suggests, the local 'patrimony of researches' produced by practitioners and researchers should be always considered, together with promoting a collaboration and alliance between universities, institutions and practitioners.

Finally, the approach should be *intertwined*. It recognizes that the challenges of cities should be faced joining forces together, with the belief that problems can become opportunities. Each problem and challenge of cities could be turn into occasion of change and opportunity of transformation. A wider consideration of problems, tools and resources would be needed. Problems could be solved if they become instruments towards the aimed objectives, in a kind of virtuous circle. Therefore, the challenges of integration and inclusion of newcomers, together with the challenge of social cohesion, should be considered both as aims but also as instruments to address other urban challenges: environmental sustainability and urban regeneration.

3.2. Actors and Sectors

Cities have to recognize which are the actors involved in the process of change and the resources that could be mobilized. All these actors should be addressed by strategies that aim at empowering them with intercultural competences.

The sectors and actors recognized as crucial are the following: educators and teachers; media and journalists; '*mediators, bridge builders, wall vaulters and frontier crossers*' (Langer 1994); universities, researchers and students; civil society and civil society organizations (CSOs); community leaders and religious leaders; urban planners and architects; politicians, social workers, community psychologists.

3.3. Spaces

A special space of discussion should be given to the particular conditions of the suburbs and the peripheral neighbourhoods of cities. Suburbs present different critical elements in terms of spaces and identity. Often, they are area of recent construction and development. A recent past has not allowed them to develop an identity rooted in historical events or historical places, unlike the historical centers of the cities. Being places of recent urbanization for the cities in need of more space for industries and housing, they are often characterized by chaotic planning that did not take into consideration esthetical concerns. In short, they are not aesthetically appealing and do not offer strong symbols of identification. They host spaces that are run-down or abandoned, which favors the insurgence of illegal activities in public spaces, such as drug dealing. Sometimes, they do not offer services, spaces of aggregation or cultural opportunities. This leads inhabitants to use them just as dormitory, forcing them to move to the city center. For all these reasons, they become often addressed with negative stigma that depicts them as run-down and dangerous areas. The narratives created by media and public figures often strengthen this idea, presenting a one-sided image that highlights just the most critical aspects and leave other factors concealed.

Furthermore, these areas become often the place where migrants concentrate. The reasons are the affordability of housing or the possibility to start their private businesses, for example as shopkeepers, offering products from their native countries. For these reasons, this kind of neighborhoods in the suburbs are the places of a city that would favor the most from the implementation of the afore-mentioned approach based on intercultural dialogue.

Suburbs offer key resources, forces and spaces to transform the idea of the intercultural city into reality. At the beginning of the processes, they are places where different inhabitants coexist together and are separated by walls of distrust and suspicion. They are considered dangerous, not visually-pleasant, without resources and without an identity in which their inhabitants recognize themselves and are proud of. The feeling of living in a isolated and problematic area is strengthened to the outside world by the narratives created in the public discourse and by the media. They are places that seem to have been abandoned, for which nobody cares, and which lacks social capital.

These same elements are the starting point of a process of change, when they are recognized as elements that could become opportunities of change. The spaces offered by the suburbs are wider and more flexible to adaptation than the complex entangled urban fabric of the city center. They could

become opportunities of regeneration and become landmarks and symbols of the neighbourhood. The concentration of different ethnicities and cultures could become a symbol of pride for the inhabitants, if they decide to embrace diversity as an element of enrichment. Even the negative stigma conveyed by the public discourse could become a force to mobilize the inhabitants against it, fostering the emergence of alternative positive narratives created by the locals, who decide to show all the positive aspects, resources and richness of the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the suburbs offer a kind of 'hybrid place'. Often the 'city-feeling' of the area is blurred into a 'village-feeling', where people are likely to meet casually friends on the streets or become acquaintances with local shop-keepers because of the proximity that the smaller scale offers.

In the suburbs, the challenges of cities related to integration, regeneration, sustainability and community-building become therefore more evident, deeper and crucial to be addressed. What is often considered as 'the problem of suburbs' by city planners and politicians would be therefore tackled as an opportunity of change that starts from the grassroots, instead of applying a top-down perspective. Bazzini and Puttilli (2008) proposes a relational approach, based on self-government and empowered communities that build upon the social and territorial capital of the neighbourhood.

Suburbs are therefore the most suitable places for the project of intercultural and sustainable cities. If they manage to appraise their human resources and local uniqueness, they would become the 'cities of the future', as the architect Renzo Piano imagines:

'Suburbs are the city of the future, the city where human energy is concentrated and the city that our daughters and sons will inherit from us. A gigantic work of mend is needed, and we need ideas. Suburbs are the city of the future, they are not photogenic and often they are a desert or a dormitory, but they are rich of humanity. So, the destiny of cities are the suburbs. [...] The suburbs are the great urban bet of the next decades' (Piano 2014).

4. The Case-study: Arcella, a Multicultural and Multi-religious Neighbourhood

The case study concerns Arcella, a neighbourhood in the North part of the city of Padua (Veneto, Italy). The territory of Arcella is circumscribed by some clear human-built borders: its West and South border are marked by the railway, its North border by the highway Autostrada A4 and its West border by the trafficked large road Via del Plebiscito. The entrance

to the neighbourhood is facilitated by a limited number of viaducts and overpasses. Having as a reference the data provided by the municipality of Padua regarding the demographic situation at 31 December 2016, the residents of the neighbourhood amount to 33.823, that accounts for 16,1 % of the entire population of Padua (209.829 residents). The foreign population accounts for 27,4 % (9.268) of the entire population of the neighbourhood (total number of foreigner residents in the city is 32.984, that means that 28 % of the foreign residents of Padua lives in Arcella). It is the most densely populated area of the city (approximately 7.145 inhabitants per square kilometer), and the area with the highest percentage of foreigner residents. The main countries of origins of the foreign population are Romania, Moldova, Nigeria, Morocco, China, Albania, Philippines, Bangladesh, Ukraine and other countries.

The area is often labelled as 'a city in the city', because of its considerable number of residents, its density, its characteristic of being physically separated from the rest of the city, the presence of many essential services for the residents and its distinctive identity and history. The neighbourhood underwent many significant events during its history, from being a rural area, becoming an important spiritual center, being affected by severe bombings during the Second World War, and then seeing an important industrial development. The signs of the different layers of its past are still clearly visible.

Arcella is often referred to as a neighbourhood with problems of criminality, drug dealing and neglected urban spaces. The local media (i.e. *Il Mattino di Padova*, *Il Gazzettino*, *Padova Oggi*) have contributed to the consolidation of the negative stigma of the neighbourhood, reporting news about the area often with one-sided opinions, or with a predominance of articles reporting the negative aspects. For these reasons, there is a strongly established image of the area, both in Padua and outside, as a dangerous and not appealing neighbourhood.

Nonetheless, the area is not characterized only by these phenomena. Recognizing the existence of the problems afore-mentioned (concentrated especially in some limited areas, remarkably in the proximity of the train station), the neighbourhood is rich of initiatives by associations and civil society groups that aim at restoring the image of the neighbourhood, fostering a shared sense of belongingness, promoting initiatives of cooperation and integration, boosting community-building processes and proposing ideas for the regeneration of spaces and creation of public spaces. In some other independent media (i.e. *La Difesa del Popolo*), the area has been described as an experimental place for the 'city of the future', characterized by super-diversity and the necessity to find ways to deal with and live with

diversity. For these reasons, the neighbourhood was particularly apt for an analysis that took as a reference the theoretical framework developed. The analysis of the area served for a grassroots investigation of a multi-ethnic neighbourhood that is struggling to appraise its identity, to change its public image, to find new ways of facilitating integration and to promote sustainable ways of living together and of using public spaces.

However, it is important to bear in mind that the analysis conducted reflects an on-going process that is far from being concluded, while it faces challenges, prejudices, psychological constraints and other barriers (such as power relations and economic differences). The research applied proposes an insight of the causes and effects of the processes of change through the study of Arcella. The aim is to try to shed new light on the role and potential of urban areas, that thanks to their diversity and shared and bottom-up initiatives, can foster the process of creation of 'urban civitas', namely communities that are inclusive, cooperative, and respectful of diversity and of shared spaces. The research, adopting the case study methodology, has therefore focused on the processes that have emerged in Arcella as a response to the evolution experienced by the neighbourhood, characterized by a growing diversity and the formation of a new identity.

4.1. Methodology and Data Gathered

According to the framework proposed by Creswell (2003), the paradigm and the philosophical assumption at the basis of the research conducted were the ones related to the participatory/advocacy approach. The choice was motivated by the nature of the research problem, inherently linked to political issues, and with the aim of fostering a collaborative process and a change-oriented conclusion that could serve as a shared 'agenda for change'. Concerning the strategies of inquiry and methodologies, the choice was oriented to the qualitative methodology of research. This choice was motivated especially by the type of research problem. As the research is related to people's perceptions, opinions, ways of living and experiencing places and contacts with the others, the qualitative approach best fitted with the topic and better offered the opportunity of an in-depth analysis. Within this qualitative framework, the strategy of inquiry adopted was the case study approach, with the selection of the neighbourhood Arcella (Padua) as the case study of the research. For what concerns research methods of data collection and analysis, the main method adopted for gathering data was semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, the methodology related to visual methods was also embraced in order to analyse some projects which

produced photographs and videos of the neighbourhood, and to collect visual material that expressed the themes treated in the research, observing how urban spaces are lived and experienced.

The fieldwork took place from June 2017 to August 2017. The semi-structured interviews were conducted both with residents and key-persons engaged in social work or associations dealing with projects of intercultural dialogue, urban regeneration and integration. Interviewees were selected in terms of age, gender and ethnicity in order to represent the diversity of inhabitants of the neighbourhood as much as possible. The interviews focused on biographical aspects, everyday life in the neighbourhood, involvement in the life of the neighbourhood, perceptions of diversity and of the Other. A total of 29 interviews, which lasted on average one hour, were carried out between 27 June 2017 and 8 August 2017. The fieldwork was carried out with extensive time spent in the neighbourhood, moving around the area by bike or on foot to explore and get the best knowledge of the local space and local events and initiatives. The exploration of the neighbourhood and the participation to community activities were accompanied by the collection of photos and fieldnotes.

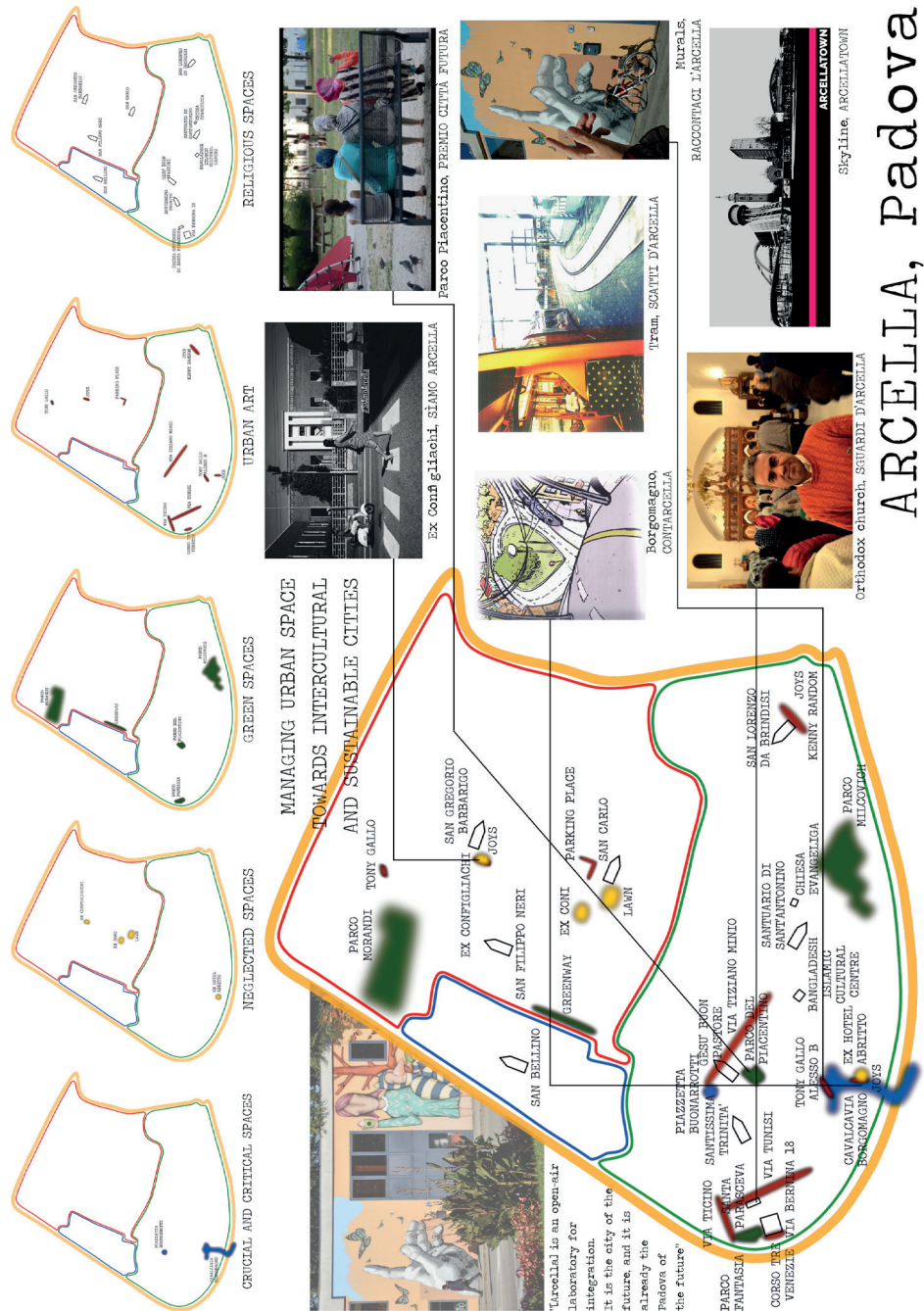
4.2. Mapping the Key Elements of the Neighbourhood

The research identified the actors involved, the resources used and the tools (also innovative and creative ones) found in the ongoing process of change. At the same time, the research investigated the shortcomings, the needs of the neighbourhood and the obstacles. An important focus of the research was on the narratives that were created about the neighbourhood, especially from 'outside', and which narratives emerged from 'inside' in response to them. The research aimed also at inquiring if the opportunity of encounters promoted through events and initiatives favoured the creation of a shared sense of belongingness to the place, with the result of the strengthening of collaboration among people, a stronger identity and a bond with the place. A process of mapping the neighbourhood offered the possibility to highlight which actors play important roles, which services they provide, which spaces are considered crucial, and which are the perceptions of the residents about the resources and assets, problems and needs, worries and hopes about the neighbourhood. In the Table 1 a comprehensive review of some crucial actors identified is offered, while in Figure 1 is possible to observe the crucial spaces and some of the projects carried out in the neighbourhood.

Table 1: List of actors

CIVIL SOCIETY (ASSOCIATIONS AND INFORMAL GROUPS)	R.I.D.I.M. - Rete Italiana Donne Immigrate Xena Amici dei Popoli Cooperativa Sociale Il Sestante Onlus Gruppo Vivere Bene San Bellino Volontari per il Quartiere – Padova Rete Arcella Viva BiblioSanBe Domna La Bussola Social centre Pedro
INSTITUTIONAL	C.A.T. - Centro di Animazione Territoriale Tavolo Arcella
EDUCATION	3° Istituto, 4° istituto, 5° Istituto ENAI, Liceo Scientifico Eugenio Curiel, IIS Giovanni Valle
RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL	Santuario dell’Arcella, Santissima Trinità, Gesù Buon Pastore, S. Lorenzo da Brindisi, San Bellino, San Carlo Borromeo, San Gregorio Barbarigo, San Filippo Neri Chiesa Cristiana Evangelica Assemblee di Dio in Italia Biserica ortodoxa Sfinta Parascheva Chiesa Cristiana Evangelica Cinese di Padova All Christian Fellowship International Christ Apostolic Church Of God Mission Holy Covenant Adoration Church Associazione Culturale Congolese A.C.C Unione Sacra d’Africa Al Farouk Bangladesh Islamic Cultural Centre Padova Italy
POLITICAL	Member of the municipal council delegate to the neighbourhood
MEDIA	Il Mattino di Padova Il Gazzettino Padova Padova Oggi La Difesa del Popolo
SOCIAL MEDIA	Arcellatown Sei dell’Arcella se... We love Arcella Quartiere Arcella Arcella Liberty Arcella e la sua Storia
SPORT	Polisportiva San Precario Sports centres Colbacchini, Plebiscito and others
ARTISTIC/CREATIVE	SiAmo Arcella Street artists: Tony Gallo, Kenny Random, Alessio-B, Joys and others
COMMERCIAL SPACES	Osteria di Fuori Porta Cinema Multiastra Gasoline Angoli di Mondo Limerick Ruvido Barber Rock Club Piazzetta Buonarrotti

Figure 1: Crucial spaces and projects



In Figure 1, the first map presents the *crucial and critical spaces*: Cavalcavia Borgomagno, that many interviewees described as an entrance to the neighbourhood, and also as a critical space for what concerns security; and Piazzetta Buonarrotti, an important space of aggregation. The second map presents some of the *neglected spaces* that in the opinion of many interviewees could be converted into spaces of aggregation for the community. These spaces are abandoned buildings and a large and currently empty fenced lawn. The third map shows the most important *green areas*. Parco Milcovich is the park described by many residents as the place of multiculturality. Other parks located on the map are Parco Piacentino, popular for many families, Parco Fantasia, whose existence is threatened by the construction of a supermarket, and Parco Morandi. In both Parco Morandi and Parco Milcovich it is possible to find urban gardens. The map presents also the 'Greenway', an ongoing project which includes a bike path and an urban garden. The fourth map highlights areas with *murals and graffiti*, created by some well-known artists such as Tony Gallo, Alessio B, Joys and Kenny Random. The fifth map represents the *religious spaces*. It reflects the variety of religions present in the neighbourhood. The map shows the historical Catholic churches, the churches of other religions and the centers of other religions, particularly the complex in Via Bernina 18 that hosts many different religious practices. The sixth map shows a comprehensive image of all the elements presented in the previous maps.

In Figure 1 it is possible to observe some examples of initiatives that used innovative ways to create new narratives of the neighbourhood. These projects tried to involve the inhabitants and prompt them to look at different aspects of the neighbourhood, not just at its problematic sides. Photography was one of the innovative tools used in many initiatives as a method for providing new images of the neighborhood.

'SiAmo Arcella' is a photography project created by a group of photographers. Their common aim of the group of photographers is to portray the evolving and diverse reality of the neighborhood, finding new perspectives to look at it.

The project '*Premio Città Futura*' was a documentary workshop that produced a short documentary about the neighborhood. In the opinion of one of the organizers, the choice of focusing on the neighborhood was motivated by the wish to '*photograph the current situation, discover the real Arcella, and not the one conveyed by the media*'.

The project '*ContArcella*' aimed at letting the neighborhood become alive through the narration. Instead of concentrating on the difficulties and critical aspects of the neighborhood, the project spoke about the beauty and uniqueness of the neighborhood. One of the initiatives of '*ContArcella*'

was the photo competition '*ScattArcella*'. The winning photos were printed as postcards. The criteria for selecting the winning photos were the '*originality, the inclusive perspective and the active research of the beauty of the neighborhood*'.

The book that was created as the conclusive phase of the project is called '*Arcelledario. L'ABC del Quartiere Arcella di Padova*'. The book highlights the distinctive elements of the neighborhood, providing information about its history, its demography, its landmarks and its elements of uniqueness. It offers through a very simple and immediate form (i.e. the alphabet and the drawings) an effective message about the richness of opportunities of the neighborhood.

The project '*Raccontaci l'Arcella*', managed by the association R.I.D.I.M., used the methodology of the photovoice during a workshop with women. The aim of the project was to prompt a discussion, through the production of photos, about topics such as the belonging to the neighborhood, the perception of comfort or danger in the urban spaces, and the identification of significative places.

The project '*Sguardi d'Arcella*' (Gazes/Views of Arcella), presented by the newspaper La Difesa del Popolo, aims at providing a new type of information about the neighborhood through the voices of its inhabitants, a type of information that did not find space in other local media. Photography played a central role in the project, as a visual tool to enrich the personal stories of the people interviewed.

Regarding the use of social media, the most interesting case is the page '*Arcellatown*', created in the early 2017. It has become extremely popular in a very short time. The majority of the people interviewed knew the existence of the page and they spoke about it with enthusiasm, considering it a very interesting and positive initiative. The page has been created by two friends, 30 years old, who grew up in the neighborhood. The driving motive was the wish to show the positive aspects of the neighborhood, and to encourage people to visit and to live the neighborhood. They use irony as a powerful tool to raise the interest of people, to make them laugh both over signs of identification with the neighborhood, but also about its problems. The page shows the potential of the social media platform, on one hand to gather the sense of pride of many residents, and on the other hand to prompt discussion through the provision of hints for reflections.

4.3. Processes of Change

The case study analysis has shown a neighbourhood that is facing the challenges common to all our multicultural cities. The challenges refer to:

the ability to mediate between different worldviews; the capacity to accept changes and to evolve; the difficulty to adapt to a new world that is also sensorially (with new sounds, sights, and smells) different; the ability to deal with the emotions of their residents, and to listen to their fears, concerns, wishes and desires; the capability of accepting the evolving nature of personal and collective identities; the possibility to become inclusive and non-discriminatory; the possibility to become place of encounters and to heal loneliness and isolation; the capacity to foster the emergence of feeling of belonging; the possibility to overcome individualism and foster participation, solidarity and collaboration; the ability to overcome negative narratives and propose alternative positive images and new ideals for the future; the capability of raising awareness and finding ways to address the environmental crisis. This entire set of challenges could be summed up in one comprehensive urban endeavor: the capacity of transforming urban spaces into intercultural and sustainable cities.

The richness, variety and complexity of the perceptions gathered among the urban dwellers of Arcella show how challenging is the creation of 'urban civitas' (Bekemans 2013), and how many obstacles should be still overcome for intercultural and sustainable cities to be transformed from an ideal vision into reality. The problems and challenges facing the neighbourhood are manifolded, and they were recognized by both the more concerned, disenchanted and worried interviewees, as well by the more idealistic, visionary and positive ones. However, what distinguished the approach of most of the interviewees in relation to the problematic conditions and difficulties of the neighbourhood was the wish to regard the reality with a positive outlook. This positive outlook seems to have prompted them to consider the challenges as opportunities, and in various ways to get engaged in first person for the improvement of the life in the neighbourhood. Among most of the interviewees, it was possible to observe the wish to react against the 'stigma' created against the neighbourhood, and the wish to tell another story their neighbourhood. Their response to this wish resulted in a precious contribution in terms of energies, time, creativity, courage and originality that they offered to the neighbourhood.

The research analysed which processes that emerged in the neighbourhood Arcella could lead towards the creation of intercultural cities. These inspiring processes are several: the creation of new narratives about the neighbourhood that strengthen the identity and encourage people to participate in urban life; the use of innovative tools and modalities for the creation of these new narratives and for favouring the participation of residents, in particular visual tools and social media; the bottom-up initiatives to create opportunities of

encounters; the emergence of synergies among the actors; the role of '*agents of change*' and their ability to collaborate and especially to inspire others.

'*Agents of change*' are those people that for different reasons, such as education, past experiences or involvement in activities or projects, have developed a strong feeling of attachment to a place. Together with this, they are often moved by a 'cosmopolitan feeling of belongingness', that could be rooted in personal experiences abroad, upbringing in multicultural environment or education. This allows them to develop an attitude of curiosity towards what is different.

The origin of the entangled range of factors that lead to the development of such open-minded, curious and cosmopolitan identities are difficult to trace. Further research is needed in order to understand which kind of life-experience have made possible the emergence of such attitudes. Enabling environments that offer opportunities of intercultural growth, intercultural exchange and development of civic and ethical values should be promoted. This could favor the emergence of the features that characterize these individuals that might be called also 'intercultural individuals', 'citizens of the world', 'cosmopolitan individuals' or '*intercultural innovators*' (Wood et al. 2006).

Nonetheless, these simple characteristics do not make them automatically 'agents of change'. They become 'agents of change' when they personally get engaged and commit themselves for a process of transformation and change in their communities. These people are moved by the belief that something can be changed, and someone has to start this change, taking advantage of human and material forces offered by the territory. They are moved usually by a strong set of values which make them able to believe in alternative and ideal futures.

They can do this in very different ways, and the space of opportunities for them to act is unlimited. It can range from very different type of projects in the field of the art, education, environmental sustainability. The activities could be carried out on a volunteering basis as well as activities for profit that follow ethical principles and are aware of the social changes brought alongside the economic gain.

'Agents of change' are people that are moved by the willingness to commit themselves to the place and community they are part of and to get engaged for a change. They are people who have a utopian vision which is transformed into concrete ideas and tangible projects, and who decide to share this vision with the others, the 'neighbors' of their lives, motivating them for a change. They are precious resources for the place they live in because they are vital sources of inspiration, energies, specific or special

skills, or rare social skills, that they decide to share, put at the service of their community. Their projects become collective, and their visions too.

Although the actions of 'agents of change' could be powerful by itself, their actions should be supported not just by civil society but also by the administration, in order to prevent the emergence of feelings of frustration and disenchantment when they meet obstacles and failures. Their role as agents of change for integration and urban regeneration should be recognized by the administration. Economic and strategic support should be given to them, in the form for example of issuing enabling policies, public funding, support to access to European funding, provision of spaces. They should be considered as special forces and resources to lead changes and transformations, and administrations should identify and consult them when framing policies and projects for the neighborhood.

With a local development perspective, it must be recognized that the local territory could offer the assets to resolve its problems. Local features and unique special factors should be recognized, with the aim of using them both as concrete tools of work for the change, as well as instruments to mobilize people's motivations and imaginings.

Keeping in mind the words of Jane Jacobs (1961, 238), '*cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody*', it is relevant to suggest that the collaborative processes, bottom-up approaches and synergies taking place in the neighbourhood should be promoted and strengthened. This approach of managing urban space and urban life should be based on dialogue and inclusiveness, that could envision a change towards the creation of new hybrid identities or, as Sandercock (2006a) puts it, of new '*mongrel identities*' that thrive in our '*mongrel cities*'. With this perspective, diversity is considered as an element of mutual enrichment that can happen through dialogue, and not as a threat of deprivation.

Are the processes launched in Arcella going in the direction of the creation of sustainable and intercultural cities, favoring the neighbourhood, its residents and the entire city? Do they offer a positive model and a guiding example for others? These are still open questions to which only the future can provide an answer. Further in-depth research would be needed.

Nonetheless, what we can already observe is that the neighbourhood seems to possess a special '*genius loci*', an intrinsic nature and spirit, of being a place characterized by continuous regeneration, transaction and reconstruction. Throughout its history Arcella has experienced developments and events that forced it to change and mutate its identity and urban configuration several times.

Even if the future of the neighbourhood cannot be predicted, the wish and energy to change and creatively face new challenges, without remaining immobile, already gives great hopes. What seems crucial, more than any other factor, is exactly the ability of a city to evolve, mutate, move, change.

As Jane Jacobs (1961) suggests, cities and urban neighbourhood can be in fact considered as living entities. If an urban entity is lively, in progress and not stuck in an immobile present, the benefits of this thriving urban life could embrace and permeate the city with its energy. It could be perceived by all the urban dwellers when crossing its streets, full of life, people and encounters. Suburbs could offer therefore special opportunities of changes, because they offer spaces of opportunities and experiments. They are the places where usually diversity is most visible, and because of their evolving nature they could be living laboratories for proposing new visions and horizons of conviviality, meaningful encounters and true dialogue.

As Jane Jacobs believed,

'Dull, inert cities, it is true, do contain the seeds of their own destruction and little else. But lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration, with energy enough to carry over for problems and needs outside themselves.' (idem, 448)

Conclusions

The case study analysis has offered the recognition of precious elements and emblematic processes which emerged spontaneously in the neighbourhood. They are considered strategic for the development of intercultural and sustainable cities. While identifying criticalities and weaknesses of the processes of change, the research has purposefully focused on the positive and powerful elements of change observed. In fact, the research has tried to use the same lens that Jane Jacobs used during her research and observations: an affectionate and sympathetic gaze that looks at the reality of cities, street life, urban dwellers and their relations without prejudices, curious and open to new discovery. This approach allows the possibility to be enriched by the unfolding of the life in cities, made of unpredictable forces and energies that spark from a unique element: the encounter with the Other and with the world.

Thanks to this approach, the research has allowed the recognition of the most powerful force and element of change in the neighbourhood: the passion, commitment and ability to transform dreams into reality of the 'agents of change' encountered. They have proved to be inspired by the reality of the neighbourhood, even if problematic and complex. They have

decided to get engaged with their time, energies and creativity, believing in the potential of the neighbourhood and in the possibility of creating something new and different, taking advantage of the tools at their disposal in innovative and visionary ways.

A strategy to foster intercultural cities should take into consideration their potential and take advantage of their inspiration, creating enabling environments, conditions and moments for letting their energies and passion be shared and transformed into larger tangible projects and effective changes.

The simple coexistence in a 'multicultural' place would not lead to such an ambitious horizon as the creation of 'intercultural' cities. Multicultural environments are places where people live side by side in the city with indifference (or tolerance) with the Other and with the urban space. On the contrary, intercultural cities are created when their urban societies are guided by the principles of dialogue and the awareness of being part of the wider global community. This 'urban civitas' (Bekemans 2013) would be therefore aware of the need to consider the encounter with the Other as a moment of enrichment and personal growth. In these societies, the respect and defense of the environment would be embraced by everybody.

The ideas proposed by Jane Jacobs (1961) seem to find fertile ground and confirmation in the neighbourhood. She advocates for the creation of diverse, dense and mixed-use neighbourhoods, for the importance of local urban entrepreneurs, for the crucial role of life in the streets, on the sidewalks and in parks. She considers all these elements as the key for creating lively and livable cities that favor conviviality, encounters and the resolution of their own shortcomings.

The vibrant and lively life in the neighbourhood seems therefore the confirmation that such a fertile ground might lead to the emergence of agents of change and the possibility that, thanks to dialogue and passionate individuals in cities, positive change might occur in societies.

In conclusion, the research suggests that cities can provide the possibility of becoming intercultural and sustainable if they are able to involve everybody, to favor participation, to benefit from local expertise and ideas, to offer places of conviviality and moments of meaningful encounters, to host diversity in terms of people as well as of spaces and services. These features could favor the emergence of lively and vibrant urban communities, shaped both by problems but especially by the wish and the desire to engage together to solve them, and to believe in new visions and perspectives. New visions and realities might emerge in these lively and visionary neighbourhoods, being laboratories of conviviality that offer the right and appropriate space and place for building the 'cities of the future'. The neighbourhood

Arcella in Padua is certainly a promising grassroots example of managing urban governance in a diversified environment, towards intercultural and sustainable cities.

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