

Active ageing through dialogue between generations: animating community strategies and participatory processes

Invecchiamento attivo attraverso il dialogo tra generazioni: strategie comunitarie e processi di partecipazione

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Abstract

Becoming elderly could be a reason for exclusion from social networks because of a change in status, role and identity related to age. Faced with the emergence of new needs, welfare fails to support inclusive processes and requires an intervention of community activation, so it becomes possible to create welcoming and dialogic social contexts. Pedagogy can rely on animation as a mobiliser of social contexts, awakening the bottom-up approach, in order to promote places and times of intergenerational dialogue, and to build more cohesive societies where the bonds of trust and proximity enable citizens to engage in the construction of a common good, that is oriented to supporting people and communities. The presentation of a practice carried out on the national level helps us to understand how intergenerational dialogue can be a vehicle of interaction for an open and hospitable community. Triggering, facilitating and supporting the relational dynamics that are aimed at the knowledge, experimentation and sharing of experiences where learning is mutual, may deepen the sense of personal and community projectuality, implementing reflective paths to highlight the characteristics of a successful daily practice. Elderly and young people in dialogue, therefore, can create meaningful connections and relational movements that can re-create the sense of community and understanding, experimenting new ways of living in an inclusive territory.

Active ageing and the crisis of the welfare state: (im)possibility of intervention and social creativity

An ageing population and the increased longevity that characterises the Italian context, must cope with demographic change, which has been going on for some time¹, and

¹ For statistical updates, it is possible to consult ISTAT documents, in particular: *Italia in cifre* (2013 edition and previous), in <http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/30329> and *The section population-demographic indicators*, in <http://dati.istat.it/> constantly updated. Last consultation: 07 april 2014. Currently in Italy more than 25% of the population is over age 60 and the demographic forecasts say that, with regard to the balance between generations, the dependency ratio of the elderly – which describes the relationship between not active age population (under age 14 and over age 65) and the working age population (between 15 and 64 years), for 100 –, is 30.9% today, will grow to 59.7% in 2065, thus generating generational imbalance. ISTAT, *Il futuro demografico del paese, Previsioni regionali della popolazione residente al 2065*, 2011, <http://www.istat.it/it/files/2011/12/futuro-demografico.pdf>. Last consultation: 07 april 2014.

requires a careful socio-economic approach in synergy with socio-educational perspectives.

Becoming elderly determines many consequences related to psycho-physical changes, and to the changes in one's status and role, starting with retirement. It can lead to exclusion from the social network, thus generating discomfort, isolation, lack of investment resources, skills and abilities for the individual. This leads to a loss of wealth at the level of social and relational capital, and requires a new configuration of society-community. It is therefore easier to promote the dynamics of proximity and solidarity without a dispersion of resources, but rather with a reinterpretation and sharing of resources.

In this regard, the current welfare system, based on a seriously depressed economic logic, is not always able to support inclusive processes. Thus it needs a community's activation – which should not become a replacement but rather a supplement – in the form of active participation, so that we can create inclusive and dialogic social contexts. The ongoing changes in welfare policies have generated a fragmented pattern where it is easy to waste resources (above all, the human ones), and not recognise them, so much that there are not sufficient financial resources to cope with emerging needs. The animation can convey «transversality communication»², which acts as 'social glue', reactivating the mediations and becoming an interface for civil society; supporting solidarity and connecting the micro and macro intervention; and encouraging encounters and dialogue between operational practices, institutional arrangements, and decision-making powers.

A significant role-responsibility and risk-proxy is attributed to the citizenry, though not always explicitly, and this creates imbalances and the *absence of welfare* that only a subsidiary approach can help fulfill. Subsidiarity, which is closely correlated with democracy, includes active citizenship, the guarantee of freedom and respect for social rights³, and requires a mutual activation of institutions and citizenship. For this to be built, it requires a participatory process where stakeholders are part of a common project, and serve as social actors of the proposals to be implemented.

This change of perspective requires the presence of active citizenship, with accountability, participation and choice⁴, where the role of social forms is fundamental to constructing new social, sustainable architectures⁵. It means promoting and facilitating networks of interaction and exchange, based both on trust and on the ability to create common projects in local territories. A locality that, more and more, compared to approaches and sustainable projects, can be modelled according to the situation, without losing references to the general and complex reality. At the same time, ideas and activities can be implemented that respond effectively to the specificity of places. Social animation

² J. C. Gillet, *L'animazione è utile alla democrazia, la democrazia è necessaria per l'animazione*, in «Animazione Sociale», n. 8/9, 2000, pp. 42-55.

³ G. Lazzarini, *Etica e scenari di responsabilità sociale*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2006.

⁴ J. Newman, E. Tonkens, *Participation, Responsibility and Choice: Summoning the Active Citizen in Western European Welfare States*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2011.

⁵ The metaphor of 'social architecture' allows us to emphasise the importance of restarting from the study of relational foundations to give shape to 'plastics buildings' of interaction and support networks, that are able to adapt to change, and, at the same time, consistent and capable of coping with critical situations and fragility.

provides that there are postures of guidance and support so that resources can be discovered and activated — or re-activated — in view of shared common goals. In this sense, we can refer to education and training as forms of enhancement and restoration of human, social and relational capital, in a dimension of empowered and empowering communities where greater awareness of their own resources and the increased knowledge of each other allows for the motivation for participation and cohesion within the group. By activating this process, it becomes possible to regenerate the existing resources and collectively build new ones, thanks to the dynamics of exchange, through pathways that support and reformulate the intertwining of knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences of the community with an open outlook⁶.

Awakening the context, returning awareness and giving an opportunity to the subject-citizens to express their being part of a reality, allows them to develop educational approaches focussed on the relationships between people, so that we can arouse the personal and community conscience that is in continuous transformation. It is more likely to engage skills and competencies in situations with a power of influence, where the sense of community makes citizens partners and participants. To do this, we need to generate possibilities, space and time, where people can meet, relate, compare, talk and plan together, starting with the issues that affect everyone and that can be addressed in a cooperative way. We can speak of a 'neighbourhood welfare' in which the dimension of dialogue and mutual respect — 'me-you' — is reflected in the solidarity of 'we' as having a potential for welcoming contexts, openness to differences, the ability to develop innovative and experimental education and training paths. The structure of the community will be in progress — evolving, alert to changes, capable of generating change. So, any person who accesses the services encounters its difficulties and its needs, but at the same time, he/she becomes a potential collaborator and an expert with which to compare, as a bearer of lived experiences. Supporting dialogue between social-educational services and people can generate new meanings and results that are useful in discovering the resources and the value of the subjects themselves⁷. This logic takes care of every person who expresses a need and an identity, and it is not limited to taking charge of the problem only. This allows the exploration of everyone's complexity, between limits and possibilities, enabling new chances for personal and social projectuality⁸.

Thinking about active ageing and building «a society for all ages»⁹, also means creating and strengthening intergenerational ties between the young and old so that they become a common force of social experimentation and cooperative environments, open to dialogue with differences, capable of taking care each other¹⁰ and of articulating the

⁶ M. Woolcock, *The Place of Social Capital in Understanding Social and Economic Outcomes*, in «Canadian Journal of Policy Research», n.2, 2001, pp. 11-17; M. A. Zimmerman, *Empowerment Theory*, in J. Rappaport, E. Seidman, *Handbook of Community Psychology*, Springer, London 2000, pp. 43-63; M. A. Zimmerman, *Empowerment e partecipazione della comunità. Un'analisi per il prossimo millennio*, in «Animazione Sociale», n. 2, 1999, pp. 10-24.

⁷ S. Venuti, *L'aiuto informale in un welfare di prossimità*, in «Animazione Sociale», n.11, 2009, pp. 22-28.

⁸ R. Deluigi, *Divenire Anziani. Anziani in divenire. Prospettive pedagogiche fra costruzione di senso e promozione di azioni sociali concertate*, Aracne, Roma 2008.

⁹ United Nations, *Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, Spain, 8-12 April 2002*, United Nations, New York 2002.

¹⁰ We intend to "take/have care" in the sense of L. Mortari who identifies in it the search for authenticity, so each man lives in a responsible way with his project, «blooming directions sense». L. Mortari, *La pratica*

multiplicity of languages and cultures that make up the cultural and social heritage of the community. We believe that education and training should not always be addressed to a homogeneous target. Instead, we can experiment with proposals and initiatives designed to accommodate the differences as a resource for dialogue and mutual enrichment, and to approach the realisation of a heterogeneous social laboratory, integrated with the complexity of the context, along with its nuances, divergences, and peculiarities. In this way, we can generate 'relational goods', and articulate inclusive projects, that are aimed at improving the quality of life of all subjects involved.

Active ageing¹¹ becomes a growth strategy to develop throughout the course of life. From this perspective, growing old does not mean falling into circuits of exclusion or therapeutic specialism, but rather, it is a continuous and progressive change that highlights the fragility and resources to which one listens and offers spaces for dialogic interaction. We refer to the pedagogy of Paulo Freire because his theory about the generative themes of education, in particular, focus on development of a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action. It is still a current approach, and above all, a workable theory.

Promoting and sharing 'authentic words', meetings and relationships involves taking non-negligible responsibility; restoring dignity and citizenship means working for liberation and 'awareness' of competent local communities in continuous development. In this sense, 'give word to the elderly' is closely connected with restoring dignity and recognition to the person who, if he fears and perceives that he has lost power, may retire and be excluded from the life of civil society¹².

dell'aver cura, Mondadori, Milano 2006. This vision allows us to support the person in his/her identity transformation even within social contexts in which his/her personal project and idea of project are compared and intertwined with that of others. Thus, new personal and joint directions are generated, revealing renewed senses and meanings, not neglecting changes of ageing, but also re-evaluating and re-meaning in the light of lived experiences. J. Mezirow, (tr. it.), *Apprendimento e trasformazione*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano 2003.

¹¹ The term is used here in the perspective of active ageing defined by the World Health Organization as "the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. Active ageing applies to both individuals and population groups. It allows people to realize their potential for physical, social, and mental well being throughout the life course and to participate in society according to their needs, desires and capacities, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they require assistance". WHO, *Active Ageing. A Policy Framework*, World Health Organization, Ginevra 2002, p. 12. This definition reminds us the need to build a welfare system and an effective logic of shared responsibility to ensure active ageing and participatory contexts.

¹² Here, there are two considerations that we mention briefly but we would like to deal with them in more detail: in the first instance, the viability and the feasibility of a pedagogical thinking can actually provide directions for planning educational interventions and practices that are able to communicate openly with the experience towards the co-construction of knowledge that increasingly contains traces of implemented project guidelines. Secondly, the dimension of power (personal, decision-making, such as status and role) should be observed very carefully to understand the influences that determine the identity of change and ageing. On the one hand, it is likely to fade away in its own defense in reference to the power recognised as such by others, and on the other hand, not feeling invested in more of a role and being able to express one's self, can lead to the loss of 'the power to be' of a person, limiting it in its becoming, again with the words of the Brazilian educator, 'to be more' (ser mas). P. Freire (tr. it.), *La pedagogia degli oppressi*, Mondadori, Milano 1971; P. Freire (tr. it.), *Pedagogia dell'autonomia: saperi necessari per la pratica educativa*, EGA Libri, Torino 2004.

Having the opportunity not only to tell of your own self, returning value to the narrative, memory, and the transmission of knowledge and skills¹³, but also to re-design the self with others, allowing older people not to become 'useless' in the 'productive machine', but rather to be agents of change and activation in a logic of re-generation where productivity is measured by the degree of well-being¹⁴ that all people can achieve in a open and welcoming community system.

As mentioned previously, changes relating to physical and mental condition, social status and employment, can outline a sense of loss in the elderly, with a renewed identity that is not always easily able to redefine itself. The risk is to seek refuge in an image of the past, not bothering to build present prospects for the future. Supporting the projectuality of everyone, even in relation to the teleological purposes of pedagogy, means urging the individual to revise and rebuild his or her personal and community identity, in order to understand strengths and weaknesses, and identify the (individual and social) goals to pursue. In this sense, it is taking care of one's self in relation to others, and reconstructing the trajectories that are able to empower the discovery and self-expression in the life context. Being and becoming projectuality/intentionality men/women means taking an ethical and social commitment that does not end in the confines of the individual, but requires direct comparison with otherness and with experience, in an effort that, emphasising the historical and relational dimension, assumes a new direction for the future¹⁵. If it does not, we lose the integrality of the person faced with the need to have a place, a function, and a role, which for many is found in the extended family's sphere, becoming 'full-time grandparents', or in the social dimension, with more time dedicated to associations and to the voluntary sector, or even devoting themselves entirely to their own interests and hobbies, becoming part of the real/virtual community that shares similar passions.

We believe that active ageing can be supported and maintained through inter-generational dialogue that goes beyond the boundaries of age, to rediscover a sense of dialogue, encounters, knowledge, and a joint project. Very often, it is easy to detect the presence of several generations in many places (professional, recreational, family), and it is among them that we can assume pathways of activation and participation processes aimed at reconstructing paths of dialogue and care for others, in addition to laboratories of democracy, where the original contribution of each person acquires a value in the construction and achievement of a common goal.

We also believe that this aim should be built into the specifics of each context oriented to search the common good, such as the construction of a shared well-being and

¹³ The narration takes on an educational value as the man who 'says of himself', shares part of his life with others, re-reading it and re-meaning it, opening up spaces for discussion and learning. The story that is expressed through a variety of languages can return an image of itself to take care of. D. Demetrio, *Educare è narrare. Le teorie, le pratiche, la cura*, Mimesis, Sesto San Giovanni – Milano 2012.

¹⁴ The well-being is closely related to the quality of life, linked to social organisation, services, practices and organisational issues that drive it. M. Nussbaum, A. Sen, *The Quality of Life*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1993. Well-being is determined by a combination of factors connected to each other and that relate to the individual and the community, and thus require dual focus (the person and context) of those who work in the social sector, not to create conditions of exclusion. M. Nussbaum, A. Sen, *The Quality of Life*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1993.

¹⁵ R. Deluigi, *La cura e l'invecchiamento attivo*, in reference to the work of di G. M. Bertin, *Educazione alla ragione. Lezioni di pedagogia generale*, Armando Editore, Roma 1995 (1968), in press.

the expression of a supportive community. The same common good in the community and relational welfare is subject to a process of co-construction, so that citizenship can recognise itself in it, as a significant reference for the community, amplifying the value and the need to invest in its construction as the logic of a vital/dynamic context, and attentive to heterogeneity and current changes.

A common good based on the person's good requires a relational approach to welfare in which there is space for planning experimental 'social yards' where the interaction of ideas, projectuality and experiences materialise the democratic nature of active citizenship¹⁶. Ageing becomes, therefore, a challenge for all generations, not intended rigidly, but rather as a transition, as steps, and as *crossroads of existence*¹⁷ which become elapsed time and lived space, as well as time to live and space to define.

Pedagogical perspectives: the approach of social animation

Pedagogical reflection may avail social animation¹⁸ to become a social mobiliser and to awaken the bottom-up approach, promoting spaces for intergenerational dialogue in order to build more cohesive societies where the bond of trust and proximity allows citizens to invest in the construction of a common good, close to the person and the community.

By interpreting and delineating lines of social animated action, we can undoubtedly claim that promoting active ageing is to abandon the stereotypes that often characterise the generations, and we can find points of contact where dialogue and design produce shared experiences, thus creating democratic places of hybridisations of thoughts, languages, needs and resources. This allows us to give space and representation to different present identities, and to start cooperative dynamics and social logics divergent by a standardisation and institutionalisation system of social practices and people. So, we decrease the risk of impoverishment and configure the individual projectuality within the limit of socio-political institutions, educational and training agencies, health and social services that too often deliver and provide¹⁹ assistance and benefits without making active and involved subjects-recipients.

¹⁶ P. Donati, *La cittadinanza societaria*, Editori Laterza, Bari 2000; G. Moro, *Citizens in Europe: Civic Activism and the Community Democratic Experiment*, Springer, New York-London 2012.

¹⁷ J. Elder had recognised those as *turning points*, moments of transition in which each subject gives a significant meaning and in which identity has to cope with varying structures, including long-established ones, to re-design themselves. G. Elder (Edd.), *Life Course Dynamics. Trajectories and Transitions 1968-1980*, Cornell University Press, New York 1984.

¹⁸ Cfr. R. Deluigi, *Animare per educare. Come crescere nella partecipazione sociale*, SEI, Torino 2010. In particular, with reference to the relationship between animation and territory, we highlight how the action of promotion of local resources may initiate a virtuous circle of participation where subjects with projectuality - for themselves, with others, for others - may become members of a community, fostering a sense of belonging and raising the need to take action in partnership between institution-citizens. In this way, the empowerment of the individual and the community enhances the decision-making power, fostering research into spaces of participation, promoting shared well-being and, thereby, restarting projectuality and, therefore, the virtuous circle. We can then talk of 'responsible partnership'. R. Deluigi, *Animare per educare. Come crescere nella partecipazione sociale*, cit. pp. 105-110.

¹⁹ We have deliberately used the verbal predicate 'deliver/provide' that is often accompanied by the noun 'users' and that refers to the production and consumption of services, without co-participation and co-responsibility of the parties. We believe that this is not the way forward for the subsidiarity and proximity, but rather, it is more useful to find and activate the cooperative dimension of *social enterprise*.

In this regard, it would be necessary to imagine a reformulation of the relationship between services and communities, starting to build *social enterprises* connoted by involvement and participation at the level of models and strategies for action. We can speak of active partnerships between all stakeholders – institutions, third sector, civil society, associations, citizenship – that help the logic of governance²⁰, in an architecture of subsidiary welfare, which is characterised by ties of solidarity²¹.

This model gives sense and significance to the presence of people and their way of living in shared spaces and feeling linked to the territory that it carries in their daily lives. Even in the presence of change that may interfere inexorably with older age, for example, we think about the institutionalisation in a home for the elderly or the changes of family structures to support home-based care in a renewed alliance between caregiver and careworker²². These are changes which, no doubt, affect the quality of life of expression, freedom of the elderly who are too often likely to be exempted from the decision-making processes relating to their own existence, and who retire with an attitude of self-exclusion and separation from social and relational reality. It is here that we can generate the disvalue of the human: when the other is substituted in all and for all, and has no way to use the remaining silent and resilient skills, despite the loss of autonomy.

A society for all is a society of all: the sense of belonging that can generate investment acts as a lever to promote active dynamics, to develop critical guidelines, and to support innovative and experimental approaches of living together. In this regard, consider social housing and how from this approach, widely used in northern Europe – leaving the first traces of pilot experiences in Italy – emerge lights and shadows of a model to calibrate and to regenerate, and also depend on territories where the experiences are located²³.

We must start, and we can start, from the participatory design, the co-construction of knowledge and practices, the ability to bring together the efforts and human resources in interventions that, increasingly, must become people-oriented, not only in a sectoral and specialist way, but with scenarios that are able to be inclusive and generative. It is necessary *to take action with the community for the community*, rediscovering the need to become active with others, to become agents of change, and to become social actors able to have the power of speech, expression and influence over events that affect the social context. This is a context that is never an abstract concept, but rather, is a set of places and times in which people live with their experiential, emotional, cultural ‘baggage’, where they generate relationships that consolidate the identity of the participated collective where plots of identity and multiple projectuality ‘bloom’.

²⁰ A. Gasparre, *Logiche organizzative nel welfare locale. Governance, partecipazione, terzo settore*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2012.

²¹ G. Lazzarini, A. Gamberini, S. Palumbo, *L’home-care nel welfare sussidiario. Reciprocità e ben-essere nelle relazioni di cura*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2011.

²² Thinking in particular of the Italian situation, the first term refers to family members, and the second term describes the widespread and heterogeneous ‘underwater world of *badanza*’, an issue which, no doubt, raises many questions from the point of view of the rights of citizenship, and not only that, of all the parties involved.

²³ D. Czischke (Ed.), *Urban regeneration in Europe: The place of social housing in integrated urban policies. Current perspectives*, cecodhas European Social Housing Observatory, Brussels 2009; J. Dijol (cecodhas), C. Puyol (ush), *Housing and Ageing in the European Union 2010*, Bruxelles 2009.

Social animation may provide some guidance as it is an educative style that promotes awareness and dialogicity, increasing the intentionality of the individual and the collective. We pursue an ethic of commitment and responsibility, where citizens become actors of a vision of community that aims to generate and re-generate identity and to develop belonging and solidarity investment in a multigenerational context in order to articulate plots of resources and needs, to build common and shared horizons. To animate, facilitate, and promote the participation of citizens in their own context means vehicular energy 'from below', oriented to the common good by concerted political, economic, social and educational approaches. If the logic that guides capital and welfare pertains exclusively to the political-economic axis, we will have partial views and not be able to understand the entirety of the person. For this reason, the development of awareness, belonging, participation and active postures becomes strategic in replacing the entirety of man, his continuous development and his social being. The horizon of the project itself and of the community must be broader to contain the many meanings of the individual, and to create a shared sense of co-living life contexts. Regenerating the possibility of making plans and being with others is an issue that affects the elderly, and not only that, the underlying logic of possibility and hope, in a pedagogical sense and not illusory, to be able to creating situations, times and places to consolidate the person-community project.

«Ageing with all its facets can encourage (people) to re-design themselves and to redesign, in a creative and re-generative way, life that is not a continuous r-existence at logical outside the man, but that becomes the expression in co-existence»²⁴. In this sense, intergenerational dialogue becomes a platform to relaunch experiences, life stories, skills and knowledge that are in contact through the relationship, handed down, to share and create space for the continuous training of human, social and cultural capital, that otherwise would be lost. The logic of exchange is fundamental and asks subjects to reposition themselves in relationships, sometimes unusual, where continuous learning becomes mutual and runs right through links that are generated in the experience of sharing and in the creation of new experiences. The trajectories of the generations intersect and intertwine to soften distances, differences, conflicts and tensions that often clearly delineate and mark the boundaries for the age group.

Notes on educational planning to enhance the dialogue between generations

To continue the pedagogical reflections around active ageing and solidarity between generations, we refer now to a national experience carried out in 2013/2014, currently in its final phase, which will connect the issues identified from the theoretical point of view with the practice developed in the intervention project .

The project, '*Young vs Elderly: new relationships between generations and cultures. Experimentation of territorial actions in favor of intergenerational solidarity*', funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs – Directorate General for the Third Sector and Social Formations and proposed by the leader SCS / CNOS Federation (Salesians Association for Society) was founded in response to the guidelines of the 2012, «European Year for

²⁴ R. Deluigi, *Abitare l'invecchiamento. Itinerari pedagogici tra cura e progetto*, Mondadori Università, Milano 2014, p. 107.

Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations»²⁵. This European initiative, which has found an appealing and appropriate target at the demographic level in Italy, raises an educational and cultural challenge which we must address in experimental and unusual ways. Hence the title of the project contemplates the construction of intergenerational interaction that is able to make seniors more active and young people more involved, in view of the construction of environments of cooperative citizenship.

The project is focussed on building/facilitation of times and spaces in non-formal contexts and in social, cultural and sportive gathering places, where people can meet, learn and recognise their own abilities and skills – even to direct them in common projects. The start of the dialogue process becomes critical to increase the logic of participatory planning which, after being triggered, must be accompanied and supported all along the development path. The role played by each center's manager becomes strategic – the 19 locations involved are located in 17 Italian regions – in order to develop inclusive logical, empowerment and community perspectives. It is precisely the approach of animation that, without a doubt, is geared to ensure the highest level of expression of the person in the community, including through group dynamics, which can urge and initiate processes where subjects become active and protagonists of experience.

This style allows us to consider the problematic issues for which the project was intended to function, from the sharing of one's personal wealth of knowledge, skills, and competencies. These are resources that older people possess and that too often are lost, to the detriment of the individual, who may perceive feelings of exclusion, and to the detriment of the community, which does not benefit from the human resources and relationships that can generate mutual enrichment. In addition, we must not overlook the difficulty of transforming the particle 'versus', included provocatively in the title of project, in its substantive sense: from conflict-opposition to the movement-meeting, made possible by structuring shared responsibility experiences. Even the difficulty of communication between the generations can reveal a distance, due to the use of multiple forms of languages that seem too distant and divergent to create synergy and hybridisation. And finally, in heterogeneous contexts, cultural elements and experiences may be different, and the risk that they generate diversity in conflict is high if we do not create open and welcoming contexts, ready to listen and to engage in dialogue.

Based on these issues, we hypothesised a way to build proximity in social settings, sometimes too fragmented and closed in particularism of dynamic need-response. The intent was to give form to new possibilities of cohesion, to promote local ferments and intergenerational practices that would make people think about the importance of support and communicate experiences of 'us', which have become more and more disparate, without exclusion of any person that is present in the socio-educational contexts of action.

All aggregation centers that are responsible for and involved in the project '*Young vs Elderly*', have facilitated encounters between generations, often in places where they were already together, thus activating moments of dialogue and reflection (after sharing the general structure of the project in a seminar of initial training). The use of different languages made it possible to create an interaction, not only of ideas, but also of lived experiences, soliciting and testing the aims of the project in the context of realisation. The

²⁵ EY2012 - *European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity Between Generations*. For further references and details on the guidelines, see <http://europa.eu/ey2012/>. Site archived on 30 june 2013 but still available. Last consultation: 01 april 2014.

proposal and the management of parallel groups of young and old (one dedicated to defining a profile of senior and active ageing, and the other, to understanding what skills and resources could be available for reuse in the community, starting from the life story), has resulted in a mixed group (young and old together) where the generations, meeting 'face to face', began to get to know each other, leaving behind the clear demarcation between the generations in order to become oriented to the more extended and boundless knowledge of the other person (by increasing a greater dialogue between the parties and promoting a better understanding of the other).

Initiating relational, intergenerational contexts required, first of all, an understanding of the needs and resources in reality, and to imagine new ways of engagement that were innovative and integrated with the measures already put in place. It means to listen to and take the different instances into consideration, emerged from young and old, and initiate, share and think of activities together, introducing new ones in itinere²⁶. The relationships and bonds, born from informal relationships between young and old, have strengthened the initial guidelines of reference, enriching them with new trajectories and meanings. The previous knowledge of the centers managers, already operating in the realities involved with the project for a long time, required them, in some cases, to dismantle a consolidated, logical reference in order to imagine innovative work-tracks; in other cases, it was necessary to strengthen and consolidate the co-presence of young and old, that was taken for granted as a transit/passage rather than as significant length of stay.

Sharing common, achievable goals, after discussing the matter, has facilitated the participation of individuals and the re-emergence of skills and knowledge that have helped to create a climate for a purposeful and active group of young people and the elderly. In this way, many experiences and tacit knowledge have emerged and that have found a space for expression and renewal. This has made it possible to foster less stereotypical images of generations, thus encouraging feelings of alliance rather than opposition, experienced through collaboration to achieve a joint objective. Reflection alone was not sufficient, and to reinforce the degree of commonality, the project has turned its attention to the promotion of joint activities where the whole experience helped, on one hand, to strengthen the inter-generational group, and on the other, to create an openness to new ideas to achieve in favor of a larger community, such as the local territory²⁷.

The relational forms that have emerged during the course of this project are indicative of the possibility of the development of community care, where 'the other' becomes visible and near²⁸, and is known directly. In this perspective, everyone becomes

²⁶ It is therefore part of a logic of participatory planning, attention and involvement of people, not only as perpetrators of proposals, but as co-creators of the same. Guidelines become shared strategies and concrete actions and the role of participants/social actors becomes crucial; scenarios are drawn by those who took part in the participatory process and is no longer simply user and viewer. It thus refers to a logic of co-responsibility and community sharing of intentionality, motivation and implemented proposals.

²⁷ Extending the reflection on the local context is a very important aspect for the expansion of proposals and the logic underlying the project, which may become a common heritage of the wider community. The experimental project, therefore, becomes one of the tools of awareness and communication of experiences, not closed and secured in predetermined shapes but aimed, rather, to be open to a wider territoriality in which everyone can contribute and continue the reflection and intervention strategies that could be implemented in terms of intergenerational dialogue.

²⁸ The tangibility of the presence of 'otherness' allows us not only to power the reflection on how to develop sustainable interaction, but also to implement actions and strategies that promote a "welfare of small worlds",

an active citizenship²⁹, as their contribution is valuable to the community in which it is inserted and allows for intergenerational activities. The discussions that began at the start of the project between young and old have required the development of concrete actions, active proposals, and laboratories in which to experiment, learn to cooperate, and to give form to own thought in a participatory way. Planning and creating experiences together requires the ability to build a democratic environment and to restructure it with mediation, so that it is always attended and generates co-responsibility, based on the significance of the relationships. The differences become treasures to discover, and shared experiences open up the possibility to continue to create environments for sharing and widespread socialising. The languages, modes of expression and communication, forms of artistic, cultural, theatrical, sportive, and recreational associative expression, have built *new geometries of communitarian environment*, allowing us to catch a glimpse of further developments in the ongoing synergy between innovation and tradition.

The animation approach has conveyed all the dynamics described above, taking advantage of the contextual peculiarities of the implementation of the project '*Young vs Elderly*', and enhancing them to create models of inclusion and sustainable inter-generational dialogue. Proof of this is the fact that in many places the young and elderly have met informally, beyond the opportunities generated by the project, and have traced many possibilities of sharing, because of the common interests that emerged along the way.

Trajectories and perspectives: between experience and reflection

Giving off and amplifying the energies that are present in the environments of life, even those less formal, creates a way to take unexplored, educational paths. The plasticity of the interventions and the multiplicity of actions implemented have led to a belief in the sharing of general guidelines that are modelled on the beautiful imperfection of the concrete, leaving significant traces of experiences that increase unprecedented opportunities for collaboration and new forms of living together. Constant and active dialogue with ageing 'in progress' is a strategy to support future projects, identifying the significant points of socio-educative work where we need time and continuity. Initiating participatory dynamics gives renewed strength to personal and community projects to ensure that inhabiting public spaces becomes a reason to support the daily pursuit of intergenerational dialogue.

Taking care of the community to which everyone belongs, where the ferment of participatory democracy was created as a transformative act that relates to the individual and the context, is translated into concrete acts and attention directed towards another citizen. These are the people we have met and have known — faces that do not go unnoticed, names that assume a meaningful identity, and shared moments that will not

a welfare contextualised and situated in active communities that are able to revitalise innovative projects, to track down sustainable and replicable logic and, above all, to underline the emergence of virtuous mechanisms of socio-educational adventures in progress. F. Santamaria, G. Volpe, *Passaggi critici nella progettazione di comunità. I tempi lunghi dell'incubazione di imprese sociali territoriali*, in «Animazione sociale», n. 6-7, 2007, pp. 45-54.

²⁹ E. Ripamonti, *Anziani e cittadinanza attiva. Imparare per sé, impegnarsi con gli altri*, Unicopli, Milano 2005.

only remain in memory, but become launching pads for other projects. Projects where the importance of the conceived and lived experiences (together) amplifies the occasions of knowledge, experimentation and sharing of significant moments, and where learning becomes mutual and experiential, expands the sense of personal projectuality and of community planning; there is a way of implementing reflective paths to bring out the decisive moments and effective authentic and original practices that are to be exercised in the multifaceted and complex day.

In the unusual, in the unexpected, in the uncertain — it is here that reflective thought is placed, getting substance from practices that unfold in each moment, looking for a balance that makes it constantly dynamic but ready to stay in the situation.

It is evident that the challenge of ageing affects all, as men and women cross the course of life and share traits, and that, therefore, we need to move towards a pedagogy that is able to start from shared reflection on the practices, and to guide intergenerational educational intervention. In this way, we can promote and support networks and social contexts where the enhancement and the meeting of human resources is permanent, so that nothing of human development, whether the person who becomes a project or the dialogic community, is lost along the way.

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