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Deprived Neighbourhoods in Neo-Liberal Times – the Role of Public Funding in Education

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1 ABSTRACT

In the light of what has been called "actually existing neo-liberalism" the issue of spatial segregation and exclusion of deprived peripheral neighbourhoods is analysed by challenging the pseudo-concept of the so-called "mixed communities", whose ultimate goal seems rather to be encouraging home ownership through a mix of tenures. Preliminary findings on a still ongoing on-field research are presented.

2 NEO-LIBERAL GUIDELINES FOR URBAN POLICIES, PLANNING AND DESIGN

Within what Brenner and Theodore (2002) have called «actually existing neo-liberalism», being different from pure neo-liberal ideology, Peck and Tickell (2002) further distinguish a «roll-back» and a «roll-out» model, or «laissez-faire» («let-do») and «aides-faire» («help-do») neo-liberalism (Purcell, 2009; see also: Raco, 2005). While the former is associated to Margareth Thatcher's and Ronald Reagan's policies in the context of the 80s, when market logics and the reduction of the State to a minimum were proposed as an effective approach for facing the economic recession, the latter, based on a more active role of the State in facilitating the accumulation of capital, is explicitly associated (see e.g.: Allmendinger, 2011; Peck & Tickell, 2002) to the New Labour's centre-left government in the UK (see also: Levitas, 1998; Newman, 2001; Cochrane, 2003; Raco & Imrie, 2003; Hills & Stewart, 2005; Holden & Iveson, 2003).

Brenner and Theodore (2002) also suggest «recognising the extraordinary variations that arises as neoliberal reform initiatives are imposed within contextually specific institutional landscapes», and the need to more overall analyses on such «variegated neo-liberalism» (Huw, 2009; see also: Peck & Theodore, 2007; Birch & Mykhnenko, 2009; Brenner et al., 2010a) is highlighted (e.g.: Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Peck, 2004; Peck et al., 2009b).

But, despite «the path-dependent character of neo-liberal reform projects» (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) and the different ways in which «established institutional arrangements significantly constrain the scope and the trajectory of reform», as Scoppetta (2012) has noted in the case of regeneration of industrial port-cities (see also: Scoppetta, 2011a; 2011b), a general well-established neo-liberal planning recipe exists and can be easily individuated: «finding a derelict industrial or port area (in the latter case, delocalising port activities in a deepwater zone); adding a lot of public/private partnership, a pinch of trendy "creative class" according to Landry's (2000) and Florida's (2003) theories, a quantity of entertainment and leisure, a spoonful of (luxury) housing, offices, malls and public spaces, and a handful of tourism. Seasoning with IT facilities; then mixing with an international Olympic or cultural event and with a slowly and carefully cooked strategic planning tool. Finally flavouring with a tasty slogan – such as "young city" or similar – and with an "inclusive" and "shared" participatory process».

Such neo-liberal planning recipes can be seen as «knowledge apparatus» (Sum, 2009), based on competitiveness as a «hegemonic "knowledge brand"» (ibid.), «persuasive, widely accepted and powerful simplifications of the world» (McCann, 2004), such as the so-called "best practices", that effectively functions in spreading neo-liberal discourses and approaches, by forming a sort of disciplinary power over different countries and rooted planning traditions, so that they are often used by various actors to support arguments and to express the need for certain projects (see: Peck, 2010), which, in turn, refer to a specific (and often imagined) «urban neoliberal subjectivity» (Beaten, 2011) mirroring particular ideas about work, free time, and (above all) pattern of consumption (see: Atkinson, 2003b; Zukin, 1995; 1998).

In fact, as MacLeod and Ward (2002) and Lees (2003) underline, this happens especially as concerns public open spaces (on which urban regeneration schemes are particularly focused) by promoting an idea of "quality" that precisely mirrors a specific, «selective and systematically discriminating» (in: MacLeod, 2002) aesthetic model, which, in turn, both emerges from and promotes specific social groups, i.e.: young single or childless urban professionals with high income, and high social, educational and cultural capital. And, as Jensen and Richardson (2007) argue, «when particular subjects are imagined in particular ways, this will play a more or less visible part in the formation of policies and plans».

Such «technology of representation», which is incorporated within a «technology of renewal» based on detailed design guidelines, tends to reproduce «guidelines for a favoured kind of urban citizenry, figuratively embracing them in a landscape informed by a bohemian aesthetic while other residents are rhetorically and materially recast as outsiders» (in: Hoskins & Tallon, 2004) through the use «interdictory architecture of the new built environment» (MacLeod, 2002) implying expectations of specific behaviours, often supported by surveillance systems (Atkinson, 2003b).

3 DEPRIVED NEIGHBOURHOOD IN THE CONTEXT OF NEO-LIBERALISM

3.1 Neo-liberal spatial exclusion

The French sociologist Jacques Donzelot (2008) claims that, while the twentieth century was the age of confrontation, ours is one of polarization and spatial segregation. In fact, being the epicentre of the neo-liberal «geographically uneven, socially regressive, and politically volatile trajectories of institutional/spatial change» (Brenner & Theodore, 2002), cities are at the heart of processes of exclusion/inclusion, as the transformations linked to the process of both economic restructuring and globalisation have led to a polarisation of the labour market due to the growth of the demand for high-skilled labour on one side, and low-skilled labour on the other (see: Sassen, 1991; Mollenkopf & Castells, 1991; Hamnet, 1996; 2004; and many others).

While the polarisation thesis by Sassen and by Mollenkopf and Castells tends to highlight how specific processes of economic restructuring and labour market changes affect the social and spatial structures of cities, Hamnett's contribution (1996; 2004) has been pivotal in addressing the importance of welfare regimes in shaping the social outcomes of economic restructuring. In the European context, the debate was taken forward, with many authors insisting on the significance of welfare regimes without disputing the spatial inequalities affected by economic restructuring (see: Maloutas 2004, Musterd & Ostendorf 1998). Therefore, the phenomenon of spatial polarisation can be seen as an additional outcome of that characterising both the labour market and population (Maloutas, 2004).

As a consequence, the issue (or the rhetoric) of the included and the excluded who are (also) spatially segregated permeates the recent European literature and policies. The broader "spatial turn" in policy discourses has led to widely acknowledge space as a crucial dimension in the structuring process of exclusion. In fact, many scholars (Murie and Musterd, 2004; Musterd et al., 2006; Andersen, 2003; Forrest & Kearns, 1999; Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001) particularly emphasise the spatial dimension and the role of place in social exclusion, especially in the case of run-down inner city areas or peripheral public housing estates, so that the emphasis on social issues has shifted from notions of social class to notions of place: Therefore, both mainstream literature and political discourse in many European countries focus on the dimension of the neighbourhood, especially if dangerous, deprived and involved in a downward spiral that contributes to the further concentration of low-income households.

"Downward spiral" involving people, buildings, the environment and the image of the place, stigmatisation, "post-code discrimination", predominance of negative role-models, spreading of anti-social behaviours, concentration of disadvantaged low-income inhabitants, and the escape of householders as a result (see e.g.: Taylor, 1995; Power, 1996): these are the interpretative categories– coming from the US context, with a higher and more rooted level of segregation due to racial issues – generally used for explaining the «neighbourhood effect» (Bolt et al. 2010; see also: Musterd & Ostendorf, 2005; Ostendorf et al., 2001). The latter is not without implications in policy terms, as it linked with the idea of introducing a"de-concentrative" social mix (see: Musterd, 2002; Musterd & Andersson, 2005; Ostendorf et al., 2001; Musterd, 2003).

Lindsey (2007), however, underlines how the exclusion is «manifested both physically (within the actual space of the city) as well as discursively (within the space the city occupies in the imaginary)». In other words, this means that the exclusion is not only spatial, but it also is an exclusion from city's narratives. This allows assuming the existence of dialectical relationships between the (essential) economic motives and the (not irrelevant) ideological connotations of neo-liberal globalised and market-led urban renewal initiatives. As Scoppetta (2012) notes, «this relationship clearly reveals how not only the end result of rent-seeking urban policies, but also the socio-spatial transformation process are determined by (and are able to reproduce) hegemonic relationships».

3.2 A "pseudo-concept" is roving Europe!

On the background of the abovementioned spreading of neo-liberal pre-established recipes, guidelines and (presumed) "best practices", a «pseudo-concept» – as Bourdieu (2004) would say – is roving Europe (sic!): the assumption that more balanced communities can be achieved by encouraging the social mix through the differentiation of housing tenures. Well-designed open public spaces for imagined citizens (consumers) to be attracted in regenerated neighbourhood constitute the obvious corollary of the basic assumption.

Jacques Donzelot (2006) – an urban sociologist from a country where concerns about self-segregation are strong in the political debate, as the main objective is to assimilate minorities into mainstream society – has critically analysed such trend towards social mix by deconstructing, in order to reveal its ambiguities, the use of the concept of "mixitè social" as a key-tool to achieve social cohesion in French urban policies over the past twenty years. He nderlines how this concept has been translated in two type of policies: imposing minimum quotas of social housing to local authorities, and encouraging "middle class residents" back into deprived neighbourhoods (mostly post-war housing estates) through selective demolition and housing differentiation measures. According to Donzelot, this means that the ultimate goal is to increase the variety of housing typologies in order to encourage home ownership, rather than assuming as primary objective the mix of population groups with different incomes. In fact, such projects are often aimed at enticing middle-class residents into deprived neighbourhoods, rather than deprived households into richer areas.

Donzelot's analysis offers useful insights into a better understanding of both rhetoric and hidden reasons staying behind public discourses on social mix, which seem to be mainly led by the need of attracting middle classes residents and private investments in the (no longer public) restructuring of the existing public city. We can also interpret in this sense the shift towards ownership of housing policies in Berlin (Bernt & Holm, 2004), which used to be a tenant city: while subsidisation of condo conversion is expanded, funding for social housing has been drastically curtailed, and rent control has been reduced. In addition, each year 30,000 housing units are "freed" from being reserved for low-income groups, and the public housing associations are being sold. The goals of social programs for "problematic neighbourhoods"– such as "Social Stadt" – are not desegregation or redistribution (since such goals are no longer seen as feasible), but rather an attempt to mitigate the worst effects of the restructuring.

It is not a coincidence, however, that the concept of social mix – exclusively applied in social housing estates (Darcy, 2010) and not, as in case of the Home Ownership and Opportunities for People Everywhere VI or Moving to Opportunity programmes in the USA, where vouchers to rent private dwelling in richer neighbourhoods are given to low-income households – as an engine of cohesion and sustainable communities constituted one of the main principles underpinning the vision of New Labour's so-called "urban renaissance" (that involves, in the reality, just a part of the "urban"), and it was strictly linked to that of "sustainable community". In this sense, many scholars have highlighted the coexistence of two contradictory New Labour's agendas (Cochrane, 2003, 2007; Holden & Iveson, 2003; Levitas, 1998; MacLeod & Ward, 2002; Ward, 2003; Jones & Ward, 2004; Amin et al., 2000). In fact, while the term "social mix" was already present in the first period, "sustainable community" appeared for the first time in 2003 and progressively substituted the term "urban renaissance" – the major slogan of the New Labour's agenda immediately after the coming into power in 1997 (Rogers & Coaffee, 2005; see also Gordon, 2004) – in public discourses.

In key policy documents, the «new sustainable urban realm» to be achieved through the "urban renaissance" was explicitly intended as an instrument aimed at «attracting the suburban knowledge and service industrial demographic back to the city» (Cochrane, 2003, 2007), i.e.: to stop the "escaping" of the middle-class towards the suburbs (the process of sub-urbanization started in the '80s) and to enhance the (global) competitiveness of the city in the new knowledge economy. In other words, the vision of the New Labour's "urban renaissance" was based on the assumption that the return of the middle classes to the inner city could be the key-way of reducing concentrated poverty and its long-terms effects (DETR, 2000). Therefore, being the concept of "social mix" framed within these basic ambiguities and contradictions, it clearly shows its rhetoric nature.

In this sense, it is not a coincidence that what is to be "mixed" remains highly unclear in key policy documents such as the Urban White Paper (DETR, 2000; see also: Lees, 2003), where the term "mix" refers to uses and functions («mixed development») as well as to social issues («mixed communities») or, as

Rowlands et al. (2006) note, it is presented as a (prodigious!) tool for delivering both income and social mix as well as social interaction, broader social cohesion, "sustainable communities", cultural and ethnic diversity (OPDM, 2006) (surprisingly, happiness, richness and eternal youth are not mentioned!). Further (supposed) positive effects of mixed tenure are individuated by the Williams's and Daly's de-constructive analysis (2006): dilution of disadvantage, improved sustainability (of services), change in resident behaviour and change in non-residents perceptions. But, anyway, they conclude that empirical evidence shows that while tenure mix surely is a necessary precondition for social mix, it is not sufficient to achieve it.

In the reality, indeed, «tenures are spatially separated as a result of the land assembly methods» and «this not necessarily being conducive to social integration» (Williams & Daly, 2006). Many other scholars (Kleinhans, 2004; Galster, 2007; Cheshire, 2007, 2009; Chesire et al., 2008; Lupton & Tunstall, 2008) agree on the fact that there is little or no evidence neither of the increasing of social interactions between social housing rental residents and the owners of newly built housing units, nor of the leading to better life chances and opportunities. On the contrary, beyond the obvious loss of social housing and public assets, regeneration policies based on a mixed-tenure approach rather tend to lead to a transformation of local services and retail (Rowlands et al., 2006) for the benefit of higher income groups. Furthermore, while seeing in mixed-tenure strategies a form of gentrification (Cameron & Coaffee, 2006; Johnstone & MacLeod, 2006; Lees, 2008; Aktinson, 2003; Davidson & Lees, 2005; Watt, 2009; see also: Urban Studies, 2008), British scholars underline that the tenure mix rather tends to produce «utopian and dystopian spaces», «physically proximate but institutionally estranged» (MacLeod & Ward, 2002) leading to daily micro-conflicts over the use of green or social spaces (Richards, 2005; Taylor, 2005). Richard Rogers himself – one could say: the "father" of the Urban White Paper – highlights the risk of segregation «with ''haves'' occupying their trendy new apartments and the ''have nots'' living not far away in substandard housing» (Hetherington, 2002).

By underlining that the New Labour's idea of "urban renaissance" is focused on a «civilized middle class» (Atkinson, 2003a), other scholars (Jupp, 1999; Atkinson & Kintrea, 2000) highlight a further paternalistic assumption of a (supposed) "civilizing" influence of tenure mix, based on the idea that contacts and interactions with "role model" from a different socio-economic background could "motivate" the deprived groups or individuals, even though there is «no specific evidence of role-model effects or increased social capital» (JRF, 2006).

Anyway, it is worth noting that in the UK the increasing of negative perceptions of Muslim residents, due to the bombing of 11th September 2001 in the US and 7th July in London as well as the riots in Northern English cities in 2001 led to growing debate in the British media and political sphere on the spatial segregation/clustering of immigrants and on its potentially dangerous consequences as well as to the re-emerging of assimilationists discourses (Philipps & Harrison, 2010) within which residential segregation of ethnic groups was seen as undesirable (Bolt, 2009; Musterd, 2003). A clear ideological affinity with such kind of discourses can be found in the highly controversial declaration by Prime Minister David Cameron (Helm et al., 2011), elected in the spring of 2010, and by the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government's reaction to the urban riots of the summer of 2011.

4 CONSTRUCTING CITIZENSHIP AND URBANITY.

4.1 Lessons from a (too easily) forgotten work.

Although it has become a sort of «professional orthodoxy» (Bailey, 2005), given the scarce evidence about its positive effects for low-income or marginalised residents, together with so many abovementioned British scholars that livened up a passionate debate on the issue at least since the 1996 (a review in: Inch & Marshall, 2009; Marshall, 2009; see also: Inch & Marshall, 2007) we can affirm that the mixed-tenure approach is an uneffective or at least insufficient tool «for delivering social mix and long term sustainability» (Rowlands et al., 2006) for low income or marginalised urban residents.

Such approach, in fact, tends to treat the symptoms of urban deprivation and inequality rather than tackling its causes (Cheshire, 2007; 2009; Cheshire et al., 2008), by shifting the focus of public intervention away from the fundamental question of structural inequalities, with a useless and uneffective use of public resources (Musterd et al., 2006; Beaumont, 2006; Arbaci, 2008; Cheshire, 2009), as it seeks to solve larger-scale problems – such as labour market and structural economic transformations, the changing role of the welfare state, the dynamics of the national housing market, or ethnic discrimination in various spheres –

which are rooted outside the borders of the neighbourhood. An example of the uneffectiveness of the mixed-tenure approach is given by the fact that, despite the emphasis (and the rhetoric) on the so-called "sustainable mixed communities", social interaction in mixed neighbourhoods is not self-evident, as social worlds, places of consumption or education of children from low and middle/high-income families remain highly separated. In fact, even though tenure mix may imply a (relative) physical proximity between social groups having different incomes, it does not automatically mean a real mix in public spaces, schools, public services and shops.

Therefore, a broader consideration of non-residential forms of marginalisation is to be suggested, and this raises questions on what other spaces focusing on to construct a shared concept of contemporary urbanity. Amin (2002), for example, suggests the spaces of daily negotiation of differences, such as workplaces or schools. In particular, as regards schools, it has been noted (Burgess et al., 2005) that, even in the less criticised cases of UK neighbourhood regeneration, new middle class residents tend to perform exit strategies by sending their children to private schools or to public schools outside the (clearly still stigmatised) neighbourhood, so that the degree of class or ethnic segregation in schools within the regenerated areas remains higher with respect to that of the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Therefore, schools and, more generally, the access to welfare services (such as education, training and employment opportunities) (see: Musterd & Andersson, 2005) – i.e. the integration of area-based and people-based policies – seem to be a more crucial factor for the construction of "sustainable communities", even for avoiding the «potentially detrimental gentrifying effects» that only mixed-tenure regeneration processes «may inflict on the communities they intend to help» (Lees, 2008).

In 1961, at the beginning of both the so-called Italian "economic boom" and the uncontrollable sprawling growth of the city of Rome, Vittoria Calzolari and Mario Ghio wrote together an unfortunately too easily forgotten book – "Verde per la città" ("Green for the city") – based on a detailed comparison (showing a gap which appeared as really hard to bridge) of educational provisions (in terms of school buildings and related green and sport areas as well as of educational systems) between Italian (and, particularly, Rome) and highly welfarist Northern European cities (Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Zurich, Ulm).

This is a work that should be considered a possible new starting point for the integration of place-based and people-based approaches as well as for the spatial rethinking of the welfare system. Italian planning scholars use to connect this work to the concept of "standard" (in quantitative terms) of public services, but this is a reductive misunderstanding. In fact, even if such word was not fashionable at that time, this is a book that clearly talks about what we today use to call "urbanity", since it stresses the role of public schools (to be connected to both playing fields and public libraries) within urban neighbourhoods, by addressing their design in terms of both spaces to be devoted to young citizens and inter-relationships between these spaces and the neighbourhood as a whole. During the tumultuosus highly rent-guided growth of the city of Rome in the 60s, highlighting the existence of children and the need to consider public spaces, structures and contexts within young people operated meant linking together the issues of education and citizenship.
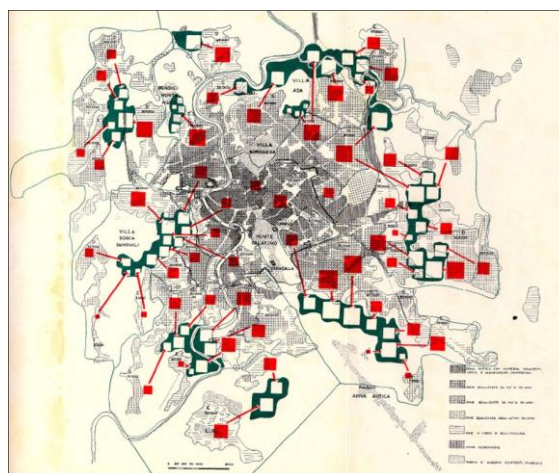

Fig. 1: Primary and secondary schools and related inter-connected green areas with sport equipments (based on density of children population). Source: Calzolari & Ghio (1961).

4.2 Preliminary findings from a still ongoing interdisciplinary on-field research.

The current sprawled and fragmented urban morphology of the periphery of the city of Rome is the result of a rent-seeking (Natoli, 1953; Cederna, 1956; 1965; 1991; Insolera, 1962; Della Seta & Della Seta, 1988; Tocci, 2009) urban regime occurred since the post-World War II, that led to the emerging of three different cities: the "private city", i.e.: the result of what Parlato (1970) has identified as «the ideology of privately owned house»; the «spontaneous metropolis» (Clementi & Perego, 1983; see also: Berdini, 2010), i.e. illegal unplanned settlements (28 % of the urbanised areas within the municipality of Rome in 1981) in what between the eighteenth and nineteenth century had been called "Roman Campagna"; and, finally, the "public city", i.e. the answer to the emerging, during the 70s, of the periphery as a new active social subject due to both innovative approaches in sociological research (e.g.: Ferrarotti, 1970; 1974) and Pasolini's literary works (1955; 1959), and to the consequent urban struggles for social housing.

The result is the current «fragmented morphology formed by "islands" which are defined by visible (e.g.: architectural shapes) and invisible borders (sometimes implying a still rooted sense of belonging of settled communities)», and which «tell us about different ideas of both city and society», so that «architectural objects, separate powers, public, private and illegal projects, images and cultural constructions, differences and conflicts are currently casually spread» (Scoppetta, 2009). What joins the different islands is a metropolitan condition in which distance (from city centre, from working places) due to a severe lack of public transport (and a consequent strong car-dependent mobility) «constitutes the unit for measuring exclusion» (ibid.). Neo-liberal policies developed since the 90s, by shifting from the periphery (i.e.: from the city as a whole) have privileged a «rhetorical narrative of urban renaissance» (in: Scandurra et al., 2007), focusing on the role of culture in re-positioning the city within the global arena of the new "cultural economy" (a review on the issue in: Scoppetta, 2013) through both the valorisation of the historical centre, mainly focusing on tourism and consumption, and culture-led policies, based on the (outsorced) promotion of spectacular events as well as of contemporary architecture (e.g.: the Renzo Piano's Auditorium Music Park) (see: Scandurra et al., 2007; Berdini, 2008).

The neighbourhood of San Basilio, in the north-eastern periphery of Rome, originally was one of the "borgate" (Insolera, 1962; Berlinguer & Della Seta, 1976; Martinelli, 1990), which were established in 1929 by the fascist regime in the "Roman Campagna" far from the already urbanised areas, as a displacement tool for freeing the central areas of the city in order to give room for the magniloquent representation of the fascist "empire" on the background of archaeological remains. After the World War II, the borgata was partally demolished and reconstructed with a low-density typology. Furthermore, thanks to the funds coming from the Marshall plan, a further nucleus of public social housing was added, and illegal settlements arose. A further settlement of social and affordable housing was then added, but it still remains separated from the others. In 1974, the neighbourhood of San Basilio emerged (with many political consequences at the national level) as a sort of symbol of urban struggles for housing: in fact, due to the problems of overcrowding and lack of transparency in establishing allotment lists, the existing nucleus of social housing was occupied, and this resulted in an armed conflict that ended tragically in the death of a young demostrator and dozen injured among both police and occupants. The initial ruralisation of the displaced originally urban craftmen and, then, the riots that involved the neighbourhood as a whole (not only the occupants) produced a shared and persistent strong sense of belonging that, in a certain sense, seems to be favoured by the architectural shapes, provided by common spaces and connected courtyards.

Due both to the presence of the still occupied blocks and to the spreading of illegal activities, such as the direct selling of hard drugs especially within the original nucleus – an enclave which is easy to control by pushers thanks to its architectural shape – San Basilio is currently considered as a neighbourhood at risk. At the same time, an "official" controlled gypsy settlement has been established (after its dispacement from an inner urban area) close to the neighbourhood immediately after the coming into power of the new right-wing government of the municipality in 2008. Thus, even if drug-market activities are confined only in certain areas, and although, given the distance from the city centre, flats' prices are more affordable than in other neighbourhoods so that new inhabitants are immigrant workers but also young families from the middle class under the pressure of the economic crisis, San Basilio is currently involved in a "neighbourhhod effect".

Within such a context, exclusion and segregation clearly appear in the neighbourhood's secondary school, with the increasing emerging of racist behaviour: middle against lower classes (mirroring the different parts of the neighbourhood), Italian against immigrants, Italian and immigrants against Roma pupils. In fact, even

if they share the same living environment, these are separate worlds with profound differences in knowledge, language, behaviours, lifestyles, interests, and expectations. School compositions, for example, clearly highlight a different use of free-time as well as the fact that the most advantaged tend to use the neighbourhood as a dormitory, as they do not use (and, therefore, do not know) the neighbourhood's public spaces. The latter are also differently perceived: on the one hand, they are intended as dangerous places to be avoided, since the living environment is inside home and movements are always by the parents' car. On the other hand, public places in the neighbourhood are perceived as a familiar networked space which tells about a shared "antagonist" collective memory, and in which it is difficult to clearly distinguish from legal and illegal behaviours because of daily interaction of street-life.

Anyway, the school is the unique welfare space for gathering, socialising and for culture, and it could really be a relevant resource, as it could act as a mean of contact and dialogue between parallel networks that otherwise risk to never cross. Exploiting the existing school's creativity and opening it to the territory could mean considering it as a social centre not only for pupils and parents, but for the whole neighbourhood, hosting in its spaces cross-section initiatives (e.g.: courses of Italian language for immigrants, cinema, library, and so on) that address different categories of inhabitants. But, surprisingly, even if many projects have been developed in the neighbourhood in order to face the "neighbourhood effect", no one of them involves the school: both the forecast path network aimed at reconnecting the different parts and the improvement of public spaces paradoxically does not consider the school, and only two of the 120 students analysed know the existence of the new built social space (resulting from a "participative" process!).

More generally, despite the rhetoric of the so-called "knowledge society", in the current phase of restructuring of the welfare system, education in Italy seems to be the privileged sector of public dis-investment. In fact, between 2008 and 2011 "cuts" in funding have amounted to 8,5 billions €, and between 2012 and 2014 further 13,683 billions are foreseen. As underlined by the OCSE report 2012 "Education at glance", Italian investment in public education (9 %) is lower than the European average (13 %), so that Italy is at 31th place among 32 EU members. Spending for public schools has been dramatically decreasing in the last 10 years: in 1990 Italy spent for school 10,3 %, while in 2008 the percentage was reduced, by subtracting about 80 billions €. In addition, in 2008 Law no.133 by the Berlusconi's government led to further cuts of around 7,8 billions for the period 2009-2012 concerning teachers employed: from 824,178 in 2001 to 795,342 in 2010 and 744,260 in 2012. When considering all different (and necessary!) figures employed in public schools: 1,137,619 in 2007, 1,043,284 in 2010, 950,000 in 2012. All this means the disappearing from classrooms of over 1,000,000 teachers in the last five years. This also means that public education is considered as one of the main resources to be used for improving the national budget. At the same time, public funding (223 millions € in 2013) to private (mainly Catholic and often elite) schools remain uncut, even though in such schools a (often very expensive) fee is required. In fact, although according to the art. 33, par. 2, of the Italian Constitution «private entities have the right to establish schools and educational institution at no cost to the State», the Law no. 62/2000 (by the D'Alema's progressist government) equaled private to public schools, so that they are considered as part of the national educational system, and since 2000 public funding to private schools is tripled (from 179 to 545 millions in 2007) – not to mention further funds from local authorities.

In the secondary school of the neighbourhood of San Basilio – where the most disadvantaged students can, however, easily earn 50 euros per day as useful non-punishable under-age pushers – such neo-liberal devolution results in less laboratories and equipments, less time devoted to lessons, impossibility in opening the school during the afternoon, increase of student per classes, less adjunctive teachers for non-Italian speaking or problematic children (currently from 5 to 9 in each class), elimination of social and psycological support. All this finally unavoidably leads to an "exit strategy" of the most advantaged students towards the schools in the surrounding neighbourhoods, while the most deprived remain excluded since the beginning.

On the contrary, beyond constituting a possible physical focus for the requalification of the surrounding network urban open and/or green spaces, the school could really play a role within a broader rethinking of the concepts of urbanity and citizenship in order to make them suitable for children, and not only for the thirty-years-old high-income single gentrifier, typical of the London's "urban renaissance". This obviously means usefully concentrating public investments (reduced because of the economic crisis) on both material and immaterial components of educational system rather than looking for "zero-cost" and "zero-tolerance" solutions to face social problems due to the still ongoing economic restructuring.

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