

Changing the Nature of Cities

Linking environmental benefits with social inclusion and urban economy

Maria Beatrice Andreucci¹, Anna Steidle²

¹*“Sapienza” University of Rome, Department of Planning, Design, Technology of Architecture, Rome, Italy,*
mbeatrice.andreucci@uniroma1.it

²*Dr. Steidle Consult, München, Germany, anna.steidle@urban-landscape-management.com*

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Extended Abstract

As a planning and design concept “Inclusive Landscapes” incorporates the knowledge and needs of everyone, balances interests of different stakeholders, and in particular considers those groups that have difficulties in accessing information and articulating their interests. The concept of “Inclusive Landscapes” can be applied to any kind of landscape – such as urban, rural, touristic, or heritage landscapes. The value of our Natural Capital should be considered as the primary infrastructure of the city, as the expression of historical, cultural and social identity of local communities, and as a driver of the urban sustainable development, essential for the definition of a new regeneration strategy which builds up the continuity of freespace, urban voids, green areas and parks to connect urban and natural space. The proposed contribution will present different perspectives and experiences articulated by the authors leveraging on the participation in two workshops (Mantua, 2018 and Munich, 2019) by academics, researchers and practitioners from a range of different disciplines central to the interdisciplinary discourse and mutual learning which is at the heart of social inclusion, environmental sustainability and urban economy. Joint Programming Initiatives (JPI UE) and the Urban Europe Research Alliance (UERA) organized in December 2018 the first workshop entitled “Urban Conflict and Convergence in the Anthropocene”, in relation with the World Forum of Urban Forest (WFUF), organized by the Polytechnic of Milan, and FAO in the city of Mantua. Being aware of the many challenges and risks affecting the urban built environment, the debate hinged upon the costs of urban infrastructure, which can be seen as economic drivers (defining the relationship between green infrastructure to be restored or newly designed, and grey infrastructure to be built, revamped, or ‘greened’); the planting of new trees in relation to maintenance costs; various international models of urban afforestation in smart cities and eco-districts; the collective scarce consciousness of the landscape economy, as it should be conveyed to the new generations. Another topic that emerged in Mantua concerns the health and wellbeing of citizens, with the example of Portugal in which administrations have convinced citizenship to perform physical activity in parks, and the relationship between the costs of subsistence of a healthy citizen, in relation to an inactive one. The participants deepened the debate by discussing topics related to how the circular economy can close the cycle of urban metabolism; the role of nature-based solutions in improving resilience and quality of life in the city; policies related to territorial development (transport, green, social integration, pollution) and which of these are the most effective; the role of different actors and stakeholders; the concept of eco-design and the reuse of water as a source of energy in the industrial production. Clear social inclusion strategies have recently been few in Europe, also because of a growing emphasis on discrimination. Social inclusion means the accessibility of the whole population to basic resources, to social services and to the labor market. Barriers to collaborative approaches in partnership emerge probably because people have different cultures, and often lack appropriate knowledge and competence, especially on critical issues as those referring to the environment. In Munich, Neuaubing-Westkreuz/Freiham is a growing district located on the western edge of the city, currently hosting around 30,000 people. Under the aegis of the SMARTER TOGETHER project, the City of Munich is expected to invest in the next few years a total of around 20 million euro in the 350-hectare district, of which 6.85 million euro will come from the EU. The City of Munich is also trying to implement pioneering smart city solutions in an attempt to be able to build neighborhood units for another 10,000 people. Beside this very ambitious programme, an already conflicting social reality confirms the urban dilemmas mentioned above. On the one hand, the city of Munich needs new settlements and openspace to accommodate the newcomers. On the other hand, the impact of climate change requires Green and Blue Infrastructure. As a consequence, Freiham is experimenting a fierce competition in terms of uses and rights on the available land. Integrated solutions developed by researchers, practitioners and citizens are needed. Especially those able to empower people already living in the area, thus preventing resistance. Under this scenario, ideas will be presented in Lyon IMU 2020, with particular emphasis on those which the authors believe could be scaled-up and successfully replicated in other urban regions, in Europe and beyond.

Key-words: Urban Economy; Welfare; Social Inclusion; Environmental Sustainability; Green Blue Infrastructure.