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**NEXT PROJECT
FINAL CONFERENCE
SASSARI – PRESENTATION
Rome, 15.06.2022**

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Today I will briefly tell about how the idea of '**Condominio solidale: vicini più vicini**' (Solidarity condominium: closer neighbours), a project financed by the *Foundation with the South* under the 'Innovative Projects 2010' call, came about.

The project was only **launched in 2013** as it was discarded in the first evaluation phase because it was considered utopian. Therefore, perhaps more innovative than the evaluators themselves expected and yet based on a very simple concept: replacing consumer goods with relational goods.

It was a challenging project in that it was based solely on people's trust.

This challenge was also taken up by the project team, which was heterogeneous and varied, and which was embarking on an experiment for which it was impossible to follow set paths, of which there were no known precedents other than projects related to social housing or co-housing.



The project, presented by a partnership, of which **UISP Sassari** was the lead partner, composed of seven associations and a limited company, was developed in the **city of Sassari**.

It is a provincial capital with approximately **130.000 inhabitants**, which in those years was undergoing a deep urban restructuring concerning both works for public utilities, redevelopment of the historic center, as well as works for the embellishment and enhancement of the city's artistic and architectural heritage, and the beautification/renovation of squares and streets.

But at the same time the city showed **signs of malaise** that were not to be emphasized but neither ignored: episodes of intolerance towards foreigners, violence against animals, acts of exasperated vandalism, acts of bullying and juvenile deviance by packs, as well as attitudes of exasperated aggression and anger that seem to have the typical connotations of the malaise of large metropolises.



The **economic and social crisis** that our city has gone through is symptomatic of that malaise, that urban vulnerability, typical of a context in which contacts and interpersonal relations are being lost precisely because of a loss of the sense of 'person'.

It is precisely with this socio-economic approach, i.e. the constant erosion of '**Relational Assets**', that we intended to read the crisis that the city has gone through (and is going through) by inserting this project of ours to support and enhance the social fabric.

Our aim, in fact, was to attempt **to oppose the metropolitan disorientation**, to block that individualistic and ego-referential spiral that leads people to enter the dangerous circuit of the **perception of urban vulnerability** that makes them feel insecure and distrustful, with the consequent taking refuge more and more within the walls of their homes, ignoring or even suffering the world around them, thus contributing to breaking down relational networks, knowledge and mutual trust.



Closer Neighbors provided two kinds of services:

intangible services:

activation of voluntary resources, increases in participation, solicitation of public debate, generation of collective goods, access to information, sharing of knowledge and skills, networking and enhancement of networking, use of condominium or neighborhood public spaces, emergence of individual experiences and knowledge, increased capacity for implementation of social policies by citizens;

material services:

activities, under various forms of awareness-raising, socializing, recreational games, motor activities, training moments, use of new or unusual spaces, documentation activities including video, etc. These include: condominium gymnastics activities, walking groups, condominium presentation events, birthday parties, neighborhood parties, action exchange activities for the optimization of daily life in the condominium, play spaces for children.



It was precisely the proposed motor activity that intrigued the evaluators of the funding foundation, who wanted a meeting with the three main partners before granting the funding. One of the first questions we were asked was precisely why that activity had been chosen and how we thought it would serve the project.

One of the **main objectives** defined was to **relate the actions** of individuals by **building a network of exchanges** and **reciprocity** in support of the social fabric, making it more robust and variously embroidered. It is important as a first step to have an overview of the possible interrelationships between the different variables of the specific territorial context by defining a project path capable of involving the useful actors and integrating their multiple capacities and potentialities starting from the simple actions they perform on a daily basis.



The idea for the project came from a group of **social workers** who came up with a hypothesis as to why established models of **social intervention** are often ineffective: because they can no longer exist without a rediscovered awareness of 'citizenship', of the active and responsible role that citizens must play, who must be stimulated to take up the challenge of opposing the individualistic/consumerist narcosis that has led them to hastily and superficially perform important actions 'consuming' their social and even economic value.

An attempt was therefore made to **use the condominium as a 'unit of measurement'** for an experimentation of interpersonal relations based on the socio-economic theory of **Relational Goods** which, in radical synthesis, sees contemporary man becoming increasingly unhappy because reduced to an isolated consumer monad.

An attempt has been made **to valorize all the dimensions of the human being**, identifying with the term 'goods' those dimensions of relationships that can neither be produced nor consumed by a single individual because they depend on the ways of interacting with others and can only be enjoyed if shared in **reciprocity**.



After an **awareness-raising activity**, which took place with the **support of the neighbourhood associations** involved and the "**facilitators**" (professional figures trained ad hoc), exchange activities were initiated through the direct involvement of the condo owners through small but significant neighbourhood initiatives, such as condominium gymnastics activities, walking groups, condominium presentation events, birthday parties, neighbourhood parties, exchange activities for the optimisation of daily life in the condominium, children's play-spaces with a snack or presentation tea for the condominium residents, etc.

Initially we thought that the four **neighbourhood associations**, already involved in the planning phase, could be the **real passpartout** to enter the apartment blocks, and thus to relate with the tenants, but they were the weak link in the planning system, proving to be ineffective in their role, probably due to a lack of real penetration in the social fabric of the neighbourhoods of reference.



This was done by the **facilitators**, all **UISP operators** coordinated by an **expert educator** from the social services of the **Municipality of Sassari**, who, with the complicity of some of the residents, put in place a real strategy to intrigue people first and then involve them in a series of initiatives, many of which originated from the proposals of the residents themselves.

The **responses of the neighborhoods** and apartment blocks involved were very diverse. What made the difference was the strong motivation of some of the apartment blocks who, sharing the social value of this proposal, **committed** themselves personally by **volunteering** their time, involving their families, and physically opening the doors of their homes.



The condominium in via Cima 6, a small building with 10 flats, has become the symbol of 'Closer Neighbors': a building with its doors ajar, ready to welcome, which has circulated the cultural and value message of 'I can do', 'I can give', which has acquired awareness of the value of relational assets and their valorization.

The **methodology of involving** people focused on the **power of curiosity**, providing input or creating ad hoc stimuli. A few examples: during the Christmas holiday period, an almost bare Christmas tree was placed in the lobby of one building, inviting the inhabitants, with a card hung on the **condominium notice board**, to contribute to its decoration.

In another building, nice invitations to have tea in a tenant's flat were placed in the letterboxes; whoever wanted could bring something. Both proposals met with a good response of interest from unsuspecting tenants.



In this way, **people curious** about '**who**' and '**why**' these actions were being promoted spontaneously approached each other, thus increasing the opportunities for dialogue.

For the promotion of **walking groups** (an organized activity in which a group of people meet two to three times a week, at an agreed time, to walk along an urban or extra-urban route, initially under the guidance of a leader), leaflets were also distributed in the streets around the apartment blocks unknowingly applying for the project.

To answer the Foundation's project questions, the walking group could be a useful **picklock to break down the mistrust** or reserve of the neighborhood's inhabitants, to get people out of their homes with the motivation to do something useful for their health, while creating those relationships of proximity so useful in everyday life.



Regaining possession of the street as a **place of sociality**, allows one to overcome the perception of the street as a problem (traffic, danger, etc.) in order to regain a social place where one can meet, communicate, rest, find moments of conviviality, play, walk.

The walking groups, together with the other project actions, have contributed to **creating inter-relational networks**, open spaces for discussion, communication and interaction between people of different ages and skills, capable of fostering mutual trust and the readiness to work together as a 'critical mass' with respect to the project, the neighbourhood and the city.

By interweaving different experiences, they helped to weave, **making it more solid**, a **social fabric at risk of imploding into isolation**, marginality and an individualistic defensive drift.



A **further step** was the **activation of communication channels** between neighborhoods to achieve **inter-neighborhood activities**, as well as the exchange of participants' personal experiences through community assemblies, focus groups, working groups, as well as recreational and motor activities

By pooling their **knowledge and skills**, the tenants ridecorate the interiors of their building, took care of an uncultivated communal plot and transformed it into a garden, organised parties and convivial occasions for all the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, spent New Year's Eve together, helped each other with their daily tasks and difficulties, finally got to know each other by telling and listening to each other's life stories, and understood each other.

"Condominio solidale: vicini più vicini" has been for all of us project partners an intense experience that has deeply affected us and helped us overcome the difficulty of knocking on the neighbour's door to ask for help, because, on the other hand, if they had asked us for help we would have been happy to help!



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