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Research Article

The Role of the Territory in an Educating City: Two Italian Laboratory Examples of Participatory Urban Planning

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to stimulate further reflection on the concept of the Educating City by presenting two Italian participatory planning initiatives. The analysis focuses on the benefits of knowledge of the surrounding territory for the development of an informed and engaged citizenry; the key role of the city for education and participatory space in a learning society; and finally, the strategies that have been implemented to educate the community about its territory and encourage active participation in its development. The focus of the reflection is thus the city as an 'open' educational environment, made up of spatial elements that are closely connected through social relations. In this environment, actors influence each other and engage in constructive communication and cooperation to co-create shared living spaces. In this sense, a comprehensive knowledge of the territory can contribute to the development of a cooperative citizenship whose actions influence both the communal living spaces and the social fabric that populates them. Through continuous learning about the territory, the urban community can acquire skills of conscious self-determination and participate effectively in the shaping of urban space. This is a fruitful process that cannot avoid taking into account the 'situated context' and the education that enables the integration needs of the urban community to be incorporated and expressed in the decision-making processes about the future development of its own territory.

Keywords: educating city, continuous learning, community of practice, learning organisation, humanistic geography approach

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Highlights:

Understanding the city as an educational and relational environment based on continuous learning processes leads us to consider:

- the territory as a text composed of layers of meanings and cultural reifications
- the territory as a provider of knowledge and an educational resource; and
- the educating city as a social innovation space based on interaction and co-habitation

1. Introduction

Although the rural population outnumbered the urban population until 2007, approximately 57% of the world population lives in urban areas (over 80% in several developed countries) at present; furthermore, it is predicted that approximately 2 billion people will live in cities by 2050 (Morgan, 2022). Therefore, the city must be considered in every respect as the context of the new challenges encountered by humanity in the 21st century.

The speed and scale of urbanisation make it our future arena in a multitude of domains, such as carbon emissions, traffic and pollution, energy consumption, food and water resources, soil consumption and the planning and regeneration of urban spaces. The environmental deviances and social changes arising from the consumption of resources negatively impact the mobility of people and goods that characterise the Anthropocene: "dense, fast, overheated, marked by inequalities and inequities" (Eriksen, 2017). The city is evidently the quintessence of this historical transformation, the expression of the needs and social tensions that inhabit it and manipulate its physical space, and the essential field of action for human processes. Each city, in its own way, becomes a means of understanding how people and societies create their life contexts and find a space for their activities. What has become of that primordial and constantly renewed experience of our personal relationship – simultaneously intimate and social as well as public and private – with the spaces and times of our existence? (Lussault, 2019, p. 19).

With spatial and demographic concentration in its many material and social layers, the contemporary city is not only a hyper-place of globalisation that consolidates various types of material and immaterial realities but also a part of the world recognised by its inhabitants as an ordered and shared space. Hyper-places represent the global world, making it real and indisputable (Lussault, 2019, pp. 110–111). Therefore, the urban space becomes the answer to the need to be anchored to a physical place where people can find their social identification (Lussault, 2019, p. 261). This is because, first and foremost, the city remains the home of citizenship that changes over time according to people's needs and relationships, with respect to the territory it inhabits and with which it identifies.

The city is a kaleidoscopic and complex reality of relationships and social conflicts and of centralities and marginalised areas that make the urban space uneven; it is a generator of inequalities (Harvey, 2014) and, consequently, potentially violent. This is amplified by the overconsumption of natural resources, including soil, and the consequent environmental deprivation (Huttunen et al., 2022). Thus, innovative approaches are

needed to respond to the evident sustainability needs of the urban system: "While cities have become the heart of the growing problem of economic and spatial inequality, within them lie at least some of the solutions to this inequality" (Forster & Iaione, 2022, p. 1).

In the search for the homeostasis of all the elements composing the complex urban reality, we have chosen to discuss the role played by local communities, emphasising the importance of the territorialisation of a permanent training process for an aware and active citizenship. The construction of territoriality as a sense of belonging to the places of life passes through the community's awareness of the potential of its contribution to the shared evolution of the territory. From this perspective, the support of the institutional dimension is key because, by revising urban policies, it can and must increasingly support the involvement of local communities in an approach based on continuous learning and co-creation (Anthony, 2023). Specifically, this analysis aims to emphasise the opportunity offered by certain initiatives focused on participatory social practices and urban services capable of stimulating collaborative economies that, by promoting inclusiveness and sustainability, can be a driver of local economic development (Forster & Iaione, 2022). On closer inspection, we can determine the following:

> *Everyday practices, understood as routine patterns and "uses of space", shape urban space. They relate different producers of space such as town planners, local communities, grassroots movements, "users" and construction workers to space in different ways. The role of producers of space goes beyond the production "of things in space" […]. These agents situate themselves along a continuum from macro-decisions to micro-decisions, both fragmented and connected. (Jenss, 2020, p. 3)*

This allows us to understand the urgent need for an alternative urban governance that, supported by targeted policies, directly involves public, private, and non-profit stakeholders and the local community to achieve common objectives, such as the reduction of poverty, inequalities, and conflicts, and to facilitate sharing, collaboration, and trust between the stakeholders participating in the city life, which is considered an area of social innovation based on interaction and co-habitation. The territory thus becomes the space for social relations and the evidence of their transformations, which are part of an integrated development process focused on social innovation aimed at fulfilling communities' needs, strictly connected to urban development challenges (i.e. the lack of the diffusion of skills and experiences between sectors, the often marginalising separation between different spaces, and the non-fulfilment of some social groups' needs), and this is dependent on the transformation of governance social relations (Moulaert et al., 2007).

Such an integrated territorial development inevitably involves sharing and expressing the needs of the community in the decision-making processes regarding the territory's future. This process is characterised by an aware citizenry that cannot disregard the knowledge of its territory, as well as the creation of a spatial awareness fuelled by the social relations in a given space and by the reproduction of identities and cultures linked to such a place (Laudiero, 2020, p. 2). This implies active participation in projects or in the regeneration of the spaces of life. Working in and for the city means considering it a sort of "open-air school" that immanently educates the citizenry and the territory through social exchange. This involves various social partners in designing and rethinking urban spaces, both public and private: "Therefore, more collaboration and partnerships with families, industry, and businesses, voluntary associations, and people active in cultural life are needed. To build a learning society and make lifelong learning a reality, it is important to embrace and connect all learning stages, types, and places" (Osborne et al., 2013, p. 410). This approach is in line with what Longworth and Osborne (2010) defined as "a geographically based learning concept" (p. 369), which allows urban citizens to be educated and aware of their active role in changing the environment to express its social and territorial value in a process of continuous learning and collective self-education.

Therefore, the territory is an educational and training space for the community. It is an ecological habitat where the educational methods fit the context (Bateson, 1984), becoming an educational laboratory (Dewey, 1939) where exchange and co-operation become part of the learning process to develop generativity (Costa, 2016). This realises the person and creates a common future vision. This is the result of a virtuous process (Fig. 1) that, however, cannot ignore the context in which it occurs (Bruner, 1984) – namely, a precise space and cultural context. In this sense, the city is an educational space from which we can benefit if we learn to manage, control, or change it (Ward, 2018, p. 96) while being cognisant that its future depends on the evolution of its citizens' co-operation.

The research questions are listed below:

- Is the knowledge of one's territory necessary for an aware and participatory citizenship, thus becoming an essential part of the educational experience of every citizen?
- Can the city be considered the shared space of a learning society?
- What can be done to educate the community to help it know its territory and play an active and co-creative role in its evolution?

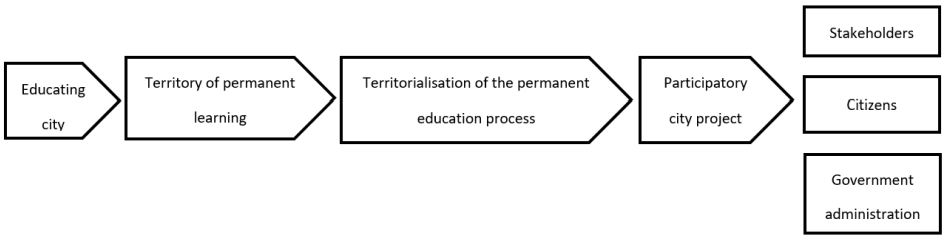

Figure 1. Conceptual diagram of the thematic path.

2. Theoretical Background

In "Democracy and Education", Dewey (1916) analysed the close connection between education and experience, emphasising how educating means providing experiences that are significant, authentic, have a social nature, and are grounded in the learners' everyday lives. As people always interact in a social space, these experiences are essential and arise from communication among groups of different individuals (Dewey,

2018). Subsequently, Delors (1966), in a report by UNESCO, stated the importance of continuous learning as the key to accessing the 21st century, owing to a society that allows it in various forms and not only in the designated places. Such a learning society has no clear separation between initial and continuous training because it occurs throughout life, "in which everything affords an opportunity of learning and fulfilling one's potential" (Delors et al., 1966, p. 38). Such constant learning can occur everywhere, and therefore, the urban environment can be considered an educational resource, and each street can represent an illustrated open book (Rudofsky, 1968). In this type of ubiquitous continuous learning, the city (i.e. the places of everyday life where people identify both individually and collectively) plays an educational function based on experience. Furthermore, Lowenthal (1961) supported the central role of studying the cultural and psychological dimensions of the "lived space", which is in constant evolution and changes with each person's experience. Approximately a decade later, the geographer Yi Fu Tuan focused on the importance of experience as a core element in the socialisation of people, as certain fundamental experiences shared by the community form the basis of social communication. The space of socialisation is, therefore, identified as that of the intelligibility of common experiences that not only facilitate communication but also forge what Tuan (1974) defined as an individual attitude, namely a cultural stance that finds its stability due to a "long succession of perceptions, that is, of experience" (p. 4). From the close link between the individual and the living environment, *topophilia* takes shape, as an affective bond between people and places or settings and a particular vision of the world as a conceptualised experience that is partially personal and largely social – an attitude or system of belief (Tuan, 1974, p. 4).

Therefore, the socialisation space can be compared to Lotman's concept of the semiosphere: a closed semiotic space without rigid boundaries characterised by texts connected with each other, thus creating dialogues and confluences. According to Lotman (1990), "the circulation of texts moves ceaselessly in all directions, large and small currents intersect and leave their traces. At the same time texts are relayed not by one but by many centres of the semiosphere, and the actual semiosphere is mobile within its boundaries [and] these same processes occur at different levels" (p. 150). The semiosphere is a vital space of signs, a semiotic continuum where the social individual is immersed and from which they learn. Geertz (1973, p. 5) proposed a similar concept, in which culture is a web of meaning woven by people where they are suspended and envelops the meaning of every social dialectic. In this system, the landscape is in constant elaboration and interpretation (Duncan & Ley, 1993). It is a kind of "shared network of common representations. As members of our species, we live in this web as well as in nature. We form our bonds of loyalty and build our communities around this sharing" (Bruner, 1996, p. 179).

The city is the territory par excellence of socialisation and signification that conveys, through the forms of the urban physical space, the intersected plots of territorialisation that have marked the history of different eras, which are complex and multifaceted in their territorial and cultural evidence. As the territory is fundamentally a cultural form, it can be considered a text. The territory, and its landscape in particular, created by the intellectual work of the society as a representation of anthropised nature coming from various social activities (Raffestin, 2007) is the stratification of social meanings, and social action is defined by regulated territorialisation processes that change according to the community's needs. Each territorial element thus represents the collective cultural sense and signifies the evolution of the man–environment dialectic through its settlement profiles that stand out in a manipulated, organised, and structured physical environment. Thus, every reification of the territory that remains in its evolution can be interpreted as a sign of the community's intelligible functions and values, based on a specific cultural code. The territory is akin to a text in which the sign-objects have a meaning, which can be understood through a unified vision of the landscape. Therefore, looking, discovering, and understanding represent the premise or the component of a correct education binding the individual to their landscape (Turri, 1974, p. 287).

3. The Educating City: The Territorialisation of the Permanent Training Process

Lifelong learning can educate the community about the territory and its textual meaning by increasing the awareness needed for every action. Developed from the idea promoted in the 1970s by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007), lifelong learning is characterised by persistent educational action at the spatial and temporal levels. In 2000, during the European Council of Lisbon, *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* was published, in which the Commission of the European Communities stressed how learning can occur lifelong and lifewide (i.e., at any time and in any field of a person's life). The text identified two important objectives of lifelong learning: "the promotion of active citizenship and the promotion of vocational skills in order to adapt to the demands of the new knowledge-based society and to allow full participation in social and economic life" (Commission of the European Communities, 2000). Subsequently, the European Parliament specified how closely lifelong learning is connected and consequent to daily life and how it is capable of instilling citizenship and a sense of responsibility in each person (European Parliament, 2001). Such knowledge is not acquired from single events or in predefined places, as underlined by the OECD through the concept of innovative learning environments (ILE). Innovative learning must occur in an organic ecosystem comprising mixed and different approaches that involve various interdependent relationships between the factors contributing to the creation of this environment, enlivened by a dense network of connections that develop the learning process (OECD, 2013, pp. 22–23). Therefore, this learning environment is not a neutral space or a simple scenario where the events occur. Rather, it is a physical space characterised by cultural, social, relational, and emotional values. The lifelong learning made possible by an organic ecosystem is implicit in the socialisation process, and the city can be considered the learning environment par excellence. The *Strategy of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (2021–2023)* can be read based on this perspective: Every public and private institution is part of a closely interconnected educational network that produces lifelong and lifewide learning and engenders a learning city (whose centre is the participation and involvement of the communities) the implementation of lifelong learning strategies, and the possibilities of inclusion, equity, cohesion, and development. The rationale for this is as follows:

> *All sectors of society have a key role to play in learning and education and should participate in building learning cities. However, stakeholders and citizens are more likely to contribute to building learning cities if decisions are made in a participatory way. In developing learning cities, we will improve governance and participation of all stakeholders by: establishing inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms to involve governmental and nongovernmental organizations and the private sector in building learning cities; developing bilateral or multilateral partnerships between sectors in order to share resources and increase the availability of learning opportunities; and encouraging all stakeholders to provide quality learning opportunities and to make their own unique contribution to building a learning city. (UNESCO, 2015, p. 8)*

The learning environment becomes somewhat spread, since any space, place, time, or relationship is a possible source of knowledge, as a co-constructed cultural artefact to which each person contributes and which is a mediator between the people and the context where they live.

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Thus, lifelong learning occurs in an organic ecosystem characterised by elements closely interconnected by social relations, where persons influence each other, by constructively communicating and collaborating in different environments (Heine, 2010). The concept of learning, along with self-reflection, must empathically and inclusively involve relationships and confrontations (Council of the European Union, 2018).

As an element that is intrinsic to the social context and the community where people live every day, the possibility of knowing extends beyond institutional education to involve every aspect and every moment of life. The immersion in the knowledge society is made possible by the physical and cultural spaces where people, as well as the community, grow and learn from territorial reifications and from the urban tissue, as signs of representations value them. Learning occurs due to the dialectical and constructive comparison with an individual's own environment and due to a widespread education that cannot be considered only as a legacy of pre-packaged knowledge in predefined and closed places but as education that develops a sociality that actively and dynamically inhabits the world, in full awareness and knowledge of one's own living space. Therefore, the indissoluble union between education and territory is revealed, not only to the extent that society has to educate people about the territory from ecological and social perspectives but also because the territory itself educates them as a founding element of its culture. Thus, the educating city is a place of experience, where active participation cannot occur without some changes in the buildings, the social spaces, and the empty spaces that, when reinterpreted, become the face and the text of the contemporaneous world.

Thus, the city becomes the essential physical and social space of a lifelong learning approach, owing to which an individual learns to be a citizen (i.e. an active part of a community) and participates in the transformation and care of their own territory. In lifelong learning, the city educates people by knowing and using its spaces. This leads, through active adaptation, to the social and territorial context we live in and to the conscious self-identification of the community. This is the difference between the concept of the learning city as a community and its public and private stakeholders, which learns to organise its sociality according to the idea of participatory sharing, and that of the educating city, where lifelong learning instead moves from the physical and relational space, determining the vector role of the territory. Clearly, the concepts of the formative city and the learning city are intertwined and complementary, for territory can only become formative in terms of its value (material and symbolic) to the extent that the community experiences it and identifies itself in its spaces, thus helping to make it a relational, historical and identity-forming environment (Augé, 1992). To be truly educational, the learning city must fulfil its primary conditions, including, as stated by UNESCO, the mobilisation and use of resources, the governance and participation of all stakeholders, and the strong will and political commitment of its citizens. Such conditions form the pillars on which the learning city is built, namely the revitalisation of learning in families and communities, the effective learning within the labour market, the extensive use of learning technologies, and the improved quality and culture of continuous learning. These are essential elements for building a city that is open to the broad perspective of sustainable development, which involves the economy and cultural prosperity and enhances individual and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2015).

The inhabitants of an educating city, as a source of knowledge and experience for building a citizenry participating in a shared urban project, learn from and for the territory to encourage changes in the living space, the social space, and the lived space from the bottom up (Frémont, 1972). In this type of "territorialisation of the training process", the territory is the generating structure as a space for the self-representation of the community, composed of a layer of meanings and values capable of influencing the dissemination of knowledge. The territory, its community, and its local governments thus become "actants" of a complex network of relationships that are capable of acting permanently, through constant education, on reality, thereby transforming it (Latur, 2005).

> *Local governments are the closest public authority to citizens. This proximity entails greater knowledge of the territory, of issues and of possible stakeholders, which turns municipal governments into key bodies in terms of decision-making and the implementation of policies to improve the wellbeing of the citizens. Lifelong learning contributes to this wellbeing. Besides fostering personal growth, it reduces inequalities or significant differences between people, groups, and neighbourhoods within the city itself. (International Association of Educating Cities [IAEC], 2021, p. 8)*

In this sense, the educating city can only exist in the reaction of its social dimension and of its learning society, which learns to manage the enlarged space of existence through the territory. This social response is necessary for the urban metabolism, which must be stimulated by the re-evaluation of the collective space where the community pact can be reactivated as a constitutive factor of urban life.

Learning organisations – that is, companies and professional associations as well as schools, universities, and groups of people who, through learning, commit themselves to being part of an integrated community for performance improvement, albeit from the perspective of a unique and dynamic learning organisation – are highly significant from this perspective (Longworth, 2006). Several European projects have been established to support this vision and provide the various actors in the territory with a wide range of indicators and techniques for rethinking, in an educational and co-operative sense, their role in the transformation of the city into a physical and social space that allows the aggregation, comparison, and exchange that engender lifelong learning. Therefore, it is important to plan public and aggregation urban areas that translate into a common intention involving network governance. This refers to a network that allows urban governance to be extended to a perspective of "collaborative governance" between governmental and non-governmental bodies in the creation of local public policies and the design of public spaces by involving and empowering communities and by creating relationships of trust and collaborative practices. In retrospect, the entire network and the system of interconnections between the actors of the learning cities involve the physical and socio-cultural components of the territory, thus becoming the keystone of a learning organisation and a cultural amplifier of the sense of belonging and collective identity.

This cannot be separated from an education that takes the individual fully into account and involves them in public life (thus allowing them to build their own future and well-being). Furthermore, the transformation of the common territory must widen the possibility for the individual to be part of a community. Rather than multiple "communities of practice", there should be informal aggregations of people that arise spontaneously in every area of daily life with the natural purpose of sharing passions, developing solutions, and exhibiting solidarity by supporting each other and to which all individuals belong at different times and stages (Wenger, 1999, pp. 13–14). Moreover, as the nature of learning is essentially social, every city should have spaces where interaction, discussion, and, therefore, learning are possible. The involvement of each citizen in a continuous educational process will lead them to become a co-author of the territory where they live and are educated and whose transformation they contribute to. The basic element for this participatory and reifying identification is the territory, the space of interactivity and education par excellence, whose artefacts, creators of opportunities and fields of action, represent the stage of social action. Every city is an aesthetic symbol of collective unity (Mumford, 1970, p. 476) and an educational place that, as an open-air school of continuous learning, needs to be explored, inhabited, and transformed on a daily basis.

In this vision, the educating city can be seen as a polycentric educational system comprising scholastic discontinuity or an "integrated training system" based on a widespread network of interconnected stakeholders without any hierarchy of importance or command. This involves network governance with several hubs (physical or social) of learning promoters spread throughout the territory (of which the traditional school represents only one among many) in a homogeneous and syntonic manner, as they mutually influence each other. Furthermore, it is an integrated education system that is also broken down into individual elements so that each person can freely choose how and when to improve their learning at any point in their life. The educating city, in its materiality and referentiality, should support and respond to these needs, thus becoming the substrate and evident demonstration of the complex conceptual and multidimensional idea that is its basis and educational influence.

4. Towards the Educating City: Two Italian Examples of a Shared Urban Project

From this perspective, the urban project acquires fundamental importance as a useful tool for lifelong learning that starts from the territory. For the city, the urban project represents a strategy supported by a shared collective vision that gives the overall meaning to be pursued and guarantees the protection of the most relevant differentiated interests. Thus, in designing its spaces, the city does not become merely an open-air classroom, where learning is based on a series of practical activities aimed at creating initiatives for and on the territory that involve various social stakeholders, but an arena to be shaped according to a shared urban project. To this end, an education capable of forming a civic conscience that drives stakeholders' actions is necessary to refine its vision in order to penetrate the polymorphism of the city and the current needs to which urban spaces must respond. This process is undoubtedly complex, as a participatory urban project is based on the involvement of social partners with different roles, functions, and natures, such as the municipality, trade associations, universities, companies, artisans, and students, who are held together by relationships of trust and by knowledge that is offered to the community and is useful for performing actions that follow the circular and recursive pattern of social production in the knowledge economy (Chesbrough, 2017). This collaborative system based on trust and shared knowledge creates the conditions for local governance, such as supporting projects and learning processes on and for the territory, which becomes a training environment for widespread education. Thus, communities become key players and resources of local development in different forms, such as neighbourhood co-operatives, new types of co-housing, community shared energy and broadband networks, community funds, and new local offices focused on citizen science and civic imagination (Forster & Iaione, 2022). From this perspective, two Italian initiatives are exemplary: the laboratory Idee per una città accogliente promoted by the University of Sassari and the path Verso il Piano di Innovazione Urbana with Neighbourhood Laboratories started by the Municipality of Bologna.

Idee per una città accogliente was created in Sassari between 2015 and 2018, as part of the training of the Laboratorio Internazionale sul Progetto Ambientale (LEAP) of the Department of Architecture, Design and Urban Planning (DADU) of the University of Sassari (Maciocco et al., 2018; Valentino & Lutzoni, 2020). The central research themes of the laboratory were the city as an urban environment and training space for civic education and the creation of urban regeneration projects for common spaces to promote active citizenship. The activities involved first-year students from two Sardinian universities, a few university teachers, and tutors; professionals and experts in the socio-cultural field; a few cultural associations; and the local community. An interdisciplinary approach was proposed for the design of some areas of the city centre, involving various social partners, with the aim of exploring the possibilities of restoring existing but unused places and redesigning and enhancing existing urban empty spaces. To achieve this, first, the area and its physical and morphological characteristics were studied, and subsequently, its potential for socialisation and participation was identified.

The laboratory was divided into three experiential blocks: The first was characterised by meetings between university professors and students to analyse the territorial context, namely its generative structures, and to identify the urban nucleus, including the spaces that had to be regenerated. This was intended to improve the relationship between the community and the historic city of Sassari. The importance of the urban nucleus' design should be underlined since it generates relationships at different spatial scales, engendering places of contact and cultural transmission and thus making the polymorphic city a place of learning, organised in a network of diversified spaces of conviviality and educational contamination. The second block focused on the knowledge and comparison between the territory stakeholders (universities, residents, institutions, and cultural associations) in the form of debates or seminars regarding the capillary involvement of the social forces inhabiting the territory and, significantly, presiding over it. Finally, the third block was concerned with the creative part of designing the projects. This involved two events: an exhibition in 2016 of the various hypotheses for the reorganisation of the historical centre of Sassari created by the students (drawings, projects, photos, and videos) and the exhibition of the results of the various workshops at the prestigious Biennale dello Spazio Pubblico (Montebelli, 2021, p. 46). This structured approach provided the students with an overall picture of the social and environmental contexts to which the various projects referred, and it did so by becoming a repertoire of potentials and elucidating the essential link between the project, the settlements, and the territory. This is because "active learning and collaborative learning approaches encourage […] to actively participate in the learning process and construct their knowledge through interaction with peers and the educational environment" (Fraile-Jurado & Periáñez-Cuevas, 2023, p. 2).

As previously mentioned, the projects involved the regeneration of specific urban spaces in a state of abandonment – unused, used, and interstitial places awaiting re-functionalisation – and their redesign based on the aspirations and involvement of their inhabitants. They also entailed learning activities focused on the knowledge of the (physical, morphological, and social) characteristics of the territory that needed an intervention. The planning and designing of urban spaces for their participatory use, with the active involvement of all social partners, thus became a methodological example of continuous learning that, based on the criteria of territorial sustainability, makes a city truly "educational" as well as a testing ground for the skills acquired. The workshop's intention was to experience the city not only as an object of reflection but also as an environment of broad education, where active participation is implicit in living and needs its spaces. Through the collective creation of an urban project based on the redesign of inclusive spaces, the laboratory of the University of Sassari has shown how to facilitate citizenship education by starting from the knowledge of the territory in a training environment extended to the city and its settlement structure. This was carried out with the intention of facilitating not only an urban regeneration in line with a shared vision but also a growing civic awareness that territorial action cannot ignore.

In this sense, the direct involvement of a city's inhabitants in the design of common spaces, as well as in the construction of public policies, mobilises the capacity to inhabit by stimulating the connective tissue of the society and improving the qualitative aspects of the urban project and the knowledge of the inhabited area. This is especially the case when the participation of local players is not considered a consultation aimed at simply recording needs but as a radical process, with a significant aspect of criticism, aimed at rethinking and reconstructing the existing reality. This is a process that mobilises local energies and, guided by training activities and participatory pathways, can change the characteristics, the value, and, therefore, the perception of the territory. The example of the Laboratori di Quartiere (Neighbourhood Laboratories) launched by the

Municipality of Bologna with the path Verso il Piano di Innovazione Urbana is the result of the intention to involve the "third player", a general category of players whose knowledge can contribute to the development of strategies that are not linked to technical or academic knowledge but to the local environment where they live and act. This category includes ordinary people, weak and marginalised people, local experts, and bearers of "local wisdom". For approximately two decades, the Municipality of Bologna has adopted certain co-design policies in urban planning activities by launching participatory processes (workshops, forums, debates, and round tables), which have led to changes in municipal regulations. To create a city based on the continuous renewal of the civic sense, various initiatives have been promoted over time (policies and actions based on short- and medium-term investments, such as proximity interventions, the daily use of public spaces and services, and the management of urban commons), for which the participation of various urban stakeholders has been sought. Consequently, in 2005, the Bologna Urban Centre was created. In 2018, this became the Fondazione per l'Innovazione Urbana, comprising the municipality and the university, where citizens, public institutions, associations, and representatives of the economic and social worlds can meet and discuss the territorial and urban transformations affecting Bologna. In 2017, it housed the Ufficio per l'Immaginazione Civica (Office for Civic Imagination), a permanent laboratory that, in close collaboration with the neighbourhoods, utilises participatory events to evaluate urban innovation projects. Organised every year in different neighbourhoods of Bologna based on the planned investments, citizens' recommendations, data, and socio-economic priorities, the Neighbourhood Laboratories are the result of this objective: an urban innovation plan for a collaborative city that can offer spaces for both discussion and co-planning and can connect different actors to develop the potential of the territory, starting from its redevelopment. Thus, the municipality's vision of urban projects is complemented by that of the "third player", who identifies and suggests areas of intervention in the social sphere and with regard to public spaces at different urban levels (Fondazione Innovazione Urbana, 2019).

The Fondazione per l'Innovazione Urbana aims to use the Neighbourhood Laboratories to apply a new method and new practices to collaborative public policy-making. The pivot of this method is the proximity to both the spatial scale on which the Neighbourhood Laboratories function and to the desire to place human and social capital at the centre of public choices. This proximity dimension stimulates discussions and practices through which the civic potential can identify possible administrative innovations for managing the city. This allows the laboratories to test an "open" city (Chesbrough, 2017) – that is, welcoming the practices and experiences of the inhabitants by establishing a relationship between their needs and public policies The importance of the territorial dimension and geographical proximity is key to this project, and the needs and proposals become the lenses through which the territory is read. The Neighbourhood Laboratories operate in areas defined and selected by the municipality on the basis of the socio-economic and demographic data from the Frailty Maps developed by the Statistics Department of the Municipality of Bologna. This makes it possible to intervene directly in daily life and to create a deeply rooted and multidisciplinary organisation that, by functioning on the basis of proximity, is constantly at the service of the territory, building up skills and stable links as well as a profound knowledge of the context in which it operates. The role of the University of Bologna has been important in learning which territories, owing to scientific support, have started a co-planning initiative to improve the collaborative process.

From a methodological perspective, the project begins with the preparation of the necessary administrative documents, which entails the administrative actors agreeing on the objectives and defining the initial framework for achieving the objectives set within the territories involved. After this initial phase, the actual involvement of the citizens begins, owing to the support of the communities active in the area – the "intermediary bodies", who, as stakeholders, know the area from the inside. In collaboration with these groups, the theme of the itinerary that will affect the neighbourhood is decided, and the most pressing issues emerge from the dialogue with them, along with the identification of local support resources. In the presentation phase, the documentation (open data, maps, photos, videos, etc.) on these issues is shared, along with the initial proposals for solving them. Subsequently, the co-planning progresses from neighbourhood assemblies to targeted meetings (focus groups, interviews, workshop scenarios, open-space technology, world cafés, actual planning, etc.) with the administration staff. This is followed by a participatory budgeting process to define the projects submitted. Thus, there is an articulated path focused on sharing as a civic tool and on the territory as an agent of civic training. This articulated path is shown in urban proximity spaces, social centres, potentials, and transversal resources that give shape to the educating city via a continuous learning process. This shows that the territory can recover its educational potential and that the city can become a laboratory for spatial planning as well as a construction site for citizenship (Maciocco et al., 2018, p. 9).

5.Conclusions

In this paper, we aim to answer three preliminary research questions. However, given the broad scope of the subject, the intent is not to provide definitive answers but to reflect on the issues raised by these questions. The conclusions focus on the idea that knowing our own environment is the key to conscious and participatory citizenship. Therefore, the city is and will increasingly be the primary field of action for the permanent education of a "territorialised" citizenship. This has also been highlighted by the United Nations, which estimates that the urban population worldwide will reach 60% by 2030 and 68% by 2050, thus becoming over two thirds of the world population (United Nations, 2019, p. 5). Notably, Europe is among the areas with the highest urban population percentage. Nearly three quarters of its total population was urban in 2018, and this is expected to reach 80% by 2040 and 85% by 2050 (United Nations, 2019, p. 5) . Within this framework, it is necessary to underline the growing importance of urban communities' role in managing their living space and designing the most suitable policies for this purpose. Therefore, the urban space, in its fabric and texture, must increasingly be considered as a constituent element in citizenship education. This leads us to consider the effectiveness of the actions implemented to make a city the appropriate environment for continuous learning, which is useful for stimulating the democratisation of decision-making processes. Therefore, the third question reported in the Introduction is even more relevant: What can be done to educate the community to help it know its territory and play an active and co-creative role in its evolution? The answer to this question is not unique or definitive. While it is true that extensive efforts are still needed to attract civic participation in territory co-creation projects, it is also true that an increasing number of participatory co-operation projects are being established due to the awareness that, as stated by the European Commission:

> *citizens can place pressure on approaches commonly used within cities to address complex issues, while also enlarging the available pool of knowledge and resources. They may also help to improve the democratic traits of specific solutions, with good opportunities for networking or amplification effects via the use or creation of new technologies. These developments are enshrined in the goals of the New Urban Agenda which calls for more inclusive, accountable, and participatory sustainable urbanisation and settlement planning. (European Commission, 2019)*

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The text has specifically referenced the role of the territory as a training tool as well as a field of action for co-designing city planning. Several concrete actions have been taken based on this perspective, namely a few participatory planning programmes that are based on the collaboration of various social stakeholders involved in the co-operative implementation of actions in the neighbourhood. The two Italian initiatives discussed in this article, the laboratory Idee per una città accogliente of the University of Sassari and the Neighbourhood Laboratories promoted by the Municipality of Bologna and the University of Bologna, should be considered from this perspective. These two projects exemplify the importance of the territorialisation of the educational process that starts from local knowledge. This demonstrates that the local community can be educated, through experience, design, and co-operation, in order to solve specific territorial problems. Notably, several approaches are used to promote the city as an environment as well as a testing ground for the learning society. There are numerous initiatives to stimulate community involvement in city governance to create a city that is "open" to inclusive and co-creative spaces, from material and digital perspectives. In this regard, on a European scale, the Maker Movement group deals with community training, co-operation, and education to promote the sharing of knowledge among citizens. It has designed the Fab City Global Initiative, which promotes projects focused on a new model of a sustainable city that, while globally connected, can be self-sufficient on a local scale: "In Fab Cities, 'neighbourhoods' can become operation units where the ideas for making are tightly connected to the city's social fabric and the notion of citizen empowerment, with the involvement of schools, municipalities, libraries, museums, local businesses, new industries, etc." (European Commission, 2019). The network of co-operation created by the civic participation platforms used by over 70 entities worldwide is also highly significant. Among these, 'Decidim', promoted by the Municipality of Barcelona, is a notable one. It has given thousands of citizens the opportunity to collaborate and co-ordinate democratically on proposals of common interest and then monitor their implementation: "For instance, in Barcelona, since its launch in 2016, more than 28,500 people have joined the platform, with around 12,500 proposals submitted, 9,000 of which have been turned into public policy" (European Commission, 2019). Two interesting projects were also supported in Barcelona. The first, Patrimoni Ciutada, focused on the creation of a new model of public–community co-operation. This model is based on participatory governance for managing public spaces through the participatory budgeting approach. The second, Códigos Comunes Urbanos, led to the creation of a laboratory to formulate regulations and regulatory proposals for the joint management of common goods (Mendez de Andés et al., 2021). In Europe, the international network created by the IAEC is also important. By the end of 2023, the IAEC will include 500 cities in 35 countries around the world, uniting local governments under the Charter of Educating Cities, which has been adapting to new social and territorial challenges since 1990. Turning to the specificities of participatory spatial planning in the European context, there are several methodologies that offer interesting alternatives for experimentation: "Lego simulation workshops and DIY balloon mapping. The use of new technologies for citizen engagement in urban planning, such as planning apps, participatory urban visualisation, augmented reality, or participatory design fictions also have great potential" (European Commission, 2019). In addition to the examples specifically analysed in this paper, two other Italian initiatives are also noteworthy: The first is the Roma Decide project, promoted by the Municipality of Roma Capitale, which involved 50,000 citizens in proposing interventions to improve urban decorum, 15 of which have been funded and completed since 2021 (Roma Decide). The second one is the Valli Resilienti project for the revitalisation of the mountain area between Val Trompia and Val Sabbia in the Province of Brescia, which aims to create a participatory inventory of the cultural and landscape heritage for the participatory planning of rehabilitation interventions and the use of this heritage for sustainable local development. Notably, this project maps the identity heritage of the intervention area. To this end, it utilises the use of the community map, which represents the landscape heritage to be preserved and which the inhabitants wish to pass on to future generations.

In sum, there are several "citizenship sites" that promote the participation of urban communities and the awareness of their role in the conservation of their neighbourhood. Although such initiatives are numerous, the actual participation of citizens in co-planning for democratic urban development remains too dependent on a number of factors that prevent its full implementation. While this study has not specifically addressed the critical issues underlying the spread of participatory communities of practice, these factors can be identified as social, institutional, and technological ones. The social factors relate to the willingness of residents to participate in urban development, the involvement of residents who are often reluctant to believe that their input will be heard, the involvement of different stakeholders, the difficulties in agreeing on the strategies to be presented, the difficulties in involving different segments of the population, and the investment of personal time. The institutional factors include scepticism towards public authorities and proposed initiatives, the inadequacy of funds allocated to urban transformation projects, and the social limitations affecting those minorities who are physically unable to participate in the co-design process, such as the elderly, the disabled, and children. The technological factors comprise the availability of adequate infrastructures for the dissemination of digital platforms, such as the availability of Wi-Fi connections, the provision of public spaces and living labs equipped with an optic fibre network, and the installation of security systems to protect personal data (Anthony, 2023).

In essence, civic participation is not a spontaneous act. Rather, it is a project that requires strategies on the ground to spread in a sustainable manner through a culture of dialogue and sharing. This requires specific and widespread urban spaces capable of stimulating co-operation and confrontation. These spaces may increasingly be created not only *for* but also *by* co-planning: "An important aspect of active citizenship is the ability to recognise one's own agency" (MacKeen, 2022, p. 15). Ultimately, education as a social function can only depend on the learning environment: "Human nature exists and operates in an environment. And it is not 'in' that environment as coins are in a box, but as a plant is in the sunlight and soil" (Dewey, 1922, p. 296). Similar to how the ancient Greek *paideia* educated people to make them good citizens, in the Anthropocene, it is necessary to educate people to develop sustainability to ensure that the world remains habitable, starting from the places of everyday life and co-habitation. Being educated in and from the open space of the city involves rediscovering the political and social functions of the urban dimension and of the places used for interaction and dialogue between community stakeholders for the social and spatial organisation of life (Lussault, 2017). In this way, the culture of citizenship is linked to the living space and, therefore, to life itself, making the territory a learning factor and a constitutive moment of the educational process.

Putting this information in perspective, especially regarding the specific themes presented in this paper, the city should be conceived as an open-air classroom, by rethinking its common spaces, organised for the collective and active listening of social actors. These are places that allow for widespread and permanent education, supported by collaborative networks that link the public and private spheres – at different scales – in aware citizenship projects. Thus, a genuine territorialisation of the educational process can be achieved, which recognises the territory as a structure for continuous learning processes. As the environment of the community's self-representation, where meanings and values are concentrated and stratified to influence knowledge transmission, the territory can be considered the educational space par excellence, from which and where a conscious and active citizenship can be permanently formed. These themes are consolidated in the concept of the educating city, which views education through lifelong learning as the main means to transform society, the living environment, and all aspects of everyday life. This is because "the various policies and actions set up by municipal organisations and services (such as urban planning, environment, transport, culture, sports,

health) transmit knowledge and educate citizens in values and attitudes, intentionally or otherwise. The Educating City should be understood as a citywide project that includes a new form of networked governance, based on dialogue and engagement between the municipal government and the community, as well as with other cities from around the world" (IAEC, 2021, p. 9).

Thus, rediscovering the "right to the city" means recognising the "collective power" of citizens over urbanisation processes (Harvey, 2012, p. 137). This is important because, in order to be such, an educating city, which shapes co-operation on and for the territory of its various actors, must not be imagined as a utopia. Rather, it must be rethought as an "open" city where "education transcends the school walls to permeate the entire city. This leads to a citizen-focused education, where all administrations assume their responsibility to educate and transform the city into a space of respect for life and diversity" (IAEC, 2021, p. 8). To encourage collaborative experimentation and a sense of belonging to a community, "an open ville will avoid committing the sins of repetition and static form; it will create the material conditions in which people might thicken and deepen their experience of collective life" (Sennett, 2018, p. 141). Perhaps by designing "infrastructures for disorder" (Sendra & Sennett, 2022) that combine architecture, politics, urban planning, and activism to create places that encourage confrontation – where dialogue occurs to promote change and where people are trained to find and create all the alternatives that the city of the future will need – with the threats of division and stagnation. The educating city corresponds to a kind of rebellious city (Harvey, 2012), capable of promoting the active role of the community in designing and managing the environment and increasing the creation of spaces for social interaction where their own territorial consciousness can be formed. This vision requires a transformative and participatory approach to governance, focusing on spaces of interaction that allow communities to participate in and co-create an ongoing and concrete rethinking of their city. For this, the following is important:

> *All sectors – public administration, industry, communications, transport – must take part in promoting education. Local and national communities are in themselves eminently educational institutions. As Plutarch said, ''the City is the best teacher''. And especially when the city is capable of remaining within human proportions, it does indeed contain immense educational potential – with its social and administrative structures and its cultural networks – not only because of the vitality of the exchanges that go on, but also because it constitutes a school for civic sentiment and fellow-feeling. (Faure et al, 1972, p. 162)*

If education cannot be reduced to pre-packaged knowledge but must involve training people to engage in life and participation, delineate identity through knowledge, and develop certain skills useful in everyday life and social coexistence, then education through lifelong learning, can only necessarily use the territory as a text-tool created by a living, founding element of the culture inhabiting it.

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