PALERMO, CITY OF SYNCRETISM: RECOVERING A COMPLEX HISTORIC CENTRE HELPED BY AN AWARE LOCAL COMMUNITY
Palermo, ciudad sincrética: recuperar un centro histórico complejo con la ayuda de una comunidad local consciente

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ABSTRACT
The Italian site of Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalú and Monreale was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2015 as an example of a sociocultural syncretism between Western, Islamic and Byzantine cultures. Palermo has maintained its identity over the centuries as a complex and multicultural site.

In 1993 the local government of Palermo, supported by the Sicilian Region with specific Laws and funds, launched a process of regeneration of the historic centre, restoring public monuments as well as encouraging recovery of private houses. A specific planning instrument such as the Piano Particolareggiato Esecutivo (PPE) was implemented and a special office was established to coordinate activities and funding.

Local community developed a pro-active attitude over the years, demanding local government to promote more cooperation and coordination between the different stakeholders involved in the recovery process. The civil society emphasised the need to intervene not only on the urban and building fabric but also on the social one, starting from the weakest sections of the population.

The support of civil society, with its bottom up approach, and the strong political will of local government, determined in the regeneration of the historic centre, made possible to speed up the process. The inclusion on the UNESCO list, then, gave greater visibility to the Cultural Heritage of Palermo and boosted tourism. The upgrading of public transport, the establishment of a restricted traffic zone and the pedestrianisation of some squares and streets, then contributed to recovery the human dimension of the old town and to enhance the quality of life, attracting many people from Palermo to live or start business there.

Identity and Culture are the principles guiding the action of local government, which succeeded in winning remarkable awards: Palermo, the Italian Youth Capital 2017, the Italian Capital of Culture 2018 and will host also Manifesta, the nomad European biennial of contemporary art. The process of regeneration of the city goes on, between identity and contamination. This paper aims to describe the process of recovery launched in the historic centre of Palermo by the local government and the fundamental role played by citizens and associations in endorsing it, making it a positive example in the World Heritage scenario.

KEY WORDS: historical centres regeneration, building reuse, social participation, local identity, sustainable development.

RESUMEN
El sitio italiano Palermo árabe-normanda y las catedrales de Cefalú y Monreale fue añadido a la Lista del Patrimonio Mundial de la UNESCO en 2015, como ejemplo de un sincretismo sociocultural entre las culturas occidental, islámica y bizantina. Palermo ha mantenido a través de los siglos su identidad como un lugar complejo y multicultural.
En 1993, el gobierno local de Palermo, apoyado por el gobierno de la Región Sicilia con leyes y fondos específicos, inició un proceso de regeneración del centro histórico, restaurando monumentos públicos y promoviendo la recuperación de viviendas privadas. Se puso en práctica un instrumento específico de planificación, el Piano Particolareggiato Esecutivo (PPE), y se creó una Oficina Técnica, para coordinar actividades y financiación.

A lo largo de los años, la comunidad local desarrolló una actitud proactiva, pidiendo al gobierno local promover una mayor cooperación y coordinación entre los diferentes actores involucrados en el proceso de recuperación. La sociedad civil hizo hincapié en la necesidad de intervenir no sólo en el tejido urbano y de construcción, sino también en el tejido social, empezando con los sectores más débiles de la población.

El apoyo de la sociedad civil, con su enfoque de abajo arriba, y la fuerte voluntad política del gobierno local, determinado en la regeneración del centro histórico, hizo posible acelerar este proceso. La inclusión en la lista de la UNESCO, entonces, dio una mayor visibilidad al Patrimonio Cultural de Palermo y estimuló el turismo.

La potenciación del transporte público, el establecimiento de una zona de tráfico restringido y la peatonalización de plazas y calles, contribuyeron a la recuperación de la dimensión humana del casco antiguo y a la mejora de la calidad de vida, atrayendo a muchos Palermitanos para vivir o empezar negocios allí.

La Identidad y la Cultura son los principios que guían la acción del gobierno local, que logró ganar importantes reconocimientos: Palermo, la Capital Italiana de la Juventud 2017, la Capital Italiana de la Cultura 2018 y este año acogerá también Manifesta, la bienal europea nómada de arte contemporáneo. El proceso de regeneración de la ciudad sigue adelante, entre identidad y contaminación. Este trabajo pretende describir el proceso de recuperación iniciado en el centro histórico de Palermo por el gobierno local y el papel fundamental que desempeñan ciudadanos y asociaciones en impulsarlo y compartirlo, lo que lo convierte en un ejemplo positivo en el escenario del Patrimonio Mundial.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** regeneración de centros históricos, reuso de edificios, participación social, identidad local, desarrollo sostenible.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The Italian site of Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2015 as an example of a social-cultural syncretism between Western, Islamic and Byzantine cultures. This series of civil and religious buildings, dating to the 12th century Norman Kingdom, denotes the fruitful coexistence of people of different origins and religions: Muslim, Byzantine, Latin, Jewish, Lombard and French (Unesco, World Heritage Centre 2015). Over the centuries Palermo has been maintaining its identity as a complex, multicultural and syncretic city. After all it is the capital of Sicily, an island - as Gesualdo Bufalino wrote (1985) - *in which everything is mixed, changing, contradictory, as in the most composite of continents*. This paper will specifically deal with the historic centre of Palermo, the process of recovery launched by the local government and the fundamental role played by citizens and associations in endorsing it, making it a positive example in the World Heritage scenario.
2. **TOOLS FOR THE RECOVERY OF THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF PALERMO**

During the Second World War, bombing seriously damaged the historic centre of Palermo, which was increasingly neglected by local government in favour of the development of new areas. The historic centre remained abandoned and depopulated for decades, until the end of the 1980s when a new enlightened local government firmly decided to remedy the situation and regenerate the area. Therefore, in 1988 the drafting of the *Piano Particolareggiato Esecutivo* (PPE) was entrusted to Pierluigi Cervellati, Leonardo Benevolo and Italo Insolera; the aim was to define a unified strategy and specific actions to intervene on more than 240 hectares of the historic centre of Palermo (Cannarozzo 1996). This instrument became effective in 1993 and in the same year the Sicilian Region approved two specific Regional Laws to support it: L. R. 15/93 and L. R. 25/93.

Thanks to the Regional Law L. R. 15/93, Italian lire 170 billion were allocated for the recovery of the area in the three-year period 1993-1995 (Article 74, paragraph 1) and a specific technical-administrative office, the *Ufficio per il Centro Storico* - now called *Ufficio Città Storica* - was set up to coordinate and monitor the process (Article 74, paragraph 3). L. R. 25/93 allocated funds for interventions of recovery, to be realised by single owners or gathered in consortia. In addition, the provision specified that the actions of the Municipality had the purpose to: acquire and recovery degraded buildings for residential use and monumental buildings for public uses; provide models to private operators, as well as create underground technological networks and open public spaces (Article 124).

The *Ufficio per il Centro Storico* had to design the recovery of public areas and buildings as well as to check private projects. To stimulate the recovery of buildings the law halved the costs of urbanisation and construction (Article 125, paragraph 1); in addition, it gave grants up to a maximum 50% of the project costs, according to the chronological order of submission of applications, for restoration of façades and roofs as well as consolidation of structures (Article 125, paragraph 3). Over the years, the Office has published numerous calls and launched several construction sites, allowing the recovery of public and private buildings.

Recovering the ancient city also mean training and qualifying workers and technicians to properly intervene, retrieving that knowledge transmitted for generations but forgotten in the post-war period. In this regard, the then (and current) mayor Leoluca Orlando and assessor Emilio Arcuri wrote (1997) that the dimensions of Italian Cultural Heritage would have required our country to become a leader in the approach to architectural restoration, based on progressive repairs with similar or identical materials to the degraded ones, not losing but rather creating a highly-skilled workforce with the knowledge needed for these jobs. Architects but also workers must be oriented in reading the different technical and morphological languages.

In effect, local government set the objective of ensuring high quality standards in order to create a coherent and homogeneous urban whole. Therefore, specialised studies were commissioned and published as support for technicians in recovery interventions, such as the *Manuale del recupero del centro storico di Palermo* by Paolo Marconi and the *Codice di pratica per la sicurezza e la conservazione del centro storico di Palermo* by Antonino Giuffrè and Caterina Carocci. The first is a handbook presenting traditional techniques, construction systems and elements, also some specific case studies; the latter suggests criteria and techniques of intervention by analysing the historic structures, in such a way to improve the earthquake resistance.

Thus, in 1993 the local government of Palermo, supported by the Sicilian Region with specific Laws and funds, launched a process of regeneration of the historic centre, restoring public monuments as well as encouraging recovery of private houses. Leoluca Orlando and
Emilio Arcuri wrote (1997) that we have the task not only to do new things but even to make things new. Intervening correctly on old built Heritage makes possible to rediscover the relationship between man and his past environment, to understand ancient layered values but also to add new ones, to be transmitted to future generations. In this way, territorial Heritage can be increased and used as a resource for sustainable development. Moreover, in parallel with the recovery, events such as Palermo adotta un monumento and Kals’Art were promoted to raise the awareness and involvement of local population since school age and to stimulate the knowledge and re-appropriation of Cultural Heritage, attracting Palermitan people from all other districts to the historic centre.

The process of regeneration continued but after twenty years was still far from its conclusion for many reasons, including: the change of local government and its reduced interest on the historic centre; the difficulties associated with the size of an area larger than 240 hectares; the abundance of monumental buildings; and, furthermore, the presence of more than two hundred buildings destroyed during World War II but still to be rebuilt or secured. Further, important aspects such as the introduction of services, the increase of surveillance to guarantee the safety or even the cleaning and maintenance of public spaces still needed to be enhanced.

Thus, the action of urban recovery and maintenance needed to find a renewed incitement by the Municipality of Palermo, in accordance with a more holistic strategy, starting from a broad learning action based on achieved results and main criticalities, in order to plan the new priority objectives of regeneration. In effect, there were still those methodological and operational difficulties encountered by Ferracuti, who first introduced the concept of urban maintenance over twenty years ago (Ferracuti 1994; Germanà 2002; Molinari 2002).

It would have been appropriate to operate simultaneously at different levels. On the one hand, first securing the crumbling and abandoned Heritage and secondly stimulating extraordinary maintenance interventions on envelopes and roofs, whose inefficiency generally becomes the first cause of instability for the underlying structures. On the other hand, keeping in efficiency recovered buildings (Faraci 2014). In this sense, it would have been important that officials of the technical office verified the correct execution of interventions, in particular those which granted public contributions, and carried out periodic inspections monitoring the built Heritage and its conditions. In effect, recovery interventions should respect the requirements of reliability and durability of materials, compatibility and maintainability (Germanà 1995). This operation would require the definition of a Territorial Information System to support urban maintenance, an open and flexible tool in which to collect and manage the return information of the maintenance activities (Fiore 2010).

It is not possible to consider the city as a crystallised lifeless outdoor museum but rather as a living organism, which can change but always respecting and maintaining its genius loci, i.e. the meaning and identity of places layered over time (Faraci 2015a). Buildings can be reclaimed in accordance with the criteria of adaptability, transformability and flexibility to provide for a variety of functions (van Hees, Naldini & Roos 2014), carrying out the indispensable functional adjustments, as demanded by changing requirements and regulatory frameworks (Gasparoli & Talamo, 2006).

Recovery is an opportunity for a sustainable development in terms of reuse of real estate assets, reclaim of identity and cultural values of urban systems, improvement of the quality of life and tourism enhancement. It is necessary to regenerate the unused Heritage according to a new vision of future, favouring new interpretations of collective living, introducing new creative uses, paying attention to the context and the social value of their identities, thus triggering among the citizens a process of cultural re-appropriation. To do it, a policy of consultation between different stakeholders is fundamental in a synergistic and
shared process of recovery that, identifying the city as a collective good, looks at the territory as Heritage and Identity.

In the 2010s the same government, which previously focused on the regeneration of the historic centre, was re-elected. Its strong political will made possible to relaunch the process of urban recovery. The upgrading of public transport, the establishment of a restricted traffic zone and the pedestrianisation of the main squares and some streets, then contributed to recovery the human dimension of the old town and enhance the quality of life attracting many Palermitans to live or start business there. The opportunity to get in touch with local community along with its identity and Heritage values became an element of interest for the growing visitor number of Palermo, still far from exceeding the sustainability threshold.

In addition, numerous events were organised to foster the local multicultural identity and integration of diversities, such as Palermo città delle Culture. In effect, the organisation of events is becoming an important tool for promoting the old area, attracting local people and visitors and encouraging them to come back (eds Fusco Girard, Baycan & Nijkamp 2004; García 2004; Smith 2012). Identity and Culture were the principles guiding the action of local government in the revival and enhancement of the historic centre. Then, the major objective was to list the Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale as a World Heritage Site. The inclusion in the UNESCO list in 2015 has given a greater visibility to the Cultural Heritage of Palermo, boosting tourism, stimulating the birth of many new business and repopulating the main axes of the historic centre.

3. AN AWARE AND PRO-ACTIVE LOCAL COMMUNITY

In this context, local community has been changing its attitude over the years, becoming pro-active, also demanding local government to promote more cooperation and coordination between the different stakeholders involved in the recovery process (City, Superintendence, University, entrepreneurs, professionals, cultural associations, residents, shop keepers and citizens). Civil society has emphasised the need to intervene not only on the urban and building fabric but also on the social one, starting from the weakest sections of population, strengthening and sustaining the network of relations and activities, crafts and commerce which has always characterised the old town, as demonstrated by the reduction of the historic outdoor markets such as Ballarò and, above all, Vucciria.

The various associations active in the old city, largely composed of young people, have developed several projects and activities at different levels in recent years: 1) denunciation; 2) communication; 3) enhancement; 4) design. 

1) The association Palermo indignata, which organised a demonstration to ask local government to secure buildings in danger of collapse in the historic centre, denounces critical situations by posting on line photos of the endangered heritage and has more than 5000 followers on Facebook (Palermo indignata 2011);

2) The Amo Palermo blog posts pictures of construction sites during and after restoration works, carrying out a great communication service (Amo Palermo 2012);

3) The University of Palermo, opening to the public its museums and collections, launched in 2006 Le vie dei Tesori event (now at the 12th edition), which has been involving more and more partners over the years (such as the Curia, the Municipality and many private parties) and an increasing number of monumental goods spread out over the historic centre (Le vie dei tesori 2017). The event usually attracts a myriad of visitors, especially citizens curious to know their city Heritage (Figs. 1-2);
4) The city meeting SOS Ballarò works for the revival of Ballarò market and Albergheria district by developing proposals for local administration and concrete actions. Among these, we can quote the Palermo Tale project, thanks to which the neighborhood kids painted murals to recover abandoned and degraded areas (SOS Ballarò 2016). In the footsteps of SOS Ballarò, Comitato Vucciria works for the revival of Vucciria market and district, through various proposals, ranging from the involvement of schools to create gathering spaces, passing by the pedestrianisation of streets and squares, until a single Regulation for all the historic markets (Comitato Vucciria 2017).

![Figures 1-2: people from Palermo discover their city Heritage at the 12th edition of Le vie dei tesorì; a long queue of visitors (Phs by G. Faraci 2017).](image)

Albergheria district deserves particular attention. Founded by the Arabs more than one millennium ago, this area has always been keeping its multicultural identity, with a high immigrant presence. Albergheria, with the coexistence and agreement of diverse and (supposedly) irreconcilable social-cultural components, well represents the syncretism of the city. It was a high-risk-area, dirty and degraded, but a bottom-up action launched by civil society in the 2010s is changing it in a workshop of social innovation (Faraci 2017) for the revival of the market and neighbourhood. The symbol of this rebirth and re-appropriation is Piazzetta Mediterraneo, which was the first degraded area, before used as a dump, to be co-designed and recovered by the inhabitants in 2011, according to the spirit of multiculturalism and integration (Fig. 3).

Then, many associations, movements, cooperatives and clubs have decided to open their headquarters in this district; Moltivolti is an example of that. In 2014, a group of 14 friends from 8 countries (Senegal, Zambia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, France, Spain, Gambia and Italy) opened a restaurant with Sicilian-ethnic cuisine and a co-working dedicated to the third sector. Namely, profit supports non-profit but derives from it energy and meanings. Moltivolti is a social enterprise based on relationships, a laboratory for a new society of integration and interaction, in which exchanges between diversities are at the basis for development (Moltivolti 2017). It is a project intimately connected with the district of Albergheria, which grows in balance with the colourful market of Ballarò, populated by old and new citizens. As partners say: cooking is a metaphor for a new recipe for coexistence and sustainable development.

In 2015, the town meeting SOS Ballarò brought together associations, inhabitants, traders of the historic Ballarò Market, ecclesial communities, artists and many citizens to talk about their needs, desires and the future of the Albergheria district, in order to develop proposals for local administration (Fig. 4). The proposals of SOS Ballarò aim, above all, at
enhancing public services in the neighbourhood: streets repaving; street signs in three languages, to mark the access to the historical market of Ballarò; market regulation and pedestrianisation in working hours; regulation of nocturnal musical activities; community centres for children; equipment for public areas (benches, flowerbeds and fountains); public toilets; bus stops; waste baskets and separate collection.

Fig. 3: Piazzetta Mediterraneo was the first area in Albergheria district to be co-designed and recovered by the inhabitants (Ph. by Blog Sicilia 2018).

Several associations that are part of SOS Ballarò cooperate with the Assessorato alla Cultura of Palermo, to carry out projects whose goal is to regenerate the district, promoting the recovery of its millennial history, abandoned buildings and public spaces. Among these projects, we might mention Ballarò Tale, promoted by the association Per Esempio Onlus and intended to the narration of neighbourhood identity (Per Esempio Onlus 2016). Young and old inhabitants were invited to tell their memories about the district. Their stories were collected and changed in fairy tales. Then, children drew fairy tales illustrations on paper and, with the help of adults, painted murals in large dimensions (Fig. 5). In this way the stories of inhabitants have decorated and revived some abandoned areas of the neighbourhood. In effect, one of the key themes that may contribute to innovating the process/design of the resilient and inclusive regeneration of the town is the possibility of intervening on the unbuilt-up spaces, in accordance with a logic that aims at rethinking the empty in order to regenerate the full (Angelucci et al. 2015).

Moreover, SOS Ballarò endorsed the organisation of events, such as the Ballarò Buskers Festival, to promote the area and attract people from the other districts. Ballarò Buskers Festival was an artistic invasion of performances of small bands, fire-eaters, performers, acrobats, actors and jugglers. Over thirty shows a day were performed in
Fig. 4: the town meeting SOS Ballarò brought together people from the Albergheria district to talk about their desires and develop proposals for local administration (Ph. by Meridio News 2017).

About social and economic aspects of regeneration of Palermo historic centre, also the rebirth of local handicrafts, as a consequence of the economic crisis, has to be added. In effect, crisis led to a change of perspective on so many young architects and professionals out of a job, who had to modify the urban and architectural scale of project to the smaller one of objects. Oriented towards a design inspired by principles of self-production, they have opened up their own workshops (Fig. 6). Many of these craftsmen, designers and artists are members of ALAB, Associazione Liberi Artigiani-Artisti Balarm. In effect, this association, founded in 2010, has today almost 70 workshops and more than 250 members (ALAB 2018). Its scope is to create recognizable and quality brands in the logic of start-ups, offering members the opportunity to test their products on the market. Artisans share tools and workshops, where they can create and exhibit products; their customers become supporting members. ALAB designers open their workshops in the less popular and expensive streets of the historic centre, attracting there people. In this way, they revitalise the surrounding areas. ALAB artisans do not produce in series but in the one-of-a-kind logic. They buy small quantities of materials in the other shops of the area, supporting themselves each
other (Massara & Costa 2016). In every shop you can find a map of ALAB workshops and some panel promoting other members of the network.

About crisis, design and self-production, we can quote Silvana Annichiarico, Director of Triennale Design Museum of Milan, who in 2015 dedicated the 7th edition of the Triennale to the issue *Italian Design beyond the crisis*. She wanted to investigate a new, possible and alternative history of Italian design from the mid-30s, the years of autarky, through the oil crisis of 1973, the years of austerity, up until the current global crisis, and the possible answers that can come from self-production.

She wrote that: «Crisis - according to the etymology of the word - means choice. Or decision. Every crisis poses an alternative. It compels movement. Innovation. A countermove. It does not allow for inertia, waiting, routine». And she asked herself: «What did Italian design do when it found itself operating in a society "with its backs against the wall"? Was it able to take up the challenge and make innovative decisions (...) and maybe even an exploration of new paradigms of production, creation and design?» (Annichiarico 2015, p. 25).

With regard to this issue, Beppe Finessi, the 7th edition of the Triennale curator, noted: «Designing in times of economic crisis seems to be a particularly favourable condition in terms of stimulating creativity». The 7th edition of the Triennale was the opportunity to tell the story: «of many seemingly minor incidents, often forgotten, of craftsmen artists, female figures that have always been able to make much with little, and small production companies capable of acting freely in search of new languages and markets» (2015, p. 29).

Thus, ALAB artisans have taken up the challenge of crisis, answering with creativity and self-production and creating a growing and widespread network of microeconomics and

![Fig. 5: the children of Albergheria district painted murals within the project Ballarò Tale, intended to the narration of neighbourhood identity (Ph. by Giornale Cittadino Press 2016).](image-url)
human relations. In this way, they have successfully triggered a process of interaction between Resilience, Recycle and Reactivation of urban capital (Carta 2014). This spreads creativity, generating sustainable development and urban regeneration. The historic centre has been attracting more and more people from the other areas of Palermo because of its added values, linked to history, beauty and human relationships. So, in short, it is a city of relationships (Faraci 2015b), with a human dimension.

![Figure 6](image-url) Oriented towards a design inspired by principles of self-production, many craftsmen, artists and designers have opened up their own workshops in the historic centre (Ph. by G. Faraci 2018).

4. **PALERMO 2018: TAKING STOCK OF AN ONGOING PROCESS**

Analysing the case of the historic centre of Palermo, as regards the indicators of urban regeneration relating to culture defined by Evans (2005), we might highlight: 1) on the building level, the development of recovery and conservation of the built-up Heritage; the improvement in design quality in new projects; the support for mixed use (residential, commercial, hospitality, cultural), promotion of urban maintenance and revitalisation of the town centre; 2) on the economic level, an increase in employment and a lower exodus of graduates; growth of the neo-entrepreneur rate (start-ups); domestic investment in sectors related to local culture on the part of small and medium enterprises; an increase in tourist flows; 3) on the social level, encouraging inclusion on the part of the weak or marginalised; greater cohesion between groups and classes; providing places with new meaning and promoting a different perception of these places; guaranteeing the right to citizenship and stimulating in people a pro-active and participatory attitude; raising aspirations for the local population; changing the image of the urban environment and reputation of certain groups, with the consequent reduction in anti-social behaviour and fear of crime; finally, greater collaboration between the public and private sectors.

The gradual recovery of the historic centre has helped people from Palermo in understanding that the relaunch is an opportunity of economic development. Thanks to its
Identity and Culture leaded action, local government has succeeded in winning remarkable awards, such as Italian Youth Capital 2017 and Italian Capital of Culture 2018. Furthermore, this year Palermo will host also Manifesta, the nomad European biennial of contemporary art. The process of regeneration of the city goes on, between identity and contamination. Palermo is becoming a creative and events city, powered by transformation in the form of its cultural framework. A creative city is a force that requires a vision projected into the future, representing a call to action (Florida 2002; Florida 2005; Florida & Tinagli 2004). The attractiveness of a creative city depends on three factors: a) the tangible and intangible resources of the territory; b) the factors that determine the quality of life in the urban area and that act as attractors of the creative class; c) the image of vitality, quality and potential possessed by the cities perceived both inside and outside (Carta 2007).

In spite of its complexities, the historic centre of Palermo is showing its resilience and redefining its identity, from an abandoned and neglected area to the cultural milieu of the city. A milieu is a local system, in which a critical mass of local administrators, entrepreneurs, intellectuals, social activists, artists, promoters or students can work in an environment that is open to global relations, where the spatial interaction is able to stir up new ideas, products, services and institutions and therefore, as a consequence, to contribute to the regeneration of the city and its rise in rank (Carta 2007). Three are the primary factors of urban creativity: Culture, Communication and Cooperation. Culture is the city’s identity, its history and projection into the future; Communication is the city’s capability to inform, disseminate and involve real-time residents and users. Finally, Cooperation is the acceptance of difference, the ability to bring together all the city residents and components towards common objectives and results. The creative city is not only a more open, multicultural and multi-ethnic city, but it is a city able to mobilize its diversity toward a future project.

People are re-appropriating their historic centre; after all, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote in his Faust: «What from your fathers’ heritage is lent, Earn it anew, to really possess it!» (trans. Taylor 1912, p. 28). Many young people have been encouraged to remain in Palermo and many entrepreneurs, also from abroad, are confidently investing in Palermo. The ability to imagine a better future and a more desirable place to live, have been imparted, re-interpreted, extended and shared by the local people and all those operating in the built-up urban environment; i. e. all those who have been involved in the dynamics of co-design and co-management (Angelucci 2007), with the single objective of looking after the material and immaterial resources of the city.

The concrete actions of inhabitants of Albergheria with the recovery of public spaces such as Piazzaetta Mediterraneo or the murals of Ballarò Tale have shown that also minimal interventions, carried out in application of the urban acupuncture model (Irace 2014; Lerner 2014), can give new meaning to places, reactivating the vital cycles of urban ecosystems, interrupting the process of degradation and improving the quality of life for residents (Cangelli 2015). In effect, today we need to invest over a whole area, developing integrated and systemic micro projects, but we also have to change our modus operandi, taking into account the increasing role of individuals in the care, management and implementation of actions to regenerate urban space.

Thus, urban regeneration is no longer the sum of technological interventions but becomes a process of technological reconnection between resources, space and residents; an opportunity for the inclusive involvement of human/social resources to re-generate the physical resources of the city (Vicari Haddock & Moularett 2009).
5. CONCLUSIONS

The recovery of the historic centre of Palermo was launched in the late 1980s. The process is long and complex, due to the size of over 240 hectares and the presence of numerous monumental and bombed buildings. To do it, a strong political will, regulatory restrictions and financial incentives are necessary but not sufficient. The recovery of a historic centre is an issue of collective interest, because it has a social, cultural and economic impact. First of all, re-appropriation of cultural identity among citizens must be stimulated, raising their awareness and involving them in the process of Heritage recovery. As Goethe wrote, people have to reconquer their fathers’ Heritage to really possess it.

The organization of events, such as the Vie dei Tesori, now at the 12th edition, and the opening of an increasing number of monuments have played a fundamental role in the enhancement and diffusion of city Heritage. Effectively, they have brought a growing number of people to discover the historic centre, above all those citizens who did not think of setting foot there till a few years ago whereas today are curious to know which monuments will be opened next edition.

In recent years, many associations, largely composed of young people, have been developing several projects in the old city aiming at the notification of critical situations by posting on line photos of the endangered heritage, such as Palermo indignata; or at the dissemination the recovery process, posting pictures of construction sites during and after the restoration works, such as the Amo Palermo blog.

Local community has been changing its attitude over the years, becoming pro-active, demanding local government to promote more cooperation and coordination between the different stakeholders, to be involved in the recovery process, to share a project of sustainable development.

The old scepticism of traders towards the pedestrianisations today becomes a demand for new pedestrian spaces. The proposals of civil society, such as the SOS Ballarò’s, has the goal of enhancing public services such as the regulation of markets and nocturnal activities; community centres for children; equipment for public areas; public toilets; bus stops; cleaning and separate waste collection. People are rediscovering the places of their past and identity, looking at them with new eyes, regaining their Heritage. They are proud of it. They are learning the need to dialogue with the other, completely different components of their community; this is the syncretism of Palermo, from a millennium and even today. Albergheria district is the main example, with the recovery of Piazzetta Mediterraneo, the action of SOS Ballarò and a project like Ballarò Tale.

Identity, culture, integration, creativity, design and sharing are the basic elements of the process of urban and social regeneration launched in the historic centre of Palermo. The process is long and complex but now it is not only a political will of an enlightened government, is a shared project of future. The inclusion in the UNESCO list has increased the sense of awareness, a revaluation by the people and pride in their Heritage. Indeed, tourism has boosted, creating a favourable and attractive context encouraging both foreign investors and many young people from Palermo to invest in their own region. This cultural, tourist and economic revival as well as the quality of life on the site have supported the trust of the people, who more and more believe in the recovery of their historic centre, come back to live, to launch a business, open a bed and breakfast, a craft shop, a workshop, an atelier. So, visitors are attracted by the Cultural Heritage but also by the opportunity to get in touch with local people.

The historic centre is now the creative milieu of Palermo. This area, thanks to its resilience, has been enhancing the potential of available human resources, allowing them to
spread their creativity and generating a system of relationships, micro-economy, as ALAB artisans demonstrate. This change of attitude, this social and cultural excitement has allowed the city to win important events, such as Italian Youth Capital 2017, Italian Capital of Culture 2018 and the nomad European biennial of contemporary art Manifesta 2018. Palermo is a creative, multicultural and syncretic city.

The ability on the part of local administrators and planners to listen to local people is the key to the success and vitality of urban transformations. The project becomes the instrument through which one might delineate the most widely-shared perspective of future development. The process in progress is not limited to the physical recovery of the historic centre and may have acted in an even more effective way on the intangible aspects, on the regenerative capacity of the social, spatial and economic fabric.

Those values that the local population perceive as producers of a sense of citizenship might be recreated, adopting a pro-active attitude, along with a reinforcing of the processes of governance, increasing the governability of transformations and stimulating a change of perspective in the local community (which may be imagining a more desirable future). Sharing as a device for re-appropriation and a practice geared towards conscious co-utilisation of urban spaces might have unexpected results and change the connotation of public and private space. Appreciating the results achieved so far in the historic centre of Palermo, we hope this process of recovery and enhancement, supported by an aware and pro-active community, can be a positive example, reproducible in the World Heritage scenario.

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