Participatory democracy, networks between institutions, education and resilience. Research in progress

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Abstract

Is it possible to train to resilience at school?

Processes of participatory democracy, networks between institutions and common construction of knowledge allow developing resilience also in primary school’s students.

This is the framework that hosted a very interesting experience, the "Jannuzzi" Primary School project entitled "Walking to school". It has involved eighty children ten years old and it developed from October to May 2012.

Implemented also in 2013 and still ongoing, this project involved school, teachers, students, families, local government and citizenship. Children’s role was very important. They became the active subjects of their own mobility, playing a leading role in their own displacement. They also participated in the selection and construction of the home-school routes to be covered on foot (pedibus – adapted from Latin).

This methodology is really capable to drive change, as it involves all stakeholders from the beginning and aims at the real needs of citizens living in the territory.

To allow surfacing of young citizens experiences and needs and to enable them defining a future scenario for the transformation of public spaces, it was an educational experience of great magnitude. Educate children to continually redesign their own space is necessary to rethink themselves all the time. This is important to meet expressed needs and to develop resilience. Experimenting participation practices with children improves their debating skills and stimulates the growth of their sense of justice.

During the research I pointed out that the involvement of parents turned out to be crucial. They were enthusiast of the initiative as it aimed to increase the sense of responsibility of new generations regarding the future of their town and their awareness that small gestures can contribute to increase the sense of civic community. Another novelty in this project is the creation of training courses suitable for the needs and requirements of all stakeholders involved: children, adolescents, teachers, parents and all town citizens. These courses dealt with the subjects of road and environment safety and health, which can be achieved and maintained only by means of constant physical activity.

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The conclusions I found so far, even if it quite early, are that participatory democracy, networks between institutions and joint construction of knowledge, by effective training tools, develop resilience and improvements in community life.

In particular, I pointed out:

- Only when citizens are involved in the decision making process, success and persistence of the experience are guaranteed. The citizens shall become actors of their own choices;
- A constructive and mutually beneficial relationship between state agencies and private citizens is possible only when both commit to identify "Spaces for Dialogue": in this way, each stakeholder plays his part in achieving results which will be bigger than the pure sum of the single contribution
- Real change will be possible only if our attention is focused on building social relations capable to help people to rethink our future as always new.

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