

Defining the Public Library as an Educative and Inclusive Place: From the Third Place to the Piazza to Home

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Abstract

This paper explores the sociocultural notion of the public library being an educative and inclusive place, as it analyzes the public library in terms of three main concepts: the piazza, the third place, and home. These concepts can be traced to Ray Oldenburg, an American sociologist; Antonella Agnoli, one of the best-known Italian consultants for the public library's planning and management; J.R. Martin, an American philosopher of education, and Maria Montessori, one of the most prominent Italian pedagogists of the previous century. Observations from this research took place at Casa di Khaoula, an Italian public library, from October 2012 to December 2013, which provides a first-hand account of this fascinating setting.

Socioculturally speaking, Casa di Khaoula is home in the sense that the librarians care for and are concerned for children's growth and development, which, in turn, go across time and space. Just as a fetus grows in the womb and enters the outside world, at Casa di Khaoula the children mature from their attachments, and their responsibility to themselves, to their own community. The librarians mediate children with their materials, other adults and other things outside of the library with the educative 3Cs—care, concern, and connection—in their hearts and sharing the pleasure. Also, in time, the children learn to play their role of acting with their own 3Cs in relation to their circumstances.

The physical aspects of these valuable elements seem represented by everyone's expression in various forms and dialogues, occurring in sociocultural terms on such everyone's practice among any who belongs in the community. This is their home-like ground on which everyone in the community generates, personally and collectively, new sociocultural values, as well as keeping and passing them on to the others and to the next generations, sharing the responsibility as well as the pleasure given by all the process of the sociocultural regeneration, in the most creative sense of this term.

Surely it is fascinating that for being an open, neutral place, one of “passage, occasional discovery, and encounter” (Agnoli, 2009, 81) to match the tense of the sentence of Agnoli, and based on warm and pleasant human relationships, as described by Oldenburg. But such a sense

of responsibility across time and space shared with cannot be explained with just the third place's framework nor just the piazza's.

Keywords: Public library, piazza, third place, home

Prologue

I am sitting here reading a poet. There are a great number of people in the room but one doesn't notice them. They're inside the books. Sometimes they move about in the pages like people turning over in their sleep between two dreams. Ah, how good it is being among people who are reading. Why aren't they always like this? You can go up to one of them and gently touch him: he doesn't feel a thing. And if, when you stand up you bump against someone next to you and you apologize, he gives a nod towards where he hears your voice coming from, his face turns towards you and he doesn't see you, and his hair is like the hair of someone asleep. How good that feels. And I am sitting here and I have a poet. [...]
But see what sort of fate I have: I, probably the most beggarly of these readers, a foreigner: I have a poet. Even though I am poor. Even though the suit I use every day is starting to show signs of wear at certain places. Even though the state of my shoes might cause comment of one sort or another.

(Rilke, 1996, 31, as cited in Romeo, 2012, 7-8)

The setting is 1910 at a library in Paris, and an Italian librarian tells the story of Rilke, the famous poet, from a public library journal. In this biographical poem above, a young man has just transferred from Denmark when the family fell into poverty. Regardless of these troubles, in the library, he was recognized as worthy of being welcomed, without any regard to social status. In libraries, people find themselves in a state of total tranquility, and no one is a bother to them.

The same librarian tells another story, similar to that of Rilke, but of 16 year-old Mauris, a Romanian nomad, who lives today at a camp in the Italian countryside "where the police periodically come to clear out." (Romeo, op. cit., 7) Fortunately, since he joined a well-known, local organization for social activities and was introduced to a local library, his life has changed. Before he was illiterate, but now he can read and write. He said in regard to the library, "There you feel welcomed, there you don't feel judged, no one is interested in laughing at your clothes or at your

face” (ibid., 8).

This librarian said that Rilke’s verses have supported her professional ethics during her work in the libraries: “Anyone who comes at peace with his/her needs for knowledge, in the library he/she will feel at home” (ibid., 8). The protagonists of the two stories share a common background being immigrants, which concerns not only cultural affairs but also social dimensions. With today’s growing diversity, the complexity of sociocultural values regarding globalization, the almost chronic poverty in many so-called developed countriesⁱ, the failure of the traditional family’s roleⁱⁱ, and the increasing difficulties in the child-raising process, the public spaces that serve as public libraries should be more educational and inclusive than ever before.

Through careful analysis of the important aspects of the public library, this paper explores three main concepts: the third place, the piazza, and home. The first concept, the third place, is an idea from more than a couple of decades ago, from Ray Oldenburg, an American sociologist. The second, which is the piazza, was recently presented by Antonella Agnoli, one of the best-known Italian consultants for the public library’s planning and management. The concept of the piazza is actually based on Oldenburg’s term the third place, and both ideas are captivating. However, it is seen that in order to draw a sketch of the public library in the sociocultural terms of being an educative and inclusive place, the two concepts are not enough. Therefore, the notion of home is considered, and it can be traced to the thoughts of J. R. Martin, an American philosopher of education, based on the thoughts and the practice as a school teacher of Maria Montessori, one of the most prominent Italian pedagogists of the previous century, which invite sociocultural studiers to rethink and therefore integrate the former two conceptsⁱⁱⁱ.

1. Two Well-Known Concepts for the Public Library: The Piazza and the Third Place

1.1 The Public Library as a Piazza—Place of “passage, occasional discovery and encounter”

In 2009, Agnoli launched a new concept of the public library as a “piazza of knowledge,” with her best-selling book titled as such (Agnoli, op. cit.). In the opening, she points out the decrease in the number of people who read books and frequent libraries, and then she stresses the absence of social relationships in our modern society, which, in turn, causes the lack of creativity even in the cultural sphere. She continues to present her blueprint for a renovation of the public library itself to account for such sociocultural problems. In order to analyze the conditions, the field she chose for her investigation was the piazza. After several research trips to Europe and America, as well as various cities in Italy, she compared different piazzas and described the characteristics that divided the “piazzas of success” and the others, simultaneously drawing in parallels to her vision for the new public library.

In illustrating the conditions of the piazzas of success, crowded with people, vital and

productive, that Agnoli drew from her investigations, she described them as a place of “passage, occasional discovery and encounter”. More precisely she analyzed the following elements: the appropriate dimensions, the legibility of signs and symbols, the variety of functions, the meeting spots, and finally, a set of three valuable aspects—neutrality, equality, and conversation (ibid., 65-82). Then, she suggested how to successfully apply these fundamental conditions to the public libraries.

To more clearly understand Agnoli’s vision, theme, and precise examination of the library’s conditions, it may be useful to study the two theories on which Agnoli based her thesis on—the third place presented by Ray Oldenburg (1989) and social capital, investigated and enriched by several social studies amongst which Agnoli refers especially to Robert D. Putnam (2000).

1.2 The Public Library as the Third Place: The Fabric of Social Capital

The third place, Oldenburg explained, is represented by a coffee shop or a bar open to everyone and entirely neutral (Oldenburg op. cit., 22-23; as cited in Agnoli op. cit., 78), as it is different from associations or other organizations and unattached to political or religious identities. Moreover, it is the place “where individuals may come and go as they please, in which none are required to play host, and in which all feel at home and comfortable” (Oldenburg op. cit., 22; as cited in Agnoli op. cit., 78). In the following quotation from Oldenburg, in which Agnoli reported in her book, the principle reason why the third place is so fascinating and unique is seen:

There is a tendency for individuals to select their associates, friends, and intimates from among those closer to them in social rank. Third places, however, serve to expand possibilities, whereas formal associations tend to narrow and restrict them. Third place counter the tendency to be restrictive in enjoyment of others by being open to all and by laying emphasis on qualities not confined to status distinctions current in the society. Within third places, the charm and flavor of one’s personality, irrespective of his or her station in life, is what counts. (Oldenburg op. cit., 24; as cited in Agnoli op. cit., 78)

It could have been natural for Agnoli to connect such a concept of the third place as a means of broadening human relationships to her image of the piazzas, as Oldenburg also refers to the *Piazza* itself—the one in the Italian city of Florence—whether by chance or not. This is the quotation from Richard Goodwin’s popular essay on “The American Condition,” to which Oldenburg bestowed a half page in his writing:

Now at Florence, when the air is red with the summer sunset and the campaniles begin to sound vespers and the day's work is done, everyone collects in the piazzas. The steps of Santa Maria del Fiore swarm with men of every rank and every class; artisans, merchants, teachers, artists, doctors, technicians, poets, scholars. A thousand minds, a thousand arguments; a lively intermingling of questions, problems, news of the latest happening, jokes; an inexhaustible play of language and thought, a vibrant curiosity; the changeable temper of a thousand spirits by whom every object of discussion is broken into an infinity of sense and significations—all these spring into being, and then are spent. And this is the pleasure of the Florentine public. (Goodwin, 1974, 36; Oldenburg op. cit., 27)

Such scenery was ideal for Oldenburg regarding the third place, and Agnoli's theory also reveals the notable connection. For Agnoli, the third place was significant because as Putnam and Feldstein (2003) show, its characteristics arose to promote and enhance the social capital of those in the community who frequented the library. The definition of the social capital in which Agnoli refers to, as given by the World Bank, is as follows:

Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together. (The World Bank: www.worldbank.org^{iv})

Agnoli wrote, "A public library well-managed is the place which increases the social capital of its local territory" (Agnoli op. cit., 79). With this statement, Agnoli combined the concept of the third place, represented by Oldenburg, to her own idea of the public library as the piazza.

Actually, in one of the libraries that Agnoli managed as a planning consultant, the Sala Borsa Library in Bologna, a piazza was located inside the edifice. This *piazza coperta*, piazza with a roof, was in the center of the whole setting, connected through the entrance of the library with the *piazza aperta*, the original main piazza of the Roman medieval town. In this *piazza coperta*, they organize various events, exhibitions, concerts, study meetings, and festivals, regarding their books and more. It takes place in the traditional open-air piazza, working as the heart of the library itself and bringing to light new experiences to everyone who enters the building.

2 Rethinking in the Light of Home: An Educational Viewpoint

2.1 School as Home—3Cs for Public Schools

With public libraries being our children's learning place, the notion of the piazza, based on the third place, from an educational point of view is not enough. In this and the consecutive chapter, the concept of casa, which means home, is discussed. The American philosopher of education J. R. Martin claimed this as the very condition that today's American schools need to incorporate in its planning.

She pointed out that when John Dewey, almost a century before, had proposed his project of the new school as a microcosm of the society, he introduced several occupations that had been extinguished from the American home during modernization, and he would not think of the whole aspect of domesticity. He thought about bringing in the matters brought away from the home, which were domestic occupations. However, for Martin, there were more important things brought away from homes that absolutely needed to be taken back into public schools in order to provide children with a sound learning experience: It was a set of values that she formulated and called the "3Cs," care, concern and connection (Martin, 1992). Aspects that were lost in the modernization of American home-life were not only domestic occupations. Since parents went away from home to work, their children were left alone, and therefore, were removed from the 3Cs.

In Martin's same book, our culture, deprived of the 3Cs, is illustrated as a hotbed of violence, prejudice, and exclusion, especially toward femininity. This bears importance as women were traditionally considered the providers of the 3Cs. Martin says, our culture and society are affected by "domephobia," with "its devaluation of and morbid anxiety about thing domestic" (ibid., 155). In the modernity instead, the elements exclusively privileged have been always the 3Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) —strictly cool, objective and characterized by distant observations, actually in contrast to the 3Cs' values. In such conditions, for Martin, our society and culture are rendering themselves more and more inhumane and unsustainable regarding peace. Just as Montessori established her school to save the children from devastation in one of the poorest regions in Rome at the beginning of the 1900s, the same need is shared today by children of "all kind of socio-economical class" (Martin ibid., tr. Jp., ii) in America and other modernized countries. Thus, Martin conceptualized a more integrated figure of school as home, revitalizing the 3Cs, the essential values innate to home-ness and named her school "Schoolhome."

2.2 Core Elements of Home-ness as 3Cs - Occupations, Activities, Duty, Responsibility, and Functions

In the preface for the Japanese translation, "The Schoolhome: Rethinking Schools for

Changing Families,” Martin explains that when she discusses the concept of home, she focuses on its “occupations, activities, duty and responsibility and functions” (ibid., tr. Jp. 2007, ii); thus, all the *physical matters* related to the “reproduction” process of domesticity. Actually as Martin, developing Dewey’s thesis, argued about integrating the “head, hand and heart” of children in education based on the 3Cs, which is innate to the very process of the human reproduction in domesticity, in her mind the *physical aspect* should have a crucial part.

This is the dimension that modern society has neglected and forgotten. This is the dimension in which the caregiver, teacher, or simply an adult cannot ever escape for as long as the little being in front of them would call for them, and the daily repeating domestic tasks must be done without any regard to your forwardness. The *responsibility* and *duty* seen here is absolute; remember that the third places could lack these duties, as such without any problems.

Another difference of Martin’s concept of home from the third place is that the 3Cs’ aspects, care, concern, and connection, should go *across time and space*^v, far toward the children’s *growth*. You should think not only about the here and now of the children but also about their near and far future, and any other place with which they can possibly have to go to one day, whether you have been there yourself or not.

Additionally, “the spirit of that metaphorical home named school” (ibid., 12), is seen more closely in the quotation Martin reports to us below, which is from Montessori’s descriptions on her own school, established in 1907 for poor children in Rome and named as home, Casa dei Bambini:

It may be said to embrace its inmates with the tender, consoling arms of woman. It is the *giver* of *moral life*, of *blessings*; it *cares for*, it *educates* and *feeds* the little ones. [emphasis added] (Montessori, 1964, 62; as cited in Martin op. cit., 12)

Martin details that “her idealized version of home is echoed by the image of a womb she invoked in the talks on education and peace she delivered in Europe in the 1930s” (ibid., 12-13). Just as Montessori has used the term “*giver*,” the home-ness described is fundamentally free of charge. As Martin cited, the term like “womb” is almost based on biological fate, although Martin’s argument can be misunderstood on the biological basis because she clearly states that the responsibility should not be shouldered only by women.

Moreover, it is indispensable to hear Martin as she recalls that for Montessori, Casa dei Bambini was an *educative* place as well, in the sense that “not simply a place where the children are kept, not just an asylum, but a true school for their *education* [emphasis added]” (Montessori op. cit., 68-9). Martin quotes Dorothy Canfield Fisher’s study on the *education* of Montessori’s

Casa dei Bambini:

It is, for instance, their very own home not only in the sense that it is a place arranged specially for their comfort and convenience, but furthermore a place for which they feel that steadying *sense of responsibility* which is one of the greatest moral advantages of a home over a boarding-house, a moral advantage of home life which children in ordinary circumstances are really allowed to share with their elders. [emphasis added.] (Fisher, 1912, 34)

Then Martin adds:

Deriving not from possessiveness but from *attachment*—to the school itself, to its physical embodiment, to the people in it—this *feeling of responsibility* explains the children's zeal in keeping the schoolrooms neat and clean, their joy in serving one another hot lunches, their pride in showing the school to visitors. [emphasis added.] (Martin, op. cit., 14.)

Here, the mechanism that sustains such a *sense* or *feeling of responsibility* seems to be *attachment* to the community or to the life itself that they have there, which is hands-on and acquired, using an embodiment of the 3Cs on a daily basis.

However, naturally, the schoolhome that Martin idealized cannot afford, as she says, all the necessities that domesticity requires for children's growth:

Its loving atmosphere should keep mothers from feeling guilty about leaving home each morning. Its domestic curriculum can provide boys and girls with the knowledge, skill, and behavior patterns their mothers and fathers have no time to teach. With the medical profession's help, it can even have physicians and nurses on call. But the Schoolhome cannot buy the groceries, do the housework of the private home, tend the children during their waking and sleeping hours there. (ibid., 154)

Rather, she states, "Insofar as it can help save mothers and their children, it is *not* because it will undertake all the domestic work that is now done by women. The reason is that the education it provides will teach boys and girls alike that the *domesticity is everyone's business*." [emphasis added.] (ibid., 154) For Martin, any man or woman can be blamed for the lack of the 3Cs in our society and culture, but the true problem is that the public education system has long ignored the essential values of domesticity in its history. This is shown in the absence of it in

curriculum and the absence of it from our modern society, but “[w]ith the fear of things domestic uppermost on our minds, we cannot possibly solve the problem of how to educate the generation of children who are being left each morning” (ibid., 160).

2.3 Society as Home: Searching for Educative Agents as Mediators

In the “Schoolhome” project in fact, it is seen that public school needs to be gradually enriched. On the other hand, it is noticed that the occupations that Dewey carried into the school have always existed in the out-of-school society; therefore, school and society have been related under the micro-macro framework since Dewey’s time. Yet, regarding the concept of home-ness and the 3Cs, it is uncertain if these matters exist in general society.

Martin discusses the role of everyone being an “educational agent,” whether in school or out-of-school, in the book titled “Cultural Miseducation: In Search of a Democratic Solution” (Martin 2002). Her viewpoint is that “what a culture passes down to the next generation is everyone’s business” (ibid., 1), and she invites all of us as “educational agents”—young, old, men, women, people who have an official teaching license and people who do not, and people who work in a cultural or social institute and those who do not. Furthermore, the 3Cs play an important role regarding cultural liability. Martin does not want to pass on to children the “violence” and “hatred” (ibid., 1). How then should adults act as educational agents in the broader field of society, in or outside of school?

Martin gives a critical analysis on the utopian ideas of rendering a completely educated society, without any mistakes, as conceptualized by Socrates who thought of depriving the evil elements from the society in “The Republic” (Plato, 1974) and in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s novel “Herland” (1915), which idealized a society consisting exclusively of educated women. There was also the idea of pulling children out of society and bringing them up out of contact with harmful elements, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau insisted in “Emile” (1762). For Martin, “The truth is that any solution to the educational problem of generation that constructs a wall of separation between children and harmful materials is likely to fail if the wall should crumble and those materials reenter the scene” (Martin, 2002, op. cit., 75).

Rather than construct “a wall of separation between children and harmful material,” she considered the importance of mediation given by an educative agent between the two—children and object material, whether harmful or worthy in itself: “Child hears story as it is mediated by an adult who has the child’s growth and development at heart” (ibid., 77), and here the relation between the child and the material is turned from a “two-way relation into a three-way relation” (ibid., 77). This is the way, Martin proposes, to pass culture to children, rendering it as worthy as possible. Martin’s interpretation of such a mediator is “an adult who has the child’s growth and

development at heart”; this is crucial for this discussion because in light of Martin’s discourse about the cultural (mis-)education, this statement is applicable to any given institute or organization that has educative agents.

Although it is impossible, or rather nonsensical, to think of rendering the whole society perfectly educated, it should be meaningful to examine the worthiness of any single agent and to consider how each of them could be an effective mediator in children’s education. This is analyzed in terms of how it pertains to Italian public libraries, and Martin’s formula of the educative value of the 3Cs is used.

3 Which Home-ness is Needed?: Some Critical Reflections on the Former Concepts

3.1 Focus on Intentions and Efforts of Staffs

There is another reason why the piazza concept is not all-encompassing. While the conditions of the Italian piazzas seen today should not be ignored, one hardly encounters the scene such as the one Oldenburg happily cited, of the vital social life, colored by negotiations and interactions among men of every rank and every class: “On Sundays, the Italian Piazzas are vacant. Almost desert are the stadiums, the churches, the cinemas, the traditional places of social life” (Cazzullo, 2008, 3). If, in Bologna, the *piazza coperta* inside the Sala Borsa Library was a success, the credit does not belong merely to the facility itself, but also, or rather, much more to the *intentional project* for the new library. The project was deliberately planned and promoted with *concrete efforts* by a huge number of people—from the planners to the practitioners—working still today inside the edifice on daily basis. Thus, there are a required number of agents, consisting of many human resources. Therefore, considering the fact that almost any given piazza does not work in itself, the *intentions* of and the *effort* made by staff, with which such a place could newly begin to serve its community, are studied.

3.2.1 Third Places as Pseudo-Homes: “Domesticity Repressed”

Oldenburg, in the same study mentioned above, attempts to point out the similarity of his concept of the third place to that of the home in general to emphasize the relevance of his “great, good place.” Oldenburg, seeking traits of “home-ness,” relied on the study conducted by the psychologist David Seamon (1979), who set forth five criteria: “Rooedness” (79), “Appropriation [with] a sence of possession and control” (80), “Regeneration” (81), “At-Easeness” (83), “Warmth” (84) (see also Oldenburg, op. cit., 39-41). These criteria allowed Oldenburg to classify the third places as “homes away from home” (ibid., 39), or against some criteria, as more home-like than the real home. This operation for appropriation of the third place to home was done in a quite generous manner because Oldenburg cut out many elements of home to compare it to the third

place theme in his thesis.

On the third condition of home Seamon presented, “Regeneration”, Oldenburg treated the question as such:

Third, contends Seamon, homes are places where individuals are regenerated or restored. Here, one must readily concede that third places are not recommended for the *physically ill or exhausted*. The home, if not hospital, is required for them. But, in terms of the regeneration of the *spirit*, of unwinding, or of “letting one’s hair down”—in terms social regeneration—the third place is ideally suited. [emphasis added] (ibid., 41)

First of all, he is reducing home to the spiritual matter, depriving all of the *physical matters*, which are, as is just discussed above, indispensable for the 3Cs to embody its important benefits for children’s growth. Moreover, regarding the “regeneration” of the home, Oldenburg actually should have not compare it to the hospital, to such a special setting: He would be forgetting that the home’s regenerative function is working, rather, when you are feeling totally fine, although maybe away from it. Whether you need the third place or not, whether you go there often or never, as long as you feel ok, you *are sustained* by the regenerative mechanism of home, thanks to which you eat and sleep, and this is the very essence of the home-ness.

In addition, Oldenburg appreciates the third place, as “*Escape* is so much easier” [emphasis added] (ibid., 29). Although it must be pointed out that there is *no* sense of responsibility toward the relationships that arise there. For Oldenburg, the freedom from any “purpose, duty or role” (ibid., 24-25) seems to count first, and then ultimately even the “intimate relations among people” (ibid., 23) will be fundamentally exempted from the ball and chain of human connection.

Oldenburg, moreover, shares the same attitude toward the home as well. Writing about “at-home-ness” of the third place, he uses the words “congenial,” “comfortable,” “cheerfulness,” and “companionship,” but there is not any trace to the *sense of responsibility*. Oldenburg in fact shares his opinion on the matter of bothersome co-workers or family members:

In the third place, people may make blissful substitutions in the rosters of their associations, adding those they genuinely enjoy and admire to those less-preferred individuals that fate has put at their side in the workplace or even, perhaps, in their family. (ibid., 24)

Actually, Oldenburg did not deny that the value of the third place is “the escape and relief from stress” (ibid., 21), from “life’s duties and drudgeries” (ibid., 21), from “nagging wife and unruly children, monotonous radios and barking dogs, tough bosses and impatient creditors” (Wechsber,

1966, 16; as quoted in Oldenburg op. cit., 21). When he criticized such *escape theme* of precedent chroniclers as having a “limited view” he said, “The escape theme is not erroneous in substance but in emphasis” (ibid., 21). Oldenburg then goes to add other characteristics of the third place, amongst which the human relationship, the pleasant conversation, and the at-home-ness are mentioned. Nevertheless, going forward in his discourse, Oldenburg himself often seems to privilege the shelter-like aspect of the third place, as a place to escape or to *refuge* (and to leave no sooner than it appears uncomfortable to him).

For now, however, it cannot be accepted as the very basic preposition for a children’s educative field. The educational site should be recognized not because “*escape* is so much easier,” but because *although escape is easy, they instead would like to be there*. Here, it cannot be taken for granted the difference of the emphasis, and the latter proposition should definitely be considered as it reveals how to think about an educative place.

Martin, in arguing on the “domephobia” of the American culture and society, has pointed out that it was the message rather taught in their education traditionally common, for instance through the basic cannon of the classic literary:

In the works that are said to define American culture—the ones that constitutes the American literary cannon and that regularly appear on school and college reading lists—the private home is represented as something to *run away from*. [emphasis added] (Martin, 1992, op. cit., 141)

Such message that the home is to “*run away from*” as possible is the *value* premeditatedly passed on from one generation to another. Here, nonetheless, Martin give a diagnosis of “repression” onto the idea of *domesticity*, based on the Freud’s theory, as broadly spread in the American society and culture. For that the *domesticity* has been considered in contrast to the alterative values privileged in modernity, they seem to be affected by such disorder. Oldenburg also, seems exposed to the same effects of the American modern educational frame. Although, we should *remember* that it is rather indispensable for our life, private and social, itself.

3.2.2 Third Places as Pseudo-Homes: Its Economic Underpinnings

Moreover, in many cases when Oldenburg attempts to explain the concept of the third place in his book, especially when he describes the third place being taverns and bars, the stage where he explains its core definition, it cannot be overlooked the fact that in these places the customer pays for the services, and moreover, the place itself. This definitely distinguishes the third place from the natural home, and one is woken up from the wonderful dream to remember why such a

place has always been great—because people are its customers. Even though the agent could be non-profit, or a public agent offering their services not just for their own profit, the mechanism is still the same, as long as there would be the exchange between the provider and the beneficiaries.

People do not have to act as a “host” and are free from the “duty and role” at the third places because they pay someone who takes on those burdensome roles. At a bar, they stock the bottles of liquor when they are closed, they pour the drinks into the glasses in front of the customers, and they wash the dishes afterward, all in return for the money people pay them. If not, they would soon reject any of tasks and it couldn’t work more as great good place as before. There the vary fundamental prerequisite for home’s regeneration system is lacked: the 3Cs put in practice as occupations, activities, duty, responsibility, and functions.

Oldenburg’s discourse includes the levelers of early modern England, the precursors of the “newfound unity” after the decay of the feudal order “under Charles I and expired shortly afterward under Cromwell” (Oldenburg, *op. cit.*, 23). These democratic relationships between every kind of man, seems to represent, for Oldenburg, the most important value of the third place, like its lantern, that illuminates the face of every man awing to open the door. However, it is soon noticed that behind the decay of the old feudal order of England, there must have been the rise of another new order, based on the capital.

Now the economic underpinnings of the setting of the third place have just been revealed, and there rest doubts, so to speak, on Oldenburg’s statements that the third place is excused by any type of exclusion (*ibid.*, 24), or that “Even poverty loses much its sting when communities can offer the settings and occasion” (*ibid.*, 25). Rather it should be stated that the definition of the third place given by Oldenburg is quite ambiguous and broadly applicable. It needs to be considered more precisely when and how poverty can meet such “settings and occasions where the disadvantaged can be accepted as equal” (*ibid.*, 25). It is clear to everyone’s eye that it must not be the tavern or the bar, while the poor man might not be able to afford the bill; there should not be minimum requirements to access the “everyone’s” great, good place.

There is no doubt that it is important to accept the real conditions in which one finds; there is the fact that the third place is very popular, even as a substitute to the natural home. Never the less, it is not enough to entrust such a system with all matters relating to human beings. As the ethicists would say, we must be careful in approving a certain value because a given fact does not always permit us to rewrite it into an “ought-to proposition.” From an educational viewpoint, some of the dimensions of “home-ness,” cut out by Oldenburg in his third place thesis, should be revisited.

4 The Case of Casa di Khaoula: An Italian Public Library Called Home

Having opened in 2007, Casa di Khaoula is one of the local public libraries in a suburb of Bologna, Italy. The area is called Bolognina and it has the highest ratio of immigrants in their population. An immigrant girl had just arrived to the area and had been looking for a place where she could study in tranquility and after Casa di Khaoula was established for her request addressed to the district office: Khaoula is her name. Since the moment of its establishment, the library has not only promoted education but intercultural interactions. In this chapter, the home-ness of this Italian public library is analyzed, on the basis of what was observed during field research from October 2012 to December 2013. The findings of the research are more precisely reported in Takahashi (2014, 195-202; in press).

4.1 Librarians and the 3Cs for Children's Growth: Sharing the Pleasure Together

In Casa di Khaoula, as well as in many other public libraries, librarians have “the child’s growth and development at heart,” without waiting for any indication from the well-known Italian manual of librarian-ship, which declares its mission is to “communicate beyond the space” and to “transmit thorough the time” (Montecchi and Venuda, 2013, 73-80). Librarians work on various forms of mediation with their children—of course between the children and the materials, but also with local people and the local community itself—through which the children get a chance to know and access an expanded world.

Nevertheless, in the meantime, it is important for us to see that their efforts begin from a more fundamental level: the patrons, who are children, and the place of the library itself. The library’s manager states, first of all, that the mission of Casa di Khaoula is to offer a welcoming place for every individual, “*a place to stay together*,” so that it becomes natural for them to recognize one another as cohabitants in the same town. This is the basis of which all intercultural programs are established at Casa di Khaoula, and the vision of the manager is that each of these programs is accepted naturally by every user, as appropriately meeting the needs of the local *community*, rather than being just for immigrants.

To pursue such a vision, the librarians of Casa di Khaoula take much care of the environmental arrangements to render it as inclusive as possible for all, as they organize several sociocultural activities to attract visitors of any kind of background, as well as proactively collect representative materials. For example, a quotation is displayed in the open stairwell, “East not so far”; Arabic characters are posted; open meetings, seminars, and parties (of sociocultural characteristics) are hosted; and exhibitions of various genres of art are displayed in their piazza-like space—small but opened by skylights and comfortable. For children, many kinds of workshops are offered, sometimes in their reading rooms and sometimes in their spacious atelier.

More projects than these are in place in order to promote “*a place to stay together*” for all kinds of people.

Here, the librarians’ efforts to render a place of “passage, discover and encounter,” as Agnoli proposed, is seen. More importantly, it cannot be taken for granted that these efforts are put in place for children. In the librarian’s zeal for offering something which would appeal to children, an adult with *care* and *concern* for children’s *nourishment* and *growth*, not just for compensation, is seen. Moreover, the *pleasure* is not just for the children, but also for the librarians themselves; One librarian said, “We must be interesting enough to communicate to children the fun of reading.” Clearly, the librarian and the children go beyond the relation of giver and recipient, and now they are *sharing* a pleasant experience. This sense of sharing is spread to any other activity that is organized.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that various activities are not always planned and put in practice by only the librarians themselves, but often by *other guests, associations, and volunteers active in the local community*. They hold various titles and are willing to bring their projects into the library, and, in turn, the library and the librarians work on these projects, helping with the media or as *mediators* between the children and the guests. Also, the librarians are diligent in supplying *information* related to local sociocultural events and so on, as another form of *mediation* between the children and the outside world. This gives children opportunities on their own to access other *sociocultural possibilities* existing *outside of the library*.

Finally, in the quotation below, from the statements of the same manager at Casa di Khaoula, it is confirmed that their devotion for the children goes “*beyond time and space*.”

Based on the hope that the relation between the individual and the book – and *any other genre of informative-recreative possibilities* related to the world of communications: the cinema and the music etc.— won’t be interrupted just after the school education, the purpose of our activities for promotion of reading is to offer to *the children the possibility to continue such a rapport* thanks to the materials and the spaces with which we supply them according to their growth and to meet their always changing and renewed necessities. [emphasis added] (Righini, 2008, 261)

From the information gathered in interviews, another librarian was worried about the conduct of teenagers in public spaces. He also was concerned about the children growing into productive citizens. The echo of the responsibility was heard that Martin mentioned as well.

Then, in Casa di Khaoula, which *responsibility* and *attachments* are attained by children and how? In the following sections, it is seen in more detail, using a couple of examples from one of

Casa di Khaoula's reading workshops and one of its exhibition projects.

4.2 Children's Elaboration of Self and Collective Identity: Rethinking Home

In the third place, generally pleasant conversation occurs, although at Casa di Khaoula other terms like *narrative* and *dialogue* should be used, which, while still indicating human verbal interaction, definitely have different connotations than conversation.

"Story of journey, exchange of narratives" [org. "Storie di viaggi, scambi di racconti"] is the title of their reading workshop for teenagers, which includes topics such as emigration, immigration, or any other type of journey across linguistic and cultural borders. The activity is based on the librarians' presenting and reading excerpts from dozens of materials related to the topic. Immigrant literature (autobiographies, anthologies etc.), picture books, and radio programs are utilized on every key topic, such as departure, journey, arrival, meeting with new people, prejudice, language, return, and home. The librarians, as animators of the workshops, ask questions and invite the children to tell of their own experiences or to express their feelings or ideas about the topics. In addition, in the second half of the activity, the librarians have special guests from outside of the library, such as immigrant adults living in the community, who join them for an exchange of everyone's story.

In an attempt to analyze this workshop, first of all, it is noticed that the narratives play an absolutely vital role. Through them, the contents and the emotions of the immigrants' experience are given to the children. When they have their own story, they share them with each other; thus, it is correctly called an "exchange" of narratives. Here, we should notice that *narratives* should be distinguished from a simple conversation since the former requires a certain depth of reflection and elaboration on the original experience, while the latter does not always need such a process.

It is said that through autobiographical works the writer becomes a "researcher of oneself" (Demetrio, 2002, 70), who carries out the practice of "personal identification" (ibid., 71), and this point seems valid in the case of Casa di Khaoula's workshop. In this workshop, the *dialogue* seems to occur inside every individual as well as among them during each question the librarians ask. Questions such as, "What does home mean?" invite every child not only to imagine the conditions of people in the literature that they are reading but also those similar of his/her classmates, and to reflect on those of him/herself. This inquiry could be regarding their identity, such as their sense of belonging or their own roots. Every child, in fact, has the opportunity to express their own ideas about the concept of home in different places: "Bologna," where they are live in this moment, "absolutely where they were born" (whether another part of Italy or overseas), and "both of them."

Nevertheless, as the *narratives* contain less or more a certain concern for the listener or the listener's perspectives, such *narratives* are considered not just a reflection of oneself, but a reflection of interpersonal connections yielding already a *collective perspective*: or more precisely, the “potential energy yield for the [unfillable] gaps between several subjects' perspectives render possible the collective engagements among the *sujet parlant* [here reinterpreted as narrators]” (Noe, 1993, 131), and the eager *for* (see also Gadamer, 1990) a common *collective perspective* would be the definitive condition to render the *dialogues generative* as expected.

When an adult guest shares their ideas with the children, other dimensions are brought up on the concept of home: “Home is the concept of exclusiveness as well as inclusiveness, if the latter is valid just for who has the key. I prefer that there would be several homes which welcome me in all over the world,” “home is something to find out and build by ourselves over time,” and “I’m trying to recuperate something I’ve lost in my home country while living abroad, by learning its history and literature of that time.” These are the statements of the adult guests who respectively have the experience of being an immigrant on their shoulders, through which, the concept of home came to be reinterpreted from an *extended and deepened perspective*. Children *get to know* the immigrants that are just like them and are in their neighborhood and get the chance to develop answers to an *inquiry-formulated* question, such as “How *ought* we consider our home?” In Casa di Khaoula—remember its name means home—they even *discuss the concept of home itself*. They create by themselves, and collectively, the idea of it and try to put it in practice, as everyone matures with their own personal ideas and behaviors.

This way, as Martin suggested was an important way of cultural education, the children's reading is *mediated* by the librarians, and these readings are also *mediated* by the adults with the very same realities of immigrant experience. After this workshop, several children asked the librarians for more information about related materials and went to look for them, or even borrow them, in the library. With new voices and novel materials, the children may have begun new internal dialogues. Even though something horrible will give adults or children anxiety, it is not the case that we should worry about the censorship alongside of children because the librarians are ready to *mediate* it in an educative manner, rendering it something worth discussing. Additionally, they may invite you to talk with someone else who would be more competent for the given question and present the person to you. This casa is open to the outside society, as illustrated above.

This is the way children acquire their *affections* and *responsibility* in Casa di Khaoula, as these workshops are directed to *oneself*, to *their community*, and to *each other*. The inquiry regarding home in this reading workshop is approached through various forms of *dialogue* and offers children an opportunity to think about their identities, as well as to elaborate their

connection to the *reality* of their local town and to its *community*. Through this, they will gradually mature, *care for*, and be *concerned for* each other. Of course, each of these activities is not just a fleeting event but the results of a process in establishing *roots* that will continue to be cultivated. It is a socio-cultural ground, which is hands-on and has an infinite extension in *time and space*.

4.3 From Children to Society: Moving Toward an Extended Dialogue

The dialogue does not just occur inside the workshop classes. Many encounters take place in which a certain message is expressed by children, and in turn, invites adult visitors to seriously discuss the topic. This is called *dialogue* as well, yet in an indirect way. For instance, one evening, the library organized an opening party for a photo exhibition. The works were the product of a photo workshop, which had been organized by local staff and a professional photographer at a refugee camp. The camp was created after the disastrous earthquake that occurred in May 2012 in Northern Italy. It included 17 teenagers then living in the camp. This was a zone with a high immigrant population, and many of the participants of the workshop had an intercultural background. In the exhibition, for example, the message, “Though everyone pees in the same way, why the toilets are separated?”, written under a photo of the scene where the toilets were separated according to ethnicity, provoked discussions among the adult visitors. Furthermore, the adults could leave messages for the children on cards distributed by the staff, and then the cards were brought to them, as their own town was too distant from the library.

One of the staff members explained the original purpose of the workshop, and that was for the teenagers to overcome the conditions of depression or stress, often caused rather by the effects of the negative visions of the adults around, restoring the legitimate importance to the children’s own point of view toward their circumstances, through the photographing activities. In consequence although, it developed a *dialogue* among the local visitors and indirectly an active *dialogue* between the children and the visitors.

Here it should be pointed out that the physical aspects required to manifest the 3Cs elements – remember, “occupation, activities, duty, responsibility and functions” – seem to be *put in practice*, in a socio-cultural terms, through their *expressions* in various forms and especially on the *dialogues* occurring on the basis of such practice of *each one* in the *community*. Thus the *responsibility* arises as *shared* by *everyone* involved to promote the *sociocultural regeneration*, in the most creative sense of the term, of the *community* itself.

4.4. The Public Library as a Socio-Cultural Home

Casa di Khaoula provides children with a place to discuss, develop, and reflect on their own

identity, as well as the identity of the greater community. Through this, the children develop a sense of *responsibility* not only to *themselves* but to *each other* and the *community* in which they belong. Children were able to first-handedly work with people and materials, through the *mediation* of the librarians. These librarians, along with the other adults with whom they *share* also their responsibility toward children as well as to their community itself, kept the 3Cs in mind during their work, and found *pleasure* in their engaging interactions.

In this sense, actually, Casa di Khaoula is sociocultural home, where who lives in it together, not only *being fed* with and *maintain* the given sociocultural values, but *generate* new ones, keeping *care* and *concern* for themselves, for the others and for the community, based on the *connections* to each other. They also *put* in practice these valuable elements almost through the expressions and the dialogues.

Casa di Khaoula is undoubtedly a place of “passage, discover, and unexpected encounter.” It is a place that centers on pleasant relationships as Oldenburg and Angnoli described. Although, moreover there is wholeheartedly a *sense of responsibility across time and space* for the children’s growth and development, *shared with pleasure* by members of a community and *put in practice* by each of them cannot be explicitly explained with just the third place’s framework, or just the piazza’s framework as previously proposed.

Conclusion

The challenge today is whether we, as men, women, families, community members, educators, and others can share the task related to the human development of nourishing children based on the 3Cs. In this paper, a homelike image of the society was explored, as well as what should be required of public schools. While, today, the family itself cannot play its traditional role, as it becomes more natural (or politically required) that both parents work away home, so this research for educative agents that embody the home-ness in society is crucial.

The most important thing seen through the case of Casa di Khaoula was that the children were not only recipients of the devotion from adults, but they also were growing as makers and givers of such elements. From their voices, various forms of dialogue were developed and connections with each other were made. This all happened in a place where everyone could elaborate on their own personal values as well as the collective values, in a sociocultural manner. In this home, the adults did not only know that their children needed the 3Cs, but they also trusted their own capacity, spendable when well mediated, to generate and express their own thinking, in relation to their own circumstances.

The third place is described worthy as to “serve[s] to expand possibilities” of human relationships, without any regard of social status. The owners at the cash register and the

waiters behind the counters of the taverns were looked at, not just by the customers that Oldenburg would mainly focus on, as this uncovered whether these places would really be home-like enough to be educative for our children. This analysis shed light, rather than on those of taverns, directly on those who work in Casa di Khaoula, in our home.

Also examined was the quality of the relationships there, and it deserves praise as a true “home away from home” from an educational viewpoint. The piazza’s message, with the legacy of the third place on its shoulder, is quite bold as it recognizes “passage, discovery, encounter,” the elements of contingency innate to human life, as an asset and evaluates it. However, more discussion is needed regarding different scenarios at these occurrences, such as how to attend and intervene as an adult with children, as well as how children can gain from such dimensions of their experience.

The values of neither of the two concepts, the third place or the piazza, is being denied; however, to conceptualize the public library as an educational and inclusive place for children, these two concepts are not enough without the notion of home.

Notes

- i See the arguments on the “Race to the Bottom.”
- ii See J. R. Martin, 1992, 1-4
- iii In Japan, Kazuko Kuno (2011) argued about the school library’s conditions relying on the Oldenburg’s *third place* concepts and on the O. F. Bollnow’s theory of *home-ness*. In that Kuno focuses on the “School library”, the present paper differs from it as focus on the public library with explicit intention and should be fundamentally distinguished because in this paper the alternative thesis of Martin and Montessori *on home-ness* will invite the study to *critically rethink* the Oldenburg’s theory itself and especially its *home-ness* programmed into his *third place* theme, in order to render the concept of the Public library more educative and inclusive, while in Kuno, such critical perspective on the former theories does not exist.
- iv <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTTSOCIALCAPITAL/0,,contentMDK:20185164~menuPK:418217~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:401015,00.html> (2014.12.24.)
- v I. Sheffler, in his analysis on the concept of human potential, points out that every choice we take comes up on a time-binding field, in the very point between the past and the future (2010, 22-24). This theme indicates that as educators, we should always remember that we operate in this dimension with an infinite extension in time, in which every child carries out their choice in their growth. On the other hand, due to globalization in every aspect, we should not ignore either the extension in the spatial dimension.

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