

A Place-Sustaining Framework for Local Urban Identity: an Introduction and History of Cittaslow

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ABSTRACT

This article will provide an introduction and description of the Cittaslow organisation, its history, philosophy and policy. The organisation is reviewed through the lenses of place-sustaining, localisation and the importance of identity. Much of this article is based upon research from 2004 and 2005, conducted by the author, in Europe (primarily Italy) and from the author's home-base in Canada. The original intention was to analyse the case of Cittaslow, as it seeks to sustain the local sense of place and the identity inherent to each individual urban area.

INTRODUCTION

Urban areas around the world are facing an important phase in their histories. As the global population continues to migrate to large urban centres, cities

are gaining an unprecedented percentage of the world's total population. The trends and patterns, which include the way in which urban centres grow, are melding together under globalisation, producing cities which are becoming increasingly uniform.

The local sense of place, in many locations, is at risk if it is not properly sustained. The increase of globalisation has led to a homogenisation of urban identity. This is particularly the situation in smaller urban areas which do not receive as much attention, and frequently find themselves attracted to foreign 'solutions' which do not value the local identity. The planning community, worldwide, would benefit from a holistic, place-based solution, provided as an answer to the problem of sustaining local identity.

Cittaslow, an organised network of small cities, is attempting to focus urban and regional plans around the primary asset of place-based identity, by choosing to preserve the threads of each urban area's own unique characteristics. They have been introduced during a time in history that seems to support everything they do not represent. They are each sculpting their own future and leaning on their own past, in a concerted effort to not become yet another monotonous urban centre.

CITTASLOW HISTORY

Cittaslow was founded in the year 1999 by Paolo Saturnini (Mayor of Greve-in-Chianti), together with the mayors of Orvieto (Stefano Cimicchi), Bra (Francesca Guida), Positano (Domenico Marrone) and the President and Founder of Slow Food (Carlo Petrini). Saturnini saw the need for maintaining the qualities and characteristics of smaller urban regions. He recognised that, in the long run, cities would suffer by becoming large global metropolises with no local connections. In other words, cities will become "everywhere communities" (Calthorpe and Fulton, 2001) losing the sense of place which had defined them for centuries. As Saturnini has noted, "cities are all becoming uniform; they are losing their identity, their soul."¹

1 *Italian city promotes slow life, but is too busy to enjoy it* [on-line article, accessed March 12, 2003].

Available from:

http://potpourri.fltr.ucl.ac.be/files/AClassFTP/Textes/articles_USA/nyt_2002_juin_16et17_greve.text

Cittaslow's aim is to preserve the quality of life integral to each city's sense of place, in an environmentally-sustaining way. The underlying philosophy is to identify and support each city region's assets and ways of life which have traditionally formed its identity. According to supporters of Cittaslow, it is when these characteristics are supported, promoted and sustained that the urban regions are protected from simply becoming further examples of *everywhere communities*. Re-establishing a sense of place also recreates a relationship with the physical surroundings and the ties to the locality which have historically been the foundation for community life.

SLOW FOOD

At its root, Slow Food was the inspiration for Cittaslow. Carlo Petrini started Slow Food in 1989, in Bra, Italy. Cittaslow continues to be closely related to Slow Food in philosophy and practice. Slow Food was introduced as a way of protecting local produce, traditional cuisine and the related cultural connection. It originally began due to the increasing prevalence of fast food restaurants in Italian cities and towns. These fast food restaurants were seen as representing something foreign to the Italian way of life. Not only were the brands usually foreign, but the culture inherent to fast food was also foreign. Carlo Petrini foresaw a future of Italy being overwhelmed by fast food and fast food culture. He founded Slow Food as a direct response.

Slow Food has become synonymous with local food of high quality, connection to local land, traditional recipes representing sense of place, and with the relationships built around sharing a meal. All of these themes can easily be lost in the world of fast food. Whereas the word 'slow' in Slow Food does not necessarily represent a rate of speed, it does indicate a slower pace of life regarding the production of food, the creation of meals and the enjoyment of taste. Slow Food represents taking the time to savour this intrinsic part of our life. When we become too busy to appreciate food, and all that it represents, fast food becomes the result. When we value food and take the time to understand it and all it represents, we are starting to encapsulate the meaning of Slow Food.

In writing about Slow Food, Carl Honoré notes that it "stands for everything

that McDonald's does not: fresh, local, seasonal produce; recipes handed down through generations; sustainable farming; artisanal production; leisurely dining with family and friends. Slow Food also preaches 'eco-gastronomy' – the notion that eating well can, and should, go hand in hand with protecting the environment. At its heart, though, the movement is about pleasure” (Honorè, 2004).

Slow Food, as an organisation, has increased rapidly, and is a popular voice for ecological and environmental sustainability. The people involved with Slow Food want to preserve the integrity of the food instead of simply accepting fast food, or genetically modified food, as a viable alternative to what is naturally produced and inherent to a local region.

Slow Food has become a worldwide phenomenon. It is growing even faster in an age of increasing competition, which includes the increasing profit of the fast food industry and its consistently increasing global reach. Fast food culture promotes the “values of homogeneity and haste,”² altering what is inherently vernacular of many European traditions. Whereas Slow Food started in Italy and maintains a strong presence there, it has also become an international organization – proving that people in many countries desire the connection to local, healthy food which represents their own vernacular traditions.

Slow Food has become a philosophical precedent for Cittaslow. Slow Food has linked food, local farms and traditional cuisine with cultural sustainability. Slow Food works to promote local foods in the local region and also around the world. The connection between Slow Food and Cittaslow has produced even more urban venues for the purpose of promoting local produce and educating people about the importance of traditional, regional foods.

The precedent of Slow Food became an inspirational foundation for Cittaslow as the basic philosophies of Slow Food were then applied to urban environments. Cittaslow, being administered from a municipal basis, has a different organisational structure from Slow Food. However, the two remain

2 *Italian city promotes slow life, but is too busy to enjoy it* [on-line article, accessed March 12, 2003].

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linked through shared goals and presence in many of the same locations. Both Slow Food and Cittaslow have previously been described as *movements*. In fact, Cittaslow is more accurately defined as an organization of small cities which have voluntarily signed on to be members. Each city agrees to the shared philosophy, charter, policies and goals held by Cittaslow. This is a unique organisation of cities, moving forward with a common interest that spans borders, cultures and city identities. Whereas Slow Food can be seen as operating as a grassroots movement, Cittaslow is more formally organized and operates on a city policy level.

THE SLOW PHILOSOPHY

The confusion over labelling Cittaslow as a movement may actually stem from a growing, international movement based on the slow philosophy. This slow movement has some common themes shared with Cittaslow, however they should not be confused and have many differences. Many people who have joined this slow movement would see themselves as advocating for a slower pace of life. The scope is generally individual, and the word 'slow' is usually used in its literal definition regarding time. In this world of increased technology and multi-tasking, many people are seeking a slower pace of life. They want to slow down and enjoy life. They see a slower pace of life as being equal to a higher quality of life. Many people who would adhere to a slow movement also have strong interests in environmental quality and physical well-being, stemming from active and alternative transportation, for example. Walking in a city, as opposed to driving, results in increased personal health and environmental health. It also assists a person in seeing their city from a different point-of-view, encourages more social interaction, promotes the sense of a slower pace of life, and therefore increases an individual's quality of life. By adhering to the slow movement, a person can live in a fast-paced and hectic city environment, but still lead a slower and higher quality of life on an individual level.

The philosophy of 'slow' is emerging as an influential grassroots movement. Around the world, there are many separate occurrences of a slow philosophy but these are not necessarily linked to Slow Food or to Cittaslow. This

grassroots philosophy movement, however, is indicative of a general dissatisfaction with the speed of life and the loss of quality with an increase of quantity and haste. Slow Food has become the most visible manifestation of the emerging slow philosophy.

When Carl Honoré (2004) published his book, *In Praise of Slow*, he quickly became the point of contact for many separate movements and grassroots organizations, all of which were connected with slow. Honoré's book outlines this growing slow philosophy, which generally rebels against an irrationally fast-paced life that does not take the time for what is important as it manifests itself in such areas as food and relationships. Many of these movements and organisations are maintained separately, as they were originally formed. The fact that this slow philosophy is appearing throughout the world, in nearly all sectors of society, adds strength and purpose to each individual manifestation of the philosophy. It is an emerging philosophy which strikes a chord amongst people in many cultures and is gaining a wide following. Many of these movements and ideas are now represented or written about on the *Slow Planet* website.

There are some articles focusing on the slow philosophy which do refer to Cittaslow. However, they may focus on the word 'slow' without a deeper understanding of how the term 'slow' is used within the context of Cittaslow. It is often assumed that a member city of Cittaslow is simply a slow-growth city or a city in which life is always relaxing and easy-going.

Unfortunately, the interpretation of Cittaslow as countering the fast pace of life is not necessarily accurate. The slow in Cittaslow concerns the idea of taking the time for quality. However, residents of Cittaslow do not necessarily have a slower pace of life. Many writers only interpret the word slow based upon the common English use of the word, remaining ignorant of the original intention, which is based upon the Italian cultural interpretation inherent to Slow Food and goes far beyond a simple notion of speed. It represents a higher quality of life and taking the time to achieve and appreciate this quality.

CITTASLOW PHILOSOPHY

The Cittaslow philosophy takes the slow philosophy of Slow Food and applies this to urban policy frameworks. Cittaslow philosophy is built around the desire to provide a high quality of life for Cittaslow residents. This can involve going back to each city's roots, and looking at what made them great cities in the first place. A city does not necessarily need to change, or adopt the latest urban planning fad, in order to become a great city. Many cities have done this only to lose the qualities and characteristics which originally made them great cities. Cittaslow aims to sustain the city's own unique characteristics while also improving the city so that it is a better environment in which its residents are able to enjoy living. The philosophy states that "there is no doubt that it will be more human, environmentally correct and sensible for the present and future generations; the project will respect small realities in a more and more global connected world" (The Slow Cities Philosophy website).

CITTASLOW POLICIES AND GOALS

The six main components of Cittaslow policy are: (1) Environmental Policies, (2) Infrastructure Policies, (3) Technologies and Facilities for Urban Quality, (4) Safeguarding Autochthonous Production, (5) Awareness and (6) Hospitality. It is these areas which are the foundation and visible face of Cittaslow. These areas go beyond a basic slow philosophy to practical ways of improving the quality of life for residents, through environmental and place-sustaining means. The following is a brief explanation of each of these components.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

The first area defining Cittaslow is that of Environmental Policies. Ensuring that a city has a high quality of life is directly dependent on its environmental quality and sustainability. Cittaslow Environmental Policies include the

following:

- protection of the quality of the air, water and soil.
- promotion and dissemination of policies for the recycling of urban refuse and other wastes – including composting, and the existence of a purification plant for sewage.
- an energy-saving plan.
- ban the use of genetically modified crops in agriculture.
- regulation of advertisements and traffic signs.
- control of electromagnetic pollution, noise pollution and light pollution.
- adoption of environmental management systems (such as EMAS and ECOLABEL, ISO 9001, ISO14000, SA 8000 and Agenda 21 projects).

INFRASTRUCTURE POLICIES

This second area includes elements of urban and landscape design. There is a strong focus towards a priority of alternative forms of transportation and pedestrian-orientated urban design, and sustaining a sense of place which is represented in built form. Cittaslow Infrastructure Policies include the following:

- plans for the improvement and reclamation of historical centers and/or works of cultural or historical value.
- plans for safe mobility and traffic.
- focus on plans for alternative transportation – including bicycle, pedestrian and mass transit.
- accessibility of public places and those of public interest.
- promotion of programs to facilitate family life and social connections, recreation and assistance for those in need.
- quality green areas and pedestrian accessibility.
- plans for the distribution of locally produced merchandise and the creation of ‘commercial centres for natural products.’
- maintaining commercial areas which are welcoming, hospitable and friendly.
- revitalisation of the city – including upgrading and redevelopment of deteriorating areas.

- provision of information to citizens, including Cittaslow information.

TECHNOLOGIES AND FACILITIES FOR URBAN QUALITY

Cittaslow's policies focusing on Technologies and Facilities for Urban Quality offer a higher quality of life to Cittaslow citizens and afford new ways to attain holistic achievements on all policies. These policies include the following:

- development and promotion of bio-architecture.
- equipping the city with cables for optical fibre and wireless systems.
- adoption of systems for monitoring electromagnetic fields.
- providing refuse containers in keeping with the environment and the landscape and removal according to established timetables.
- planting environmentally suitable and autochthonous plants in public and private places.
- provision of services for the citizens, including dissemination of municipal services via internet and plans for creating and educating the citizens in the use of an internet-based civic network.
- plan for controlling noise in specifically noisy areas.
- plan concerning colours.
- promotion of telework.

SAFEGUARDING AUTOCHTHONOUS PRODUCTION

The area of Safeguarding Autochthonous Production focuses on sustaining local, traditional industries and elements which represent the local identity. This area of policy relates directly to local context and sense of place. This policy area includes:

- development of organic farming.
- certification of the quality of artisan produced products, objects and artistic crafts.
- programs for the safeguarding of artisan craft products, traditional methods of work and professions in danger of extinction.

- use of organic and local products and the preservation of local traditions in restaurants, protected structures and school cafeterias.
- programs for taste and nutrition education in schools in collaboration with Slow Food.
- favouring the activities of wine and gastronomic Slow Food Presidia for species and preparations risking extinction.
- census of the typical products of the local area and support of their commercialisation (updating of markets for local products and creation of appropriate spaces).
- census of trees in the city and enhancing the value of large or 'historical' trees.
- promoting and preserving local cultural events.
- promoting "urban" and school gardens for autochthonous cultures grown with traditional methods.

AWARENESS

The Cittaslow focus on Awareness includes public education and promotion of the organization. This policy area includes the following:

- provide the citizens with information on the aims and procedures of what Cittaslow is, preceded by information of the intentions of the Administration to become a Cittaslow member city.
- programs to involve the social fabric in acquiring the "slow" philosophy and the application of Cittaslow projects and in particular: educational gardens and parks, book facilities, adhesion to the project of the germ plasm bank.
- programs for the dissemination of Cittaslow and Slow Food activities.

HOSPITALITY

This section focuses on helping both residents and tourists to feel at home in a Cittaslow city; it directly relates to easy liveability. The Hospitality-related policies include:

- training courses for tourist information and quality hospitality.

- using international signs in the tourist signs of the historical centres with guided tourist itineraries.
- reception policies and plans to facilitate the approach of the visitors to the city and access to information and services (parking, extension/elasticity of opening hours of public offices, etc.) with particular regards to scheduled events.
- preparation of “slow” itineraries of the city (brochures, websites, home pages, etc.).
- making the tourist operators and storekeepers aware of the need for a transparency of prices and the exhibition of rates outside the business establishments.

FURTHER DESCRIPTION OF CITTASLOW

In 2004, at the time of the original research, there were approximately 60 Italian Cittaslow. Currently, there are more than double that number worldwide, in nearly 20 countries. This growth is evidence of the Cittaslow network’s success. Some of the more recent member cities had started by simply observing another city in its process of becoming a member city, as well as observing the positive effect which the Cittaslow membership had on the urban area and quality of life. Based on the positive effect of one city, the next city then has more incentive to also join Cittaslow. It has become a type of ripple effect throughout Italy, and now throughout the world.

The purpose of Cittaslow revolves around making the city a better place to live for its inhabitants. Tourism has never been a primary motivation. Although Cittaslow was inspired by Slow Food, and local foods are a central part of the Cittaslow philosophy, food is only one part of the whole equation. Primarily, the Cittaslow network exists because of a desire to provide a high quality, liveable place for the inhabitants. Through measures directed towards pollution, traffic, and noise, among others, the cities have become standards for a higher quality of life.

Paolo Saturnini recalled a story which happened many years before the birth of this organization, but which remained an inspiration to him regarding the

future of small cities, and possible solutions of place-sustaining. Saturnini viewed the countryside which surrounded Greve-in-Chianti, Italy, as vital to the overall identity of this small city. Several decades ago, there was a time of a very low level of employment in the area. Many people were migrating to larger cities to find work. In order to attract people back to the area, large industries were brought in. However, years later, this decision was regretted because of its negative impact on the local landscape, traditional land uses and agricultural production. Saturnini felt that the Chianti countryside was too valuable to let this happen again. The Chianti region had lost a part of its sense of place, something which was devastating to the local identity, and not always easy to re-establish. In Saturnini's words, it was a "wake-up call" for the area and for himself (Radstrom, 2005)³.

The Cittaslow policies, therefore, support traditional land uses, such as the vineyards which Chianti is famous for, and help to sustain the traditional architecture, such as the stone villas which are typical of the Tuscan countryside. Local producers can also be supported economically since their goods can be promoted through Cittaslow and Slow Food networks. The hope is that residents and tourists alike will learn of the Slow Food and Cittaslow brand of quality, and will therefore purchase these specific local goods. With community economic development measures such as these, Cittaslow is working to ensure that the local landscape will be protected and that local producers will be economically sustained so that large industries – foreign to the local context – will no longer be brought in out of necessity.

POPULATION OF SLOW CITIES

The Cittaslow movement was established particularly for smaller cities and towns. The policy states that all member cities must be under 50,000 people. Although similar goals and policies may work successfully in a larger city, it is more effective to implement such policies on a smaller scale. Also, smaller urban areas naturally have a relationship with their immediate context and therefore this provides a greater opportunity for vernacular place-sustaining

3 Susan Radstrom's interview with Paolo Saturnini in Greve-in-Chianti, Italy.

measures in regards to environment and local foods.

URBAN DESIGN

The most visible signs of Cittaslow appear to be in urban design and the presence of the Slow Food influence. The cities generally had an obvious pedestrian focus, and a small scale of built environment. Not all Cittaslow had signage proclaiming their membership with Cittaslow. However, the nature of the urban design is intended to have a focus toward pedestrian design, alternative transportation and environmentally sustainable measures.

One of the primary visible components of a Cittaslow member city is the pedestrian priority of design. This has prompted some to believe that Cittaslow is linked to New Urbanism. Both have a focus on urban design, priority of pedestrian areas and a walkable scale. They are clearly based on a philosophy which is central to each one's growth and marketing strategies. However, pedestrian design is one of the few similarities between them. Cittaslow is far more holistic and encompasses many sectors, such as environmental sustainability, relationship with local industry, conservation of local traditional culture, and programs to enrich social aspects of urban life for all residents. Cittaslow seeks to sustain an identity which already exists in a sense of place, working primarily with older cities and place-sustaining related to existing identity. While New Urbanism has been known for new development, Cittaslow is a planning solution for cities and towns looking for a holistic framework to sustain their identity.

THE EXAMPLE OF ORVIETO, ITALY

The city of Orvieto, Italy has had to address issues of traffic, noise and pollution. Because of its geographic situation, many people were driving up to Orvieto from the valley below. The city is built on a plateau and has grown to the very edges of this plateau. Any further growth has taken place in the valley far below. Due to the difference in elevation, people who lived in the valley but worked in Orvieto were dependent on cars. Also, most tourists

took cars up to the city. Therefore, there were parking problems and severe traffic congestion in Orvieto. The sheer number of cars within the narrow streets was also a pollution issue. Another issue stems from the fact that Orvieto was built on soft rock. During Etruscan times, numerous catacombs were dug through this soft rock and most have survived to this day. Some of these catacombs are still in use as private residential cellars, while a few have even been converted to underground restaurants. The heavy amount of traffic in Orvieto was causing concern over the long-term stability of the soft rock and the sustainability of the catacombs, which are part of Orvieto's identity. City officials were aware that the traffic issue must be addressed.

Two interventions occurred to solve this problem. The first was a funicular built to carry people from the valley up to the city. Secondly, and more recently, a large two level car park was constructed at the base of the plateau. This structure was designed in such a way that a person can still look out over the valley from Orvieto and see the natural view which is a part of the sense of place. The only noticeable feature of this structure, from the top of the plateau, is the park-like area on the roof. From the car park, people can easily access Orvieto's city centre. Elevators, escalators and stairways (all indoors) transport people directly from the parking area to within 100 metres of the city centre.

While these interventions were actually completed prior to the birth of Cittaslow, they represent the types of decisions and policies which are encouraged in Cittaslow in order to help sustain the specific assets of the local place. Orvieto continues to work towards further supporting its local sense of place. For example, Orvieto's schools now have the requirement of serving fresh, local food in the cafeterias. The students are receiving an education in local foods, as well as receiving a healthy diet. Another benefit is that local producers are supported through this initiative.

NETWORK OF CITIES

Cittaslow is a network based on the local strengths of its member cities. Cooperation and accountability are basic principles of the organisation. The

notion of the member cities being individual places which are part of a greater network is important. One of Paolo Saturnini's primary concerns was that each individual city, when not a member of a larger support network such as Cittaslow, would be competing at larger scales – national, and even global – and therefore be forced to alter its identity in order to remain competitive with other cities. This strategy, although common, only forces homogeneity on each city seeking economic stability.

The existence of the Cittaslow network has moved the member cities to a new level of relationships. It is true that each Cittaslow member city is based in its own locality, and therefore rooted in its geographical setting, maintaining strong relationships with its context. However, in an attempt to strengthen this local base, the cities have formed strong relationships with other cities which also want to sustain their own identity. Therefore, this network is linked by philosophy and an interest in local place. The Cittaslow commitment to each local identity has created a new layer of urban relationships that is not necessarily connected to geographic proximity. Although every member city is part of Cittaslow, and therefore may immediately convey a certain image, the identity of the overall movement is that each city's identity is unique and based in its local sense of place.

Massimo Borri⁴ noted that the overall Cittaslow network is vitally important to each member city's success. The network provides support to the city leaders and they are able to work together to develop ideas and solutions for each local place. A large degree of accountability is provided through this network. Therefore, even though some cities may already appear further along the path toward realizing the Cittaslow philosophy, the network of cities is working together to ensure the ongoing success of the organization as a whole, and therefore the improved quality of life and sustained sense of place inherent to each individual city.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONNECTION

The philosophical 'slow' layer of connection between the cities is separate

4 Massimo Borri, assistant to the Mayor of Orvieto (Stefano Mocio), was interviewed as part of the original research in 2004.

from the local and global layers. Ironically, even though so much of this movement is based on the local sense of place, and the relationship to local food, the true connection is on a philosophical level, as opposed to a geographic one.

Through its relationship with Slow Food, Cittaslow has focused on strengthening the local food-related industries which represent the local identity. It is also an international network with an increasing number of relationships at the global level. Yet the 'slow' philosophy really exists on its own level. Cittaslow is concerned with local identity but it is also a network which exists on a separate plane from simply a geographically-defined relationship.

Cittaslow uses local identity and sense of place in order to build on the strengths of each city. However, Cittaslow also uses globalization to its own advantage. This has been referred to as virtuous globalization. For example, members of the Slow Food movement use global connections in order to market locally produced goods. In a sense, this virtuous globalization is a type of localisation, but marketed on a global scale. If it were not for globalisation, Chianti wine, for example, may not be so well known. Many unique local products have been in even higher demand because of international marketing. However, the key to virtuous globalization is to have the highest priority on the local place. If the trend towards globalization is used for promoting and sustaining the local identity, and each local place truly benefits from this connection, then it actually will be in a city's best interest to retain its local identity.

LOCALISATION

As global identities and connections around the world are strengthened, local connections and the identity of place are at risk of being weakened. Although globalisation has provided numerous benefits, it has also undoubtedly altered many local identities. Seeking a balance between global and local is increasingly difficult. Globalisation has become a strong, emerging factor in its own right. However, smaller communities seeking the prestige of global attention and the wealth of attracting larger industries are sometimes at risk of

losing the very aspects which define them.

The key aspects which make up a place's unique identity are at risk due to globalisation. The existing identities of small places are changing and evolving to the point where a new global identity exists, which has been referred to as "everybody's but *nobody's* home" (Nozick, 1992). City planners ought to be concerned that the factors which make one place different from another place, and create an overall diversity of urban fabrics, are disappearing. "The more we are subsumed by the Global Village, the more we lose touch with our own identities, our histories, our community roots, and our local ways and traditions."⁵

In many situations, global markets have replaced local markets. Formerly self-sufficient communities have therefore lost an integral part of their identity. However, identity is complex. It is made up of more than just community economics. Culture, traditions, the built environment, and the natural environment must all be valued aspects of an identity. Indeed, when any one of these aspects changes, the overall identity also changes. Therefore, a view of identity must be holistic and yet still based in the local place. The identity of a location is based on its context, as well as its sense of place. Indeed, it is this place-based identity which causes it to stand out from its context.

Traditionally, towns or regions were known for a certain product or type of food. Each region, on a small scale, has historically been defined by its own local industry. Therefore, the sense of identity is deeply ingrained and easily recognizable in local handicrafts and foodstuffs.

Identity is dependent on place, in terms of culture, traditions, and the layers of complex interrelationships which have come together to define the physical and non-physical attributes of a location.

The factor of identity is an important one for urban areas. Cities feel the need to proclaim their own identity in order to be unique, or to fit in with another group of cities, or to simply attract more tourists. In an effort to have a new and appealing identity, many cities are now attempting to re-invent themselves. This is evident in cities which have had stereotypes of being

5 Ibid. 4.

stale, of not attracting new business, or new people. Many of these cities are eager to adopt the latest urban design fad.

It is not uncommon for urban areas to attempt a “re-definition” of their identity. When a place perceives that their identity has grown stale, it may attempt to have a new look, a new identity, and therefore gain a new reputation. However, when identity is involved, one must look at context. A reputation may become tarnished in the eyes of potential visitors. Planners and local community leaders must work toward the positive future of the community. In most circumstances, this should not involve the complete re-creation of a place. It may simply involve a new marketing strategy based on a place’s current, and true, identity.

PLACE-SUSTAINING

Place-making has been researched and reported on in many studies. However, the idea of a holistic approach to place-sustaining is overlooked as a planning basis for a network of small communities and regions. Cittaslow has provided a framework to further understand the role of place, and the possibilities of place-sustaining, within the framework of identity. The Cittaslow member cities have aimed to preserve their sense of place in order to sustain their vernacular identity.

The significance of analyzing Cittaslow as a city planning case study lies in the understanding that cities around the world are facing the same threat of globalisation and inevitably becoming *everywhere communities*. Since cities, towns and regional communities are facing this same issue, it is important to understand the implications of various solutions undertaken by specific places. Because the original problem faced by Cittaslow is also faced by countless other communities, it is plausible that the Cittaslow solution may be successfully adapted to numerous other urban areas.

Place-making stretches further to involve the aspect of cultural sustainability, in a holistic sense, so that the environment, traditions and local industry are sustained. It is difficult to strictly define “place,” since it has potential to involve any and all areas of a certain location, people, or history.

Place-making should be holistic and all-encompassing. The authors Schneekloth and Shibley argue that, “each act of placemaking embodies a vision of who we are and offers a hope of what we want to be as individuals and as groups who share a place in the world. Because of this world-making power, placemaking, if poorly conceived or imposed, can result in the catastrophic or incremental destruction of people and places” (Schneekloth and Shibley, 1995).

Sense of place has the ability to create a desirable destination for cities, while neglect has the power to destroy any sense of place which once existed. Despite the broad, all-encompassing potential, place-making must be grounded at the grassroots level. Each place is unique and therefore each solution to place-making must be locally based. This is relevant both in terms of the physical environment and, more importantly, the local people who create the social sense of place. Planning literature has focused on place-making as an integral part of the overall discipline. However, the gap in the literature exists where topics of *place-sustaining*, as a holistic regional policy, are concerned. Planning knowledge must begin to provide theoretical frameworks for sustaining the sense of place. This involves setting guidelines which holistically address all aspects of place so that local places are able to continue in the culture and traditions which have historically been the foundation of their identity.

Local cultures need to focus on sustaining the places which have defined them, instead of simply making new places based on this same sense of cultural traditions. The true risk lies in the fact that while a focus on place-making continues, existing places may be lost because of the lack of a cohesive approach to place-sustaining. When a place that already exists is endangered, this place does not need to be “made” but rather, it needs to be sustained.

The sustainability of a sense of place does not entail the same drama of actually making a place. Sustainability involves roles of maintenance, cooperation and long-term commitment. However, the focus of a regional plan needs to be the sustainability of place. When the important places are taken for granted, they are lost. The danger is that by not focusing on place-sustaining, planners will be doomed to a continual cycle of place-making

which will always aim, but may not succeed, to re-create the original sense of place. The maintenance of a sense of place may not be obvious and might only be noticed in its absence, when places are left unsustainable. The acts of maintenance and management are essential to the long-term vision of place. The notion of place-sustaining is based on the potential of a certain place to have a level of significance which will justify its preservation. However, Cittaslow goes beyond the strict notion of preservation, and toward the flexible dynamic of conservation. Some buildings, for example, may be preserved as an act of place-sustaining. The sense of place is a dynamic quality, however, that may shift over time depending on various factors. Therefore, conservation may be central to place-sustaining, in order to maintain the spirit of place and the overall identity, while growing and changing as an urban or rural environment. The actions of sustaining and conserving go hand in hand. The balance between preservation and conservation may be dependent on each local context. It is important that the act of preservation does not impede further positive emergence or evolution of place.

Conservation would go further to allowing for a fluid relationship between place, culture and context.

To sustain a sense of place, policy must be applied which may be rigorous enough to sustain what is already significant, and flexible enough to change as the significance of the place may also adapt in time. Place-sustaining, therefore, would not simply save the past for the sake of saving the past. The concept of place-sustaining is far more holistic, encompassing the ideas of preservation in forms that represent culture and quality of life. Place-sustaining is concerned with looking forward to the planning of the future.

Place-sustaining is intrinsically linked to identity. In an era of globalisation and urban homogenisation, identity of place can represent the unique attributes of a distinct culture. In many ways, localised identity becomes the foundation of a place's significance. When a sense of place represents the identity of the people and landscape, its significance can be invaluable. As a global trend, it has become easy and even convenient to ignore identity as a significant factor of a place. As Michael Hough writes, "One modern city

tends to be very similar to another. The influences that at one time gave uniqueness to place – the response of built form to climate, local building materials, and craftsmanship, for instance – are today becoming obscured as technology makes materials universally available and as climate is controlled by artificially modifying the interior environment of the building. The question of regional character has become a question of choice and, therefore, of design rather than of necessity” (Hough, 1990).

Sustainability of place involves finding richness in any local landscape and focusing on this richness as the place’s asset. This richness may be represented in such aspects as culture, environment, industry, history or a combination of several different aspects. While planners are focusing on the large metropolises of the world, the true local identity of these small towns and regions may be lost forever. Building upon the local and regional assets, and establishing these as the foundation provides an avenue towards holistic sustainability without losing what is most important in an identity.

Therefore, understanding that urban areas around the world are changing, and that the need for place-sustaining is critical, the planning discipline must begin to apply this knowledge in a practical method. It is in regard to this challenge that Cittaslow performs an essential role. Whereas planning literature does not yet provide an adequate knowledge base required for a holistic planning framework which focuses on sustaining place, Cittaslow actively embodies these theories. These cities provide a unique case to be studied and reported on, so that the broader planning community will gain applicable knowledge concerning the area of place-sustaining as a holistic framework.

Traditionally, Italy has been known for its regionally-specific and place-based identities. From a historical perspective, the city-states which made up modern-day Italy were the basis of regional identity as well as administration. Although the governmental framework has changed so that the former city-states now make up a larger nation, the smaller-scaled regional identities remain. This may be, in part, one reason that a framework such as Cittaslow has developed in Italy. The strong local identities are conducive to an organisation which thrives on this local sense of place.

Although Cittaslow has existed for a number of years, it is still relatively unknown. Whereas Cittaslow is becoming a prime ‘best practice’ candidate, the cities are focusing on simply being good places for their residents to live. Cittaslow is about sustaining what is good about a certain place and helping cities to be even better places to live, being healthier and offering an even higher quality of life. Many urban environments seem fixated on trying to lure people to a few tourist sites. These tourists will spend money in the city, but then they will leave. Tourism can certainly be a viable industry – but should it be the primary focus? A city is not only a tourist attraction. It is a place to live. A place to call home.

The truth is that Cittaslow does have a focus on hospitality, awareness and education. The accessibility of Cittaslow to tourists is part of the organisation’s overall goals. It is important to remember that a Cittaslow member city’s main priority is to its residents. However, it is clear that a liveable and accessible city is one which welcomes guests and offers a high quality of life to everyone, including those who live there or are simply passing through.

The Cittaslow have chosen to not give up their sense of place for the sake of perceived tourist demand, imported industry, or the latest urban fad. If Cittaslow were strongly advertising their cities, there could potentially be many more people visiting each city. There could also be many more people moving to the cities. While this is not necessarily a negative, it is also not the focus of Cittaslow. A fast-growth city which seeks brand recognition based on tourist amenities – or even membership in a popular group – has not truly realized the Cittaslow philosophy.

When this original research was completed, some residents of Cittaslow were still unaware that they lived in a slow city. Some tourists didn’t see anything too special or different about some of the Cittaslow member cities. They were expecting Rome or Florence – but on a smaller scale. Instead, they may have seen a typical, hardworking Italian town. It may not have been geared towards tourism, but it was likely a town which was working to retain much of its traditional industry and connections to the local landscape. People who live in, or visit, a slow city should know that they are in a real city, not a city

that is only trying to put on a face for tourists. This represents the appeal of Cittaslow. Residents and visitors alike are able to see, taste and touch the sense of place.

CONCLUSION

The Cittaslow organisation has a strong focus on traditions, context and history. Yet positive change is still welcome to cities and their surrounding areas. When cities do implement changes, however, they should do so with the desire to improve the quality of life for their residents, improving the environmental sustainability of the area, and always remembering the underlying importance of sense of place. An area's local sense of place does, at times, evolve. However, it should not become so detached from local context so that it is indistinguishable from the many other increasing homogenous places.

Cittaslow are choosing to maintain the aspects which define them, which make them great places to live. The cities don't necessarily need to make huge changes. Some places clearly still have room for improvement. Other places are well on their way by already having that high quality of life. Through the strength of the Cittaslow network, more and more small cities are able to sustain their local sense of place in an ever-increasing global society.

The Cittaslow are only just beginning. The steps of their future will determine their success. However, already they are a noteworthy case to be studied and more fully understood as examples of cities applying philosophy in order to sustain their own local sense of place and vernacular identity. It is through these place-sustaining measures that local places may indeed be able to thrive in the face of increased global homogenous urban centres.

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