Using Social Diversity in our Advantage

1ST Parisa Rafipour
1ST Politecnico di Milano, Italy
1ST Parisa.rafipour@gmail.com

2nd Kamdin Zare
2nd Politecnico di Milano, Italy
2nd kamdin.zare@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In a world with an increasing urge for societies to globalize due to competitions in economic and educational fields, lots of considerations has to be made for immigrants and locals to cohabit in public spaces. Nowadays the concept of people with different cultures and backgrounds living together is very common. This social mix and diversity can be seen as an opportunity to lead the society in the direction of creativity and potential for economic growth or as a conflict between the habitants. This paper is investigating social diversity and urban conflict through the case study of the Chinatown of Paolo Sarpi in Milan which witnessed a conflict in 2007. “Few of the spaces of Milan are so strongly loaded with cultural and political baggage as "Chinatown" of Paolo Sarpi.”. Interestingly this neighborhood has only 10% Chinese resident or people with Chinese origins, while approximately 50% of commercial activities are done by Chinese. Consequently some interviews have been done with the Chinese and Italian habitants to unveil the possible reasons of the conflict. Finally, the idea of the necessity of creating a public space for the immigrants has been elaborated on to propose a possible solution for cohabitation of people.

Keyword: Social Mix, Social Diversity, Chinatown, Integration
INTRODUCTION

The idea of social mix in the modern societies is a concept that is the concern for all the societies around the world today. People immigrating to other countries for the educational or economic purpose are the main reasons of this phenomenon. On the other hand businesses want to obtain the attention of a wide variety of nations and expand their consumers worldwide. Therefore, cohabitation and social cohesion are essential aspects that need lots of considerations since social mix and diversity can be seen as an opportunity to lead the society in the direction of creativity and potential for economic growth. And if the society does not cope with this phenomenon properly it can cause conflict between the habitants and reduction of improvement of the society. In this paper the concepts of social cohesion, social conflict and creative city has been discussed. In the first part of this article the relationship between the social mix and social conflict has been addressed and the probable underlying reasons of the lack of social cohesion have been mentioned. In the second part after discussing the theory of creative city in the literature, the connection between social cohesion and creative city has been investigated. At the end we have based our case study of Chinatown in Milan on the analysis and linkage of these theories since Milan’s Chinatown has the potential and history for both conflict and creativity.

1. Ethnic diversity and social cohesion:

Enormous amount of studies have been done to demonstrate the connection between ethnic diversity and social cohesion but the results varied much at the end. So why is it that ethnic diversity can cause lack of social cohesion?

There have been five explanations for this phenomenon in the literature which two of them is related to cognitive biases which is always about categorical differences of “us” versus “them” which sociologist and political scientist see these cognitive biases as being rooted in feelings of group threat, whereas economists and social psychologists rather refer to in-group favoritism. Two other explanations take actual cultural differences into account. Furthermore Deutsch’s has highlighted the influence of shared language spoken by people regarding this issue. The causes can be categorized as:

1.1. In-group favoritism

Many including Alesina et al. (1999) and Alesina and La Ferrara (2002) has addressed the social identity theory (Brown, 2000) and discussed that due to the fact that people who are similar, favor each other and they have less of trust for the
people which are considered outsider and avoid cooperation with the group (Olzak, 1992).^6

1.2. Group threat

The other theory is related to competition or group threat theories (Blalock, 1967)^7. It has been claimed by many authors that if the group threat theory is right it is not ethnic diversity that causes lack of trust or cooperation rather the conflict is more of a polarized situation which means that two equal rivals face each other (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005)^8. This is also true in our case study of Milan’s Chinatown where the wholesale activity of Chinese in the area has created problems for the retail business of Italian shops in the area which it will be discussed more, in later sections. Although Alesina et al. (2003) ^9 don’t think of the polarization as a main cause in their cross-national analysis, Dincer (2011) ^10 believes in it with her analysis of US federal state and declares that “Conflict is less likely in societies in which fractionalization is minimal or maximal” (Dincer, 2011, p. 291).

1.3. Ethno-cultural diversity

The other factor which can be an influence and has not been mentioned in the above discussed indices is the actual cultural diversity in language, norms, meanings and values. Regarding the concept of the ethnic diversity and social cohesion we have a two-fold conceptualization of culture first as a moral system and the second as a habitual routine of doing things. ^1

1.4. Asymmetric distribution of preferences

With culture as a moral system which involves the acceptable goals and preferences (Parsons, 1972) ^11, ethnic diversity can be a variety of point of view on how a shared community or even a space should look like and what kind of public goods is better to be supplied (Kimenyi, 2006)^12. Also Baldwin and Huber (2010)^13 has claimed that “Group-based economic differences can lead to different group needs with respect to public goods, feelings of alienation or discrimination by some groups, different attitudes toward redistribution across groups, and different “class” identities by different groups” ([p. 644]Baldwin and Huber, 2010). ^1 They proposed that in the cross-national studies the negative influence of the ethnic diversity is mainly because of economic inequality along ethnic lines.
1.5. Coordination problems

In contrary to seeing culture as a moral system, Swidler (1986) claims to think of it as a habitual routines of action which can help us to make connections and interact in the society. A shared language or a common set of practices are essential for communication about the presence of shared preferences and consequently coordinating the production of public goods (Deutsch, 1966). For this reason, ethnic diversity can be seen as a cultural diversity by some scholars who can lead to problems regarding exchange of meaning and therefore the coordination of problems (Desmet et al., 2009).

1.6. Organization of Public space

Public space plays a huge role in the way habitants interact with each other. This element is what can be discussed more in depth with our case study in Chinatown of Milan where the change of the function of street from car to pedestrian only has caused some obstacles for the users of the space. Every function fulfills specific needs that if the place cannot respond to the need of its users, it can cause lots of problems and conflict for the residence.

As it has been discussed social mix can either cause conflict or it can be an opportunity for creativity through the diversity it creates. This has led us to also consider and investigate about the theory of creative city.

2. Creative city

Creative city is a concept developed by Charles Landry in the late 1980s, motivating a culture of creativity in urban planning and propose some solutions to urban conflicts through this concept. It has become a global movement that inspires a new planning paradigm for cities and it is related to the concept of learning cities. The popularity of the work of authors like Florida (2002) has emphasized this theory. Creative city approach has been often criticized but creativity is still a main keyword considered for city planning and urban marketing policies worldwide. The core of this idea is that the driving force of economy today has switched from technological and organizational aspect to human, in the capitalist development. “The creative class” (such as artists, scientists, analysts, business managers, opinion makers: (Florida, 2003, p. 8) is the “dominant class” in today’s society. Furthermore, this kind of professionals are not motivated by material rewards(salaries), but want to live in “quality”, “creative”,

“tolerant” and “exciting” places. Therefore, based on this, the key question for urban planning is on how we can create a “cool city image” by creative environment. (Peck, 2005) so that to attract these kinds of professionals.

2.1. The six requisite conditions of a creative city are:

- First, it is a kind of city in which the urban economic system is not run only by artist and scientist expressing their creativity but also workers and craftspeople can take part in creative production.
- Second, it is a city consists of universities, colleges, and research institutes that support scientific and artistic creativity in addition to facilities like theaters and libraries. It also backs up the non-profit sectors in order to protect the rights of medium-small craftsperson’s businesses. This kind of environment also supports creative individuals and activities as well as the entrepreneurs to start their business easily.
- Third, it is a city which is well-balanced in development of industrial dynamism and cultural life which means the production and consumption are proportional. Furthermore it is a kind of city where the “quality of life” of the citizens has improved due to industrial growth and provision of social services. Therefore it has developed new industries in various fields such as environment, medical service, welfare and art.
- Fourth, it is a city where production and consumption are both developed and the urban environment is preserved. It also has a beautiful urban space to increase the creativity of its citizens.
- Fifth, it is a city with the participation of the citizens in city administration that ensures the creativity of its citizens.
- Sixth, it is a city which has its own financial administration that keeps the creative administration with personnel who surpass in policy formation.

2.2. So how can social cohesion be connected to creative city?

With the global crisis that we are facing nowadays we need to make sure that all groups of people are involved in the society and overcome discrimination as the new knowledge and information-based society is formed in this globalized society. Creative city theory must suggest creative solutions for the problem of social exclusion since this can affect many aspects in the society such as poverty and lack of sufficient educational opportunities for its citizens because following inadequate
education and income these populations can feel abandoned socially. “This, in turn, has created a situation where individuals can easily come to feel powerless, and therefore may find it difficult to function as active members of society in their communities.” On the other hand, a proper policy of social inclusion should permit the entire members to take part in an equal community in different aspects of economic, cultural and social activities. Such policy should have a basic standard of living and welfare. Also it should have lots of opportunity to ensure the basic human rights of the residence. In other words, a policy of social inclusion should bring an end to the factors that lead to social discrimination in the first place, and promote the social participation and interaction of individuals.(Masayuki Sasaki (2010) 20

In our case study, with the analyses we had over the literature we have proposed some questions to be investigated in Milan’s Chinatown.

- What kind of social diversity do we have in Paolo Sarpi?
- What kind of conflict do we have? Is it only ethnic?
- Can the diversity existed in this area be a resource in terms of creativity?

3. Case Study of via Paolo Sarpi (Chinatown):

The best area for case study in terms of discussing the social diversity and social cohesion and its relation to both conflict and creative opportunity is Via Paolo Sarpi, Chinatown in Milan.

Paolo Sarpi Street is located in the eighth district of the Milan city known to be the center of the city's Chinese community. This important commercial avenue is near the Sempione Park and the Garibaldi station. Today Several Italian-Chinese companies are headquartered in the street. It is also near to the historical town of the Milan. We go back through the history in order to be able to have the better analysis of the place.
3.1. History:

The Chinese presence began in 1920 with a massive immigration from the Zhejiang region in an area that, for the particular urban fabric, favored the concentration of laboratories in the courtyards with adjacent dwellings. Already during the fascism the neighborhood was called "headquarters of the Chinese." The first activities were located mainly around via Canonica which was related to the production of silk. During the Second World War, the processing was converted for providing the military belts. Since the late 90s there was a boom in real estate combined with that of mobile phones and hi-tech in general. Since 2000 there has been a radical transformation of the neighborhood, with the massive entry of new businesses run by Chinese, mainly focused on wholesale, which have gradually been established in place of the Italian retailers, by the payment of very high severance pay. On 25th of November 2000, there was a first protest rally in the area by the Committee ViviSarpi. Contrary to what is often reported, it was not absolutely in opposition to the Chinese presence, but against the degradation caused by the increase in wholesale, resulting in eradication of the local trade. The protests of the committee, repeated over time. They obtained that the City stabilizes in regulation time in which it is allowed loading and unloading of goods in warehouses and shops, in the face of practice to regulate the activities managed by the community of the district, whether Italian or Chinese. On 12 April 2007 a brief revolt took place in the streets of the Chinese community, with police charges and the intervention of the Chinese consul in Milan. At the end of 2008, the municipality has made Via Paolo Sarpi area ZTL (Limited Traffic Zone), while in 2011 the same street closed to traffic, making it a long paved promenade that connects Porta Volta with Corso Sempione. According to this action, it has been forbidden for all the vehicles to pass the street, the exception was considered for residents, motorcycles and taxis. The CCTV cameras have been located to monitor the traffic of that area. The hope of the administration was that these interventions would promote the movement of wholesale activities elsewhere and revitalize retail and orient the neighborhood towards effective multi-ethnicity, emphasizing at the same time the history and traditions. The peculiarity of the district is the prevalence of Italian residents for 95%, compared with more than 500 Chinese wholesale businesses that serve the vendors from all over Italy, thus forming a particular area that, according to some, it would even be wrong to define "Chinatown". This development has also caused organizational problems: the urban structure of the neighborhood is in fact incompatible with the logistical needs of the wholesalers that beset the area from trucks and vans that made it less and less viable for residents. So by investigating
the history of this area, it was understood that the social diversity existed in the area is
the diversity of ethnic as well as wholesale versus retail activity.

3.2. Addressing Urban Conflicts

One of the most significant problems which this area is dealing with is people’s
cohabitation due to the social mix which is spread in the neighborhood. But this is not
the only reason of conflict existed in this area. Another conflict existed is regarding
the existence of wholesale activity done by Chinese and the retail activity which is
done mainly by Italians. At the first step the wholesale of the Chinese goods has
become more difficult than before, this deterioration in Chinese trade has happened
because the Italian government is not satisfied about the increase of the Chinese
productions through the Italian’s life. Jlanyi (a member of AssoCina\(^1\)) also confirms
that by claiming “These series of fines and prohibitions came from one day to the next
and all the Chinese businessmen found themselves facing difficulties that didn’t use to
be there at the start.” In addition, after the change of the function of the street to
pedestrian and a controlled traffic flow, a banner was displayed by Chinese traders on
Sarpi Street in the 2008 Christmas season reading, “No buses, no taxis, no cars and no
trading. Why don’t you just build a wall around us?” This process of urban
transformation was politically interpreted as an attempt to eradicate Chinese
wholesalers from the district. As Riccardo De Corato, Deputy Mayor of Milan and
security councilor has stated “We have taken these steps because we are convinced
and we hope the Chinese will start to emigrate”. \(^{22}\) These comments also show a little
bit of the racism existed in this area as it can be another reason of the conflict.

On the other hand there are not any specific public spaces in the other parts of the
neighborhood; all the important public events could only happen in Paolo Sarpi Street
because all the surroundings are formed by the high density of the roads and
connections. Furthermore this street is mainly occupied by the commercial activities.
Moreover, the first image of the Chinatown in mind is the space with the large
population of Chinese in different spaces such as residential and commercial. While in
our case study 95% of the habitants are Italians which makes this case study a little
peculiar and leaves us with the question if this area is even a Chinatown or not.

This problem has also formed due to the diversity in the levels of the buildings, the
first floor are almost formed by Chinese worker and commercial activities in the sides
of the street, on the other point Italians live in the upper levels during the structure of
the street. This separation has made some trouble in the uniqueness of the whole street.

\(^1\) Associna is a nonprofit Association, formed by and to support second generation Chinese in Italy.
who clarified that: “The separation between the ground floor and the highest floors is what creates the real problem of cohabitation. The first one is almost completely Chinese in terms of use and attendance and the second one is almost completely Italian.” 23

Also through the interviews that were done, we figured that the problem this area is facing, is neither the existence of Chinese people in the area nor Italian residence. The problem was mainly the needs of the users of the space which has not been met through the street and public space organization. This kind of inappropriate functioning has caused problems for the wholesale activities of Chinese shopkeepers and also has caused lots of decline of sale activity for the entire shops both Italian and Chinese there and they all have blamed the change of the function of the street from car space to pedestrian path. This clarifies the importance of the public space and how it should be designed in order to respond to the needs of the users. Another point that needs to be mentioned is that the area does not even serve its own “function label” of “pedestrian” since the qualities of pedestrian path are 1. Existence of silence 2.Green parts 3.No cars, even taxis 4. Huge numbers of benches and seats and this area doesn’t have any of these features.

3.3. Creativity in Milan’s Chinatown

The idea of the creative city should be improved by considering keeping the authenticity of the Chinatown. What makes this case study a little complicated is the fact that this Chinatown’s authenticity is defined by the wholesale activity done by Chinese people; the question is that, “can this aspect extend in the street in an organized, creative way?” Unfortunately, it seems this wholesale part is not organized in a way to develop the characteristic of the creative area. Nowadays, the idea of creativity in Chinatown is being concerned by both the people and also government. The question is that how can we emphasize on this aspect by using the creative
methods? Using an indirect method could be useful to attract people to this area. This can also be beneficial to the trend of economic sale decline in the area. Via Paolo Sarpi (Milan's Chinatown) has also lots of potential for expression of creativity in order to attract people and produce wealth.

The artistic activities that has been held there through the recent years, has received a positive feedback in the sense of making the shopkeepers of the area satisfied and reduce the conflict existed in there. These kinds of activities were a success by attracting more customers to this space. Some of these recent artistic activities which happened there include the event of Jazz in Sarpi which was organized by Sarpidoc with the Union of Commerce of Milan in collaboration with some merchants, businesses, artisans in the district. Through the interviews that has been done it was understood that both the Chinese and the Italians were happy with the idea of having artistic activities held in the area to be able to attract more customers for the business sake and this can be a motive for Chinese and Italian community to cooperate together better. So artistic activity can be a possible solution to unite these two ethnic communities together but the only consideration that has to be made is to pay attention to be able to keep the authenticity of Chinatown and avoid creation of fake Chinatown in the area.

Furthermore, the idea of creating a Chinese community can be proposed in order to develop and direct it in a way to be able to establish a better community by the use of cultural activity.

In addition, another solution to consider is to create a good opportunity to go back to the idea of crafts to vitalize this neighborhood as it was before. The combination of craftsman and wholesale activity not only can be a good integration of different kind of sales’ but also can emphasize the worth of the crafts and give some kind of identity (which is getting lost) to the Paolo Sarpi Street.

The other factor which can be another potential to consider and is playing a significant role to characterize the district is a kind of plan for future especially for next generations. The creation of some facilities to maintain the quality of Chinese culture can be one way to do so.

So what has been proposed for further considerations are:

- What is the role and importance of the craftsmen activity in the sense of creativity? Can Chinese and Italian craftsmen cohabit together?
- Could they cooperate together to have more creativity?
- What does the authenticity of Chinatown in Milan mean and what is the borderline?
Conclusion

In this paper we have analyzed social mix and elaborated more on the concept of social conflict and creative city which can be a byproduct of integration of people with different ethnicity together. Some questions have been proposed through the analytical parts of the theories and the answers to these questions have appeared in the case study of Chinatown Milan. In our case study of Milan’s Chinatown we understood that the only diversity existed is not ethnic. The diversity of different kinds of business activities was another point mentioned. Later, the questions of probable reasons of conflict in this area were answered which included racism, wholesale activity versus retail business as well as the change of the use of public space from a car path to a pedestrian path. By studying the Chinatown deeply we highlighted that although there are many indices for the lack of social cohesion in a diverse community, the organization of space and design of the public spaces can also play a huge role in the way people interact. In our case it was the usage of pedestrian path which created lots of confrontation for the Chinese wholesalers and Italian residence. The possible solutions of these conflict has been addressed through the creativity since for instance, the existence of artistic activity-as it has been done in recent years- can be the common language spoken by both groups in order to create a common ground and mutual goal for the both ethnic community. These two mentioned elements can intensify the conflict between the habitants or can assist them to coexist in a conflict-free environment. But we can suggest that more research can be done in the areas of craftsman activity and coexistence of the two ethnics’ crafts together.

References:


