

# Local Institutions Matter

Building a neighborhood for all generations

Ehab Ebeid, Lan Luo, Graham Murphy, Tishya Rao & Edna Samron

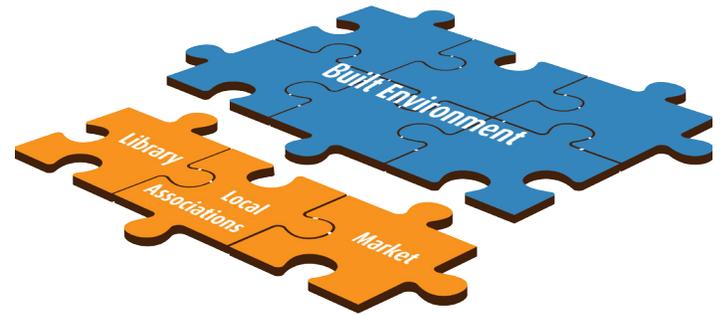
May 2017



## Introduction

In cities around the world, children and the elderly often live in neighborhoods ill-equipped to address their needs. Low-income neighborhoods in particular seldom have the physical and social infrastructure that enables residents of all ages to lead fulfilling lives. **Planning typically centers on the role of urban design**, transportation planning and housing policy in creating child- and age-friendly cities. However, we **emphasize the role of institutions and organizations in making places more livable for children and elders.**

Tufello, a public housing neighborhood in north-east Rome, Italy provides an example of the diverse roles local actors can play in creating a more livable city. These formal organizations are firmly rooted in their neighborhood, aware of the needs of their constituents and of how market forces often marginalize them, and are conscious of their respective and collective role in making places livable for people of all ages. In areas witnessing rapid urban transformations, institutions play a role in reducing the effects of these transformations, especially for the community's most vulnerable. Planners would be wise to center local institutions in their work, and to see how they complement other efforts relating to infrastructure, design and policy to inform a more complete multi-generational planning approach.



## Urban 'defragmentation'

The Associazione Defrag was founded in 2008, in the basement of the local school, in a Tufello then plagued by drug problems. The initial focus on family counselling and psychological counseling for teens made way to hosting concerts, cultural events, theater, artistic workshops and a recording studio. One of its goals—referred to in its name, short for 'defragmentation'—is to **counter spatial class segregation among the different neighborhoods surrounding Tufello.** Defrag achieves this by **hosting events in which people of different class backgrounds, from socioeconomically disparate neighborhoods, and of different age groups can interact.** Defrag helps Tufello become a desired destination for residents, especially young people, from surrounding neighborhoods by lifting up Tufello's assets.

The 2017 Cornell Rome Workshop is focused on planning for child and age friendly cities. Funding provided by Engaged Cornell. Partners include:



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*Tufello's Biblioteca Ennio Flaiano strives for multigenerational programming.* Photo by Graham Murphy.

## A multigenerational library

Cultural institutions, such as public libraries, are especially important in low-income neighborhoods. Tufello's public library, Biblioteca Ennio Flaiano, **acts as a resource to attract the participation of residents across generational and class boundaries.** The library is located on the public school campus, but it is a meeting point for the entire community. It offers a newspaper reading space which has helped attract more elderly residents, it partners with schools for their career orientations and student workshops, and it offers a reading program for parents and young children.

## A politically-engaged, truly public gym

Tufello's Palestra Popolare Valerio Verbano is not a conventional gym. Formed in 2008 when local residents occupied an abandoned building and converted it into a gym, it not only hosts sports activities but also functions as an important center for antifascist organizing in the area. The *palestra popolare* promotes sport as a universal right for all social classes, without economic barriers,

and as such its goal is to provide a **space for those "seeking health and well-being ... without being crushed by the logic of the market"**.

## A local cooperative market

Tufello's covered market, centrally located between the neighborhood's public housing complexes, is important to the lives of the neighborhood's elderly. Amid fierce competition from supermarkets around a nearby transit node and Italy's largest mall, located within a ten-minute driving distance, the market survives by catering to its main clientele: the elderly. To compete, **vendors open on Sundays, deliver goods often without a (formal) fee, and ensure the market continues to function as an important social space and place of companionship.** The market also partners with the public sector to host a service point for the municipal government as well as a civil registry. Both the cooperative running the market and the stall vendors are acutely aware of the importance of the market to the lives of their clientele, and their role in maintaining this institution.



*Tufello's covered market also functions as an important social space, especially for the elderly residents.* Photo by Ehab Ebeid.

Local organizations enjoy cooperative support from government. Defrag uses spaces in a neighborhood school. The gym is in the old boiler room of one of the housing complexes. The market, though cooperatively run, is in a building provided by the city. **Planners can learn from the synergies created by local institutions to meet multigenerational community needs, and partner with them to identify appropriate interventions.**