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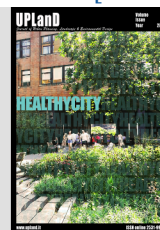
Temporary inhabitants in a new post-COVID 19 city

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Highlights

- The city is a complex human product, which can be considered as a system of levels of relationships and not as a unitary organism. The causes of city changes are manifold in the conditions of new territories and cities: the tremendous global phenomenon of migrations, health crises, climate change. A new population that lives "*between*" the cities is born, they are the city users.

- Traumatically, however, all Countries were faced with the health crisis caused by the COVID 19 pandemic. What will cities be like after COVID 19?

Abstract

The contemporary world, highly connected and globalized, is interwoven with various opportunities and weaknesses. Cities are crossed by new massive migratory flows due to various reasons, which have their roots in the economic, social, geopolitical dimensions, and then again due to the effects of climate change and health emergencies. Moreover, just in a traumatic way, we found ourselves facing a health crisis caused by the

COVID 19 pandemic, which exploded between the end of 2019, first in China and then spread globally in the early months of 2020, which still unfolds its unpredictable effects. What role do cities play in these events? How have they changed and how will they change again? It will happen this time, as in the past, that urban planning actions and choices will make a decisive contribution to resolving the health crisis, providing facilities such as parks, broad avenues, sewer networks? So giving a new meaning to the statement "the shape [of the city] follows the infection" (Bernardi, magazine Cielo Terra 2020).

The lockdown phase has experienced a delay in the use of smart working, which was already a distinctive feature of the lifestyles of the *knowledge workers*, leading to the coincidence between workspace and living space, which already new housing models such as co-working had tried mainly out.

The paper, starting from research developed in the Dicar of the Polytechnic of Bari, on new residential models for temporary inhabitants (*city users, students, creatives, buyers* and *tourists*), intends to question how the post-COVID phase can lead to a reinterpretation of these [new] models, but already not entirely adequate to interpret this phase of further crisis.

1. INTRODUCTION, THE EXTENDED CITY

The city is a complex human product. However, it cannot be considered a single, compact organism; it must be regarded, instead, as an articulated system of levels of material and immaterial relationship. The cultural position that supports an "unspeakably" of the contemporary city due to profound social and territorial changes, that continuously modify its shape and extension, making obsolete the most common definitions of the urban phenomenon that appeared to be valid only a few decades ago, is increasingly widespread.

This condition of contemporaneity leads to reconsider the interpretation of the urban space which according to the "neoclassical" model read the city in clear, distinct areas, from the urban centre proceeding by concentric halos to the more peripheral regions. Today, however, it is necessary to resort to different and more appropriate interpretative categories, such as those of "agglomeration" and "conurbation" to identify the condition of the *post metropolis* (Balducci 2011, Soja 2000). Through these categories, we describe an extended urban territory, without defined borders, of an infinite city (Bonomi 2004), a space-mirror of the consequences of the tumultuous phenomena of a transformation of the last decades.

These new urban regions constitute the environment in which divergent phenomena tend to develop. At the same time, they are attractive places for multiple job opportunities, training, social relationships and leisure; and areas in which the dynamics of the market economy progressively develop the spread of conditions of profound social inequality. The "lack of porosity" (Secchi 2016) among collective places has caused spatial segregations. Urban planning could intervene in these social fragmentations which are found inside the urban fabric, putting together the lacerations, and transforming them into opportunities by thinking of new forms of sharing living between different social groups (Secchi 2016). Two main models can help us understand these discrepancies: a typically North American model, which focuses on the separation of different domains. For example, self-segregating residential areas concerning the context in which they are inserted, called gated communities; and a typically European model, which tends to be more inclusive, Secchi (2016) describes how in the western city the different social classes meet and relate in threshold spaces, in which very different cultures, languages and habits coexist. For instance, in cities like Milan, London, Paris, a subway ride from the city centre to the most peripheral edges allows people to cross settlements inhabited by hundreds of different ethnic groups, each with its own culture, language, food traditions, a real mosaic of cultures typical of open cities, where anyone can find a place, even in the exclusive condition of city users for reasons of work, study, vacation, care.

Cities thus become the result of a fabric of human relationships, data, connections, which determine encounters, opportunities, improving the quality of life in general.

2. PROCESSING AGENTS. MIGRATION, CLIMATE CHANGE, DIGITAL, KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

The causes of changes in the conditions of territories and cities, already mentioned above, are manifold. In the first place, the tremendous global phenomenon of migrations, which - as always - trace and modify the geographies of states and peoples. Nevertheless, in the past, the place of birth determined the prospects for life quite precisely. Today we are witnessing, in a new, broad and urgent way, the manifestation of the need, or possibility, that each individual has to move, to migrate, in search of a different future, often unknowingly triggering unprecedented forms in the relationship between places and residents. Cities are, therefore, crossed by new migratory flows due to various reasons; geopolitical difficulties, disastrous effects of climate change or for health emergencies. These factors push masses of people to mobility, impacting the organization of contemporary urban space with their presence, replicating in an exasperated manner the dynamics that have always acted on urban fabrics.

However, today, cities are also above all digital and reticular organisms (Balducci 2011). New devices and infinite extension of the network, incessantly transform places, systems of production, distribution, exchange, work, training. And then again they affect all aspects of life and social relations. Instantaneousness and temporariness are technological modalities that have become as many natural, cultural and social modalities, often breaking down the barriers between what for centuries have been separate times and dimensions, work, free time, sociality, public life, private life.

"We are in an era in which the transformations of productive configurations and lifestyles, of the global economic organization and communication systems, of languages and international relationships are such as to postulate the advent of a "New" professional and human figure of a "lineage" different from the previous ones, capable of permeating the entire society and at the same time be its symbol, its logo " (Bologna 2005).

Thus, a new metropolitan population is born, that one who lives "among" cities, the city users, those who live in metropolises but do not reside there: *tourists, students, knowledge workers, freelances, visitors* (Martinotti 1993), and also *metropolitan businessmen*, sportsmen following teams, consumers who flock to the historical centres for some holidays or during the annual shopping sprees. A large sample of subjects in continuous evolution (Urry, 1995). Knowledge workers, for example, embody the philosophy of smart working, answering the new intense demands of the precarious labour market. Thus a new class of proletarians emerges, creating and procuring works, clients and collaborations (Korbi 2019). The condition in which they live leads to a disproportionate increase in working performance—the overlap of the workplace with that of living results in a new form of exploitation. The time of these workers is marked by virtual working hours, as they do not possess any rights or guarantees.

All this could have heralded a technological "playback" (Martinotti 2017) of cities, and a spread of smart-houses for smart-workers. Moreover, in reality, our homes have turned into platforms that manage various devices, capable of hosting home working. However, cities continue to expand. In the contemporary city, new figures are appearing overwhelmingly, expressing much more complex needs, paradoxically capable of adapting to residing in places that are always different and in some cases unprecedented compared to traditional ones, wireless, breaking down physical boundaries, seems to have put an end to the dictatorship of the place. Thanks to technology and telecommunications, distances are no longer an obstacle.

The temporary inhabitants, who are the object of the attention of the authors of these notes, therefore exert considerable pressure on the transport systems, on the information networks, causing a Brownian, confused, unordered motion within the metropolitan areas. In recent decades, social sciences have been interested in this phenomenon of the temporary resident, analyzing it in an interdisciplinary key. In particular, in the field of design disciplines, such as architecture and urban planning, these profound social changes linked to the concept of temporary resident, lead to a radical rethinking of traditional residential models, trying to answer the questions and expectations of these new social figures, who ask for habitable and working spaces that respond to precise performances.

The first transformations that took place in the forms of living were conditioned by the proximity to the factory and marked by its times; the most significant signs came with the advent of new technological devices. These devices can be divided into two categories, the "Fordist" type devices, that is machines for the home, designed to replace human work, and the tools that are intertwined with leisure time, such as televisions, cameras, later pc and the internet (Martinotti 2017). All this has meant that public life, free time, could be progressively moved within our home.

Among the factors of more remarkable social change are the needs related to the world of work and training imposed by the transformations of work processes and, in particular, those linked to the advent of the knowledge Economy (Bologna 2015), and by new cultural and leisure needs in Western societies. In this context, the meaning and function of living cannot certainly remain unchanged. Among the many possible views on these ongoing processes let us try to observe and interpret those related to the transformations of the new housing models linked to the figure of the temporary inhabitants.

In fact, in the contemporary city, there are overwhelmingly new figures who express complex needs, which can adapt to reside in always different places and for some cases unique to traditional ones, the dematerialization of processes and the extension of the network with the corollary of wireless as an ever faster and more robust infrastructure, it breaks down many physical boundaries. It seems to have put an end to the local dictatorship. Thanks to technology and telecommunications, distances no longer seem to be an obstacle.

3. THE TRAUMA. HEALTH AND SOCIAL CRISIS

Lack of borders, shortened distances, have re-

cently been, and for a short time, favourable living conditions and which seemed to be destined for infinite expansion. However, at some point, in a traumatic way, all over the world, all the states found themselves having to face the health crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exploded in late 2019, first in China and then spread like wildfire, globally in early 2020. The virus originated in the wet markets of Wuhan in China and spread rapidly across global connectivity networks. The virus coming from the animal and rural world, for a series of reasons, has jumped towards the human. In a market, in an incredibly crowded and, in some ways, also degraded urban context, it found the habitat particularly favourable to its propagation. Wuhan, a metropolis of 6 million inhabitants, maintains exchanges and relationships on a global level and therefore the epicentre of a series of links that have become vectors of the virus. The pandemic has paralyzed a large part of the entire planet. Cities have had to stop in a kind of simultaneous heart attack (*lockdown*).

The people most affected by the emergency were the elderly, a weak social link and, especially in Western and European societies, even more numerous, as in our country. However, this data is partial and must not distort the perception of what is happening. Once again, the most affected are the weaker sections of society, particularly in the margins of the world. "Revolt of temporary workers in a disadvantaged neighbourhood of Tlahuac (...) where there is no water to wash their hands (...) Dead and reported in Nairobi during the distribution of flour and cooking oil" (B. H. Levy, La Repubblica, 9 May 2020).

"What will the city be like after Covid-19," asks Caldana. He explains how in Brazil, especially in the city of Sao Paulo, the virus has hit the poorest, those who live in the most peripheral and impoverished areas of the city, in the favelas. The most severe problem turned out to be the lack of urban and sanitary infrastructures in these places, often even inaccessible. The pandemic has therefore affected everyone, but some in a decidedly more violent way. As Latour (2020) highlights events, ceremonies, extended uses of the territory involve multitudes; sometimes rites inherited from the past, other times fashions and current needs, such as the frequentation of meeting places, beaches, stadiums, shopping centres, theatres, tourist attractions. In this way, according to him, COVID 19 can be read as a side effect of anthropogenic impacts on the environment and biodiversity. There-

fore, the high social concentration, industrial nutrition, intercontinental travel, deforestation and the disordered proximity to animal species have accelerated the transfer of viruses between species.

4.   TRAUMA, WORK, SPACE, AND TEMPORARY NEW INHABITANTS

The era of COVID-19 has determined an epochal leap. It forced to accelerate the development of those new forms of work, mentioned above, redesigning in a short time, an entire production system based on practices, rules and methods, consolidated for centuries, often centred around the places where they live, which have had to fulfil new functions and for which they were not usually equipped. In these tumultuous months of the Covid-19 crisis, we have had to become familiar, often confusing them, with terms such as working, home working, agile work, distance learning.

For example, for home working, we mean a simple migration of normal working activities from the office to one's home, therefore, is a simple physical movement that would be better called working from home or remote working. While by smart working, we mean a flexible way of working which does not specify the place in which the work must be carried out, a way in which technologies make it more functional, smarter in fact, in which mobility is allowed, and one is not bound to a fixed place. Of course, this implies the possibility that intelligent working can also be carried out in one's home, coinciding only physically with the home working.

In the picture illustrated, the figure of knowledge workers, who are most affected by changes in working processes as they are always looking for new skills, risks being bound by this condition imposed by the virus. Not having office hours, or constraints to pre-established places, this category is forced to adapt and keep up with the different requirements of life. If before it was considered an individual job, where the figure of the knowledge worker went in search of spaces to work together, places in which to exchange experiences and learn from each other, today it risks being confined to one's own home. Features not to be underestimated is how the house can, in these cases, turn into a sort of labyrinth of the mind.

5.   WHAT IDEA OF SPACE NOW?

COVID-19 has determined a kind of estrangement from everyday life, a detachment from habits that up until recently constituted the backbone of the (productive and social) life system of our system. Regular routines and gestures have lost their obviousness to become a problem. The virus has destabilized our daily theatre, making our life lose its simplicity and transforming it into a new, continuous, uncertain experiment. We are now troubled no longer by the question of what, but how. Not what will start again, but how it will start again. The basis on which to graft the new items determined by the post-COVID condition can be found in the research already developed in the Dicar of the Polytechnic of Bari on new residential models for temporary inhabitants (city users, students, creatives, buyers and tourists). Precisely to that, we intend to link the questions that emerged in this period, accepting the challenge for this research and rethinking those flexible models of living according to the new changed conditions.

So what will cities be like after COVID? What role did the cities play in this event? How will they have to change? As has already happened in the past, when urban actions and choices have contributed significantly to resolving health crises, with the creation of facilities such as parks, broad avenues, sewer networks, will it happen again this time that the urban planning choices, the shape of the city will change to participate in the resolution of the emergency? So giving a sense to the statement "the shape [of the city] follows infection" (Bernardi, magazine Cielo Terra 2020)? We are faced with an opportunity to rethink environments, places and methods of interaction. The primary cell of coexistence seems to have returned to be the small family nucleus and the house as an absolute space (work, coexistence, survival). Will work be freer and more flexible from now on?

Certainly, workplaces will perhaps need to be imagined no longer as offices, but as co-working spaces, strongly connected to private areas, to manage a flexible mix of distance (online) and presence (off-line). Furthermore, perhaps, as Carlo Ratti says, "solved the problem of the infection, we will return to share. Maybe better than before "(Ratti, 2020, rivista open (magazine open)). As already mentioned, the lockdown phase experienced an expansion of the use of smart working. It was already a distinctive feature of the lifestyles of knowledge workers, leading to the coincidence be-

tween working space and living space, which new housing models such as co-working had already widely experimented. The confinement seems to undermine the models of co-living and co-housing which, as forms of shared living capable of overcoming the concept of the family, have been the subject of a new generation of architectural and urban design in the last decade all over the world.

6.   DESIGN TRENDS

The virus has imposed a social distance of one meter on us. How to fill this space? How to reorganize public space? There have been several architects who have already reflected on this question, on how architecture, society, the city should and can respond to this crisis. Moreover, how to prevent others. Among the most discussed and criticized opinions, among the most discussed and criticized opinions, Boeri imagines the who imagines the recomposition of the urban dimension through smart working. Cities, for Boeri, need to be rethought through some fundamental characteristics, such as environmental sustainability, light mobility, thinking of a sort of unit of measurement in the neighbourhoods. In this case, they should be rethought through some fundamental features, such as environmental sustainability and slow mobility, as design devices to give back measure to neighbourhoods. In other words, the promotion of old districts in the area, beyond romantic visions, but rather as self-sufficient places to live, imagining them as small neighbourhoods. On the same imaginary Koolhas have to look at the countryside as an opportunity, who even before the health crisis considered problematic the fact that more than 50% of the world's population lived in cities. It is not easy to anticipate today whether people will return to living spontaneously in villages or in the countryside, given that the latest trends see a steady increase in the urban population. The authors of these notes, however, are convinced that we need to work on cities, which are the place where we can also face the challenge of the pandemic, looking first and foremost at the form and nature of collective spaces, encouraging people to live in public space again.

Richard Sennet, on the other hand, proposes "a city of 15 minutes", a city where residents can reach services within 15 minutes, essential goods, work, shopping, leisure. A model which the city of Paris

is already working on. The purpose is to minimize the use of public transport, to create fewer crowds, thus returning to the size of the neighbourhood and its prerogatives.

Are they concrete visions? Will people want to return to live in the villages or the countryside, despite the latest trends seeing a steady increase in the urban population? Will it be necessary to imagine a rebalancing of forces between the central urban areas and the smaller towns? Questions of no little importance.

7.   CONCLUSIONS

The previous notes have, in summary, reconstructed a picture of the changes that the global pandemic has had on cities and contemporary living, from which it follows that social inequalities already present in the market economy have been reinforced. But in less developed countries, precarious living conditions and poor social infrastructure, from schools to hospitals, from safe public transport systems to adequate energy distribution systems, have been decisive in the spread of the virus. What is needed, therefore, is a large-scale global programme that will interpret the post-Covid-19 emergency as a new and strengthened international commitment to combat poverty and the impacts of climate change in a cooperative manner with the decisive resumption of the commitments of *Cop 21*, in Europe with the large *NextGenerationEU* programme (a temporary instrument designed to stimulate recovery, it will be the largest package of stimulus measures ever financed by the EU), which also seems to intersect with some of the qualifying points of Van der Layen's *Green Deal*, while for cities a new endowment of basic social infrastructure in health, education and training, mobility, energy and ICT networks and housing. Cities will have to make use of networks and services made efficient by the application of ICT, capable of strengthening remote working while protecting the population by revolutionising

'city times' after decades of programmes and good intentions on this important last aspect of community living. However, in a knowledge-based society that increasingly relies on science and technology, ICT is a powerful tool for monitoring emergencies and risks in the territory.

While for the urban space organisation, which is the central theme for the authors of these notes, the great season of Urban Regeneration (Mastropietro 2013, Angi 2016) must find new energy from the profound rethinking of neighbourhoods with the creation of new centralities and safe gathering spaces. An increase in the use of alternative public transport such as bicycles and electric scooters, and the promotion of sustainable light mobility could ensure on the one hand the progressive abandonment of private road transport and on the other hand the alleviation of user congestion on public transport networks. The international reflections on the *New Models of Living*; co-housing, co-living and co-working could be adapted to the new conditions of associated life, avoiding the repetition of the conditions of loneliness during lockdown of the weakest groups such as the elderly and children, encouraging with design dispositions of greater flexibility of the dwellings and at the same time the careful design of *Threshold Spaces* between the public and private sphere to promote the meeting but with new attention to unhealthy conditions of overcrowding, thus prefiguring communities of people who decide to share the spaces of collective life with the relative costs. Ultimately, the observation of these new design trends in the field of architecture and urban regeneration seems to have already challenged traditional housing and working models.

Therefore, by looking at these new models of shared living in a reflective and non-deterministic way, identifying their limits and potential, we can try to take on the challenges of post-Covid-19, looking at new concepts of housing types as possible answers to the emerging needs of contemporary living, completely abandoning crystallised visions of living from the point of view of contemporary design.

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