

Review

The new urban issue: A journey into the Italian city and its sensitive areas

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The transformation of the urban horizon shows a heterotropical fragmentation which is a transverse phenomenon. Some parts of the city are showing new combinations of functions and populations: these are simply juxtaposed, with neither contacts nor communications. While some places/populations are losing functions, suffering economic changes and weakening the sociability skills, some others are more widely connected elsewhere. Marginalisation processes may be found all over the city. Old suburbs and new critical areas can be mentioned as 'sensitive areas', far beyond their geographical position on the city map. The studies carried out indicate that sensitive areas in the city are very interesting points of view in order to observe and understand the social changes and trends of contemporary development processes.

Key words: Global connections, urban life, dislocation, heterotropical, crisis of sociability, spirals of abandonment.

INTRODUCTION

This work focuses on the results of a research project conducted on a sample of ten suburban areas of the ten largest Italian cities. The study, which was carried out in two years' time, was developed by the Faculty of Sociology of the Università Cattolica of Milan, and combined different sociological tools¹ (the volume presenting the main research findings on a national scale was prepared by Magatti (2007). It was based on re-peated ethnographic visits in each suburb, and a variety of techniques were employed contemporaneously².

The increasing problematic implications of the current

changes stemming from the phenomenon of globalisation are represented in the investigation underpinnings. In particular, the focus was centred on the accelerating pace of area fragmentation, and, accordingly, the formation of more heterogeneous spaces and populations that could undermine social bonds and lead to a diversified marginalisation.

These conditions specifically characterise the suburb, but, also concern the city as a whole since similar situations may be sometimes observed in more central areas.

The centrality of the city in today's world

At present, cities are affected by profound changes connected with the reorganisation of the space and time coordinates, a relevant phenomenon which has been brought about by globalisation.

They have therefore become an interesting point of observation of these processes; it is as if the "liquid society", as described by the Polish sociologist Bauman (2000)³, finds points of condensation in these urban contexts.

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¹ The volume presenting the main research findings on a national scale was prepared by Magatti M (2007) in *The abandoned city. Where the Italian suburbs are and how they change*, Bologna: Il Mulino (tr.).

² In particular, they consisted in prolonged and repeated observations of the neighbourhoods; at least twenty-five in-depth interviews per area with the inhabitants and representatives of bodies, social groups, and local institutions; extended informal dialogues in unusual locations; interviews in the field for collecting descriptions of the neighbourhoods and comprehending the bond between space and experience; statistical and documentary materials collection; at least five focus groups per area within contexts of everyday life (e.g. schools, sport centres, churches, cafés, recreational centres, associations) with participants who were socially very diverse.

³ In particular, see Bauman Z (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Sassen (1991; 1994)⁴ suggests that contemporary respatialisation processes need to be analysed bearing in mind two main aspects: on the one hand, the fact that they tend to be problematic for the national state and its ability to govern; on the other, the fact that they offer cities/regions a chance to assume a leading role. In her studies, Sassen highlights that the reorganisation of contemporary social life processes has given rise to significant consequences on the social level, together with a potential divarication of individual and collective destinies. Castells (2005)⁵ also works on the same line of interpretation, by pointing out the conflict-accord between the logic of flows and places as an element that determines the tension flowing out onto cities and their populations.

The functions that enable a country to enter the dynamics of globalisation tend to be concentrated within the urban areas, which therefore become strategic sites for contemporary development. Furthermore, there are different populations that mix within the same city territory, leading to a number of immigration issues. However, it is also important to stress that the contemporary city cannot be evaluated merely taking into account its residents. It is, in fact, the result of a plurality of groups and populations who have highly different interests, cultures and identities which are often in contradiction. Accordingly, cities today are returning to the centre stage as the hub through which all the major changes of the contemporary era pass through⁶. In particular, it is interesting to cite M (2007)'s concepts of world-city and world-cities. On the one hand, it is the same world that, becoming urbanised, resembles more and more a city due to the extension of "urban filaments" covering the entire planet which has become a "virtual meta-city". On the other hand, it is the city itself that becomes a world collecting all the problems, contradictions and global inequalities, and containing huge differences and discontinuous worlds in a single space.

The city as a "new social issue"

The city is returning to the centre of attention also thanks to many indicators according to which urbanisation

phenomena are highly intensive. Not long ago, the UNO announced that for the first time in the history, urban population on the planetary scale has exceeded 50% of the total. This figure increases significantly in the industrialised countries being equal to 80%. As a result, life seems to progressively become more "urban". The focus is therefore on the city as "a new social issue": faced with the tensions arising between transit flows (of capital, goods, information, technology, persons, etc.) and places, functions and populations, interests and cultures, the city is perhaps the most useful analytical object through which the contemporary change can be observed. Against this scenario, suburbs represent "urban folds", that is, parts of a general picture that, due to their concentration, are particularly emblematic in respect to those processes elsewhere more "diluted".

It is also possible to consider the city as a "new factory", in the sense that urban environments are the very places where the macro-systemic logic produced by the contemporary change and the day-to-day lives of individuals and groups meets, clashes (as happened in the factories from the time of the industrial revolution to the Second World War in Europe). It is mainly here that tension arises, can be observed and controlled. A significant increase in the social and economic heterogeneity of the population can be clearly seen with naked eyes, and it often gives rise to an increase in inequality. The dream-nightmare of an urban homologation that the modern European city had aspired so far seems out of date. In its place, in the fragmented city where isolation and solitude are spreading, a sense of insecurity and fear, on which Bauman (2005) has recently written, seems to prevail. In the meantime, on a global scale, a more general process of re-hierarchisation is gaining ground, with entire areas moving backward, and others forward. This inevitably ends up with rousing forms of protest since the marginalisation of some areas nurtures attempts to recover territorial or ethnical identity, mostly for purely defensive or exploitation purposes.

To sum up, it is possible to stress that it is the very lack of mediation between flow and logic, functions and individuals that gives rise to negative effects such as insecurity, tension in relationships, identity reactions, breakdown in solidarity and impoverishment.

The Italian case and its specific characteristics: general comments

Until today, these phenomena of change have been relatively modest in Europe and in Italy with respect to the above-mentioned trends. Despite the existing problems, there is nothing in the cities that can be compared to the large megacities of the southern parts of the world. This can be explained by the historical dynamics that have left a series of resources in the urban centres and in their cultures, and consequently, slowed

⁴ Sassen S (1991). *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press; Sassen S (1994). *Cities in the global economy*. Bologna: Il Mulino (tr.).

⁵ Castells M (2005). *The rise of the network societies*. Venice: Marsilio (tr.).

⁶ The French anthropologist Augé M talks about a *world-city* and *world-cities*. On the one hand, it is the same world that, becoming urbanised, resembles more and more a city due to the extension of "urban filaments" covering the entire planet which has become a "virtual meta-city". On the other hand, it is the city itself that becomes a world collecting all the problems, contradictions and global inequalities, and containing huge differences and discontinuous worlds in a single space; Augé M (2007). *Between the borders. Cities, places, integrations*. Milano: Mondadori (tr.).

down the more negative effects of our contemporary age. However, the development models of the industrial city of the 1900s are now in a state of crisis. It has become necessary to comprehend the adjustment rationale in order to specifically verify if the European cities, despite their specific peculiarities, are reaching a turning point that could push them towards a preordained fate. Or perhaps, on the other hand, the history that marked the birth and development of these cities is such to define a different evolution. In order to explore these questions, it is useful to take a preliminary look at three general aspects.

Firstly, Italy is characterised by an urban system carrying the dual characteristic of being extremely ancient, with traces of the past urban organisation that persists in the historical centres, and highly intricate. Italy has a number of very small cities that have always protected the country from the formation of immense urban conurbations such as those that may be found in other countries of the world. In fact, apart from Milan and Rome, there are only a certain number of medium-large cities that, on a global scale, would today be considered as medium-small (Turin, Genoa, Florence, Naples, Bari, Palermo and Catania⁷). In the worst case, there are regional conglomerates that tend to combine without the continuity of a city presenting a history of autonomy and distinction. Apart from these dynamics, in Italy, the small town continues to have a charm of its own and defend itself against mass migrations to larger towns. Secondly, Italy has a rich tradition in terms of widespread sociality. It is in relation to this rich urban network that the great heritage of the civil society emerges. The latter operates within cities and contributes to reproduce the local cultures that, in the past and more recently, have been invaluable to face development problems. Thirdly, it should be borne in mind that Italian cities, in recent years, have been going through a process that seems to lead to a progressive suburbanisation with respect to the faster dynamics of our time.

Although, Italy is one of the greatest economic powers in the world, it has encountered a number of difficulties, which are similar, but for many aspects very different in terms of seriousness from those recorded in Europe as a whole. This has made Italy grow at a much slower pace than other more dynamic areas of the world. In this process, a significant role is played by what is called "localistic inadequacy". In fact, in a time of mobility, Italy remains a country with restricted movement since individuals do not measure themselves against the

outside, where the degree of cultural integration is still very high, to the point that sometimes this causes a real inadequacy against the complex situation of today's world. As already mentioned, Italy has considerable resources connected directly with the logic of a widespread urbanisation and the creation of social and cultural capital, and all of this represents its wealth. Nevertheless, the same resources tend to effectively protect local interests rather than help approach the present challenges. The processes affecting contemporary cities tend to occur in a blander, less violent way in the Italian cities. If, on the one hand, this is undoubtedly a positive aspect, on the other, it raises the question of these cities future in a framework where the available economic and cultural resources will be likely waning.

An analytical prospective of the contemporary city: mobility, dislocation, heterotopias

In general, the processes to which a contemporary city is subjected are both intricate and problematic. All the structural elements of urban life are stirred to activity; its morphology, population, and relations. The international literature tends to agree on at least one point: as indicated by Nancy (2002)⁸, whatever interpretation is given to the changes in progress, no urban area is able to live for itself, and exclude what is outside. In a way, the contemporary city only exalts the trade, namely its original vocation. It has always been a space for exchange, meetings, and movement. For this very reason, the city has always breathed an air of freedom and movement. That is what made urban life so fascinating. However, the problem is that urban reality no longer succeeds in, and perhaps it does not aspire to, being a place where common experience is filtered, shared and consolidated. The ideal aspiration of the city is no longer of being a "place of personal experience" where personal histories intertwine, where the interpretations of the world are processed and shared and where people fight for justice. The city tends to become the "place of the living", a system of opportunities, a container of possibilities, merely a place of transit with no identity and preordained consistency.

In concrete terms, this means that a place no longer has a value except as a means of exploitation, and is anyhow provisional and contingent, as a mere point of support for realities which are orientated elsewhere. This can be detected from highly concrete aspects. For

⁷ The ethnographic research was focussed on some specific suburbs of the major Italian cities: Begato (Genoa), Zen (Palermo), Scampia (Naples), Librino (Catania), San Paolo (Bari); the Barrier of Milan (Turin), and new expanding areas (Florence), Esquilino (Rome), ex-area 13 with area Forlanini-Taliedo-Ponte Lambro (Milan), Navile (Bologna). These suburbs were defined as such by the political and administrative subdivisions of the urban territory, and, as a whole, have interestingly reflected the transformations occurring in the cities.

⁸ The French philosopher perhaps offers the most effective expression for understanding what is happening in contemporary urban areas today: "*the city is primarily a circulation, a form of transportation, an item, mobility, an oscillation, a vibration. Wherever it leads to it is outside of itself: but its outside is less and less the countryside; it is rather an indefinite outside of the city that moves away and re-urbanizes further and further away (...) Each urban location refers to other places and does not exist or is not consistent except in this reference*". (2002:41-43tr)

example, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish the dividing line between the city and its surrounding areas with sufficient clarity. Moreover, the individuals using the area do not necessarily live in that area, and it is less and less likely that a person who was born in a specific area would continue to live in that place for a lifetime. Even economic interests are linked to factors and decisions that originate elsewhere. The future of the city and the projects to be implemented therein are increasingly in the hands of investors (especially the private ones) that live elsewhere and are able to transfer capital, link parts of the city with other distant parts, just like knots in a global network.

This means that the contemporary city tends to develop in all directions, inside and outside. It is forced to a dual flow in order to exist. On the one hand, the city is urged to open out. Not only to people, tourists, migrants, businessmen, commuters, conference participants, consumers, but also to goods and services, as well as to capital and technology. On the other hand, the city must be open to connection, by placing itself in the network. To continue to exist, it needs to organise international events, attract visitors, export and sell its products. To uphold this dual flow, the city is forced to shift its barycentre from what is happening in its interior to what is crossing, connecting, and changing it. To better understand the implications of the above point, another suggestion, this time from Foucault (1994; 2006)⁹, should now be considered. This philosopher distinguishes three great historical eras in the spatial organisation of social life.

The first phase, which can be traced back to the beginnings of the modern era in Europe, is characterised by a clear predominance of location. Each location is stable, well-defined, and positioned within a spatial hierarchy that not only involves the terrestrial sphere, but also the celestial. The world is organised in a space which is hierarchical and traceable to common meanings. The figures that best represent this model are the monk and the peasant. The second phase starts in the modern era and is characterised by the logic of extension. The great geographical discoveries, the revision of our knowledge of astronomy, the advent of new means of transport, the spread of economic and social innovation break through the old hierarchies and open up new possibilities. Mobility and discovery influence behaviour. Change is marked by the emergence of new models such as the explorer, the traveller, the merchant, the innovator. In any case, even if dynamic, movement in the era of extension remains characterised by the desire to recreate homogeneity. Finally, the third phase introduces a different logic of spatialisation, named by Foucault as "dislocation". What is typical to this moment is the ability

to establish relations between different and distant points: no location exists for itself any more. So, each location is continually dislocated, open, interconnected. Within this configuration, the movements are incoherent and irregular, being reflections of a plurality of logics that no longer comply with a unitary design. The commuter, the tourist and the businessman are the symbolic figures of this phase and repeated and fragmented movements are associated to them.

There is a consequence to this new configuration that must be highlighted due to the effect it has on contemporary urban life: the dislocation phase coincides with the passage from the dominion of utopia, attributable to the modern era, to the prevalence of heterotopia. With the first term, the modern era had imagined its future in another place that had to be built. From this point of view, Utopia was an extension of a time that led to an ideal location and, because of this very reason, it was unreal. Here, all the hopes for a better, homogenous world, finally free of the human life contradictions were projected. Instead, the concept of heterotopia lies in an entirely different prospective.

It is orientated towards variety and diversification and deals with the existence of real, effective and highly heterogenic locations. In this sense, heterotopia assumes opposing and contradictory elements; on one side, it is the expression of functional differentiation, on the other, it expresses the contemporary desire to shun the systematic order, and finally, it can be an expression of the negative effects of segregation. The combination of Nancy's and Foucault's suggestions offers an interesting key for understanding what a city (within the European context) is today. Inserted within a process with never-ending events, the contemporary city experiences a continuous process of dislocation, to which it is subjected, that translates into a creation of heretopias, in the sense that, the diverse locations tend to assume a different significance and increasingly, more specialised functions.

This has firstly to do with the systematic rationale that categorises spatial environments on the basis of particular functions; the well-equipped industrial area, large railway stations, airports, university campuses, shopping malls and public utility services are some examples of it. The contemporary city tends to coincide closer and closer with its functional system, while the integrative value of the location is significantly reduced.

The formation of heterotopias also occurs on other levels according to the ways contemporary social life shapes itself. Amusement parks, pedestrian areas, squares, churches, recreational and social centres represent examples of locations destined to sustain a social life that often remains closed within that space.

Finally, heterotopia may also indicate places where those who are unsuitable to the models of contemporary life are concentrated, garbage dumps where what is hardly able to be integrated is rejected and what is liked to be invisible

⁹ Foucault M (1994). *Heterotopia. Metropolitan places and non-places*. Milano: Mimesis (tr.); Foucault M (2006). *Utopias and heterotopias*. Naples: Cronopio (tr.).

is relegated, such as centres and camps for immigrants and refugees, overcrowded prisons, urban ghettos, housing estates on the edges of the city. The result is a fragmentation of the urban land that tends to lose its unitary quality. As a consequence of this process, sociality is transformed; on the one hand, it is increasingly more difficult for sociality to reproduce autonomously, and, on the other, it risks existing only in relation to those functions that organise the city life, or as a function requiring specialised subareas for its reproduction. Almost as if there was a need for specific attention, for ad hoc effort, so that human beings can continue to maintain the ability to relate with each other.

This means that the contemporary city no longer has its barycentre in the internal social life, the one centred on the city inhabitants. Its reason of existence lies rather in being an ensemble of functions, and locations able to produce events, control populations, and generate (tangible and intangible) flows that cross through it, and that at least, in part are not within its control and needs, in case, to be enticed.

Even the neighbourhoods (distant suburbs, for example), where the settlement of new functions is rare if not inexistent, sociality, in the street or in the neighbourhood—tends to contract and exist less and less as a widespread and spontaneous event. Even these places show a rise of special protection areas where the conditions for making sociality are still feasible (for example, call centres, family and social centres). Therefore, dislocation comes with the growth of heterotopias. Places are likely to assume highly variegated meanings. They are no longer based on their ability to integrate diverse social groups, but purely on their functionality, which most of the time has no connection with the lives of those who live there.

Heterogeneity thus envelops fragmentation and laceration; anonymous, working-class building blocks, live side by side industrial areas, large railway stations, university campuses, shopping malls or, derelict factories, deserted public gardens or gardens inhabited by different population bands according to the time of the day. However, these different worlds and groups rarely intersect. Cities, as a result, are assuming a configuration that recalls archipelagos where many islands share the same portion of space, but with no water in between to connect them. This configures a new situation: the heterotropic city becomes an agglomerate of different functions and populations that do not know exactly what keeps them together.

From suburbs to “sensitive neighbourhoods”

In the light of the above considerations, it emerges that the classic centre-suburb model is no longer able to rationalise what is happening in the city. There are different reasons for this. The first is that fragmentation is

a transversal phenomenon that crosses through both the centre and the suburb. Requalification and investments follow a rationale that is not traceable to the centre-suburb scheme for the simple reason that the perspective in which decisions are normally taken has no significant link with the local *milieu*. But even the opposite dynamics, that is, squalor and poverty, seem to no longer have any boundaries. In many cities these aspects have infiltrated almost everywhere, contaminating even those areas that once seemed exclusive in such a way that one solution consists of the introduction of gated communities—that is, enclosed areas where wealthy people choose to live, and in some way admitting the failure of the idea of universal sociality, as for example has happened in the USA (but not exclusively there). The second reason is that in this way the town centre depends progressively less on the suburbs, since its connection is elsewhere, and at the same time the suburbs can become less involved with the centre because they have other reference points. For example, the suburb inhabitants live on informal economy and they no longer have to go to the town centre because a new shopping mall has been built near the by-pass. The third reason is that centres and suburbs experience the same malfunctions as sociality which struggles to reproduce, either because the conditions that sustained it in the past do not exist any more, or because individuals do not always have the suitable codes for regulating the passage towards cultural pluralism. As highlighted by mass-media news, in many cases of marginality or violence, the discriminating element is not the fact of living in the suburbs since the idea of a socially integrated centre and of a disintegrated and dangerous suburb no longer reflects reality. Numerous studies (Amin and Thrift, 2005; Augé, 1993; Bellicini and Ingersoll, 2001; Davis, 2002; Foot, 2001; Le Galès, 2006) have confirmed that processes of marginalisation, poverty, segregation, and disintegration are not now limited to the suburbs, but begin to appear elsewhere, in “more central neighbourhoods”, where these kinds of dynamics are not expected¹⁰.

On the whole, the old suburbs that are under transformation and the new areas where the phenomenon of fragmentation is more intensive, characterise the “sensitive neighbourhoods”: They no longer seem to have any function apart from allowing the system to unload what seems superfluous. In this sense, the research carried out focussed on those neighbourhoods that are traditionally suburbs in the geographical and historical sense with respect to the city, and on those that are less characterised by their spatial position on the urban map,

¹⁰ See for example, Amin A, Thrift N (2005). *The city. Re-thinking the urban dimension*. Bologna: Il Mulino (tr.); Augé M (1993). *The non-places*. Milano: Elèuthera (tr.); Bellicini L, Ingersoll R (2001). *The Italian outskirts*. Roma: Meltemi (tr.); Davis M. (2002). *Dead cities*. Milano: Feltrinelli (tr.); Foot J. (2001). *Milan after the miracle*. Milano: Feltrinelli (tr.); Le Galès P. (2006). *The European cities*. Bologna, Il Mulino (tr.).

but more by their problematic conditions. In order to avoid any form of urbanistic determinism, it is important to highlight that, within the dynamics described herein, there is an intervening variable which is given by the history of the city, its culture, the policies implemented by local authorities and by various social players in the civil society.

An overview of the Italian suburbs under examination

Begato (Genoa): a “garbage dump” suburb

Begato is a neighbourhood in the traditional sense. In fact, it has become synonym of a deteriorated and dangerous reality which is extraneous to the city life. It was built ensuing a strong housing crisis that occurred with the redevelopment of the old town centre in the 1990s. The district is characterised by a clear division and lack of communication between the predominantly private housing area, where the working class families are living on not very precarious socio-economic conditions, and the housing area where the highest levels of poverty and criticality are reached. The environmental degradation (that is, crumbling buildings, burned lifts, broken telephones, uncultivated areas, never ended facilities) is matched by a highest degree of social deprivation. The concentration of socially critical cases, together with mentally related issues, juvenile deviance, economic deprivation, isolation and the prevalence of elderly residents help give the neighbourhood a ghostly face. The district is the site of environmental and social disorder, chaos and unruliness; what strikes the most, is the widespread and random violence that suddenly becomes inflamed and then calms down for no apparent reason.

S.Paolo (Bari): The emblem of social relations disintegration

Born in light of the great optimism characterising the housing policies of the 1950s, this area was meant to be a suburban model. However, it was built in a logic of pure mono-functionality, and soon became a mere dormitory, where the economically and culturally most critical part of population was concentrated. Therefore the gap between the early design and its effective implementation resulted to be huge. Today it is a district with multiple problems, namely high unemployment, widespread economic and working insecurity, organised crime, petty crime, juvenile deviance, low education, dilapidated housing stock, unauthorised building. Apart from the lack of green spaces and opportunities to gather and socialise, what is reported is the sense of strangeness that the neighbourhood seems to convey, and that is enlarged by an urban structure that has created “no man’s lands”.

Librino (Catania): From “new town” to non-place

Born in the 1970s as a sign of great ambition, this area was intended to be a diverse group of independent residential communities connected by a road system of wide avenues flanked by a walkway in the countryside. This project, however, has never been carried out. The failure is mainly due to illegality intertwined with unauthorised building. From ideal city to non-place, Librino is the ghost of itself: spatially segregated from Catania, little known and passed through, internally fragmented, with no history or identity, unable to express sociality and rootment, and destined to become a receptacle and multiplier of human and social problems. The registered population is 43,600 inhabitants, while at least 70,000 people living in the district do not result from official estimates. The neighbourhood nowadays is still without basic services, shops, green spaces, and public services. What strikes is the deep rift in the social fabric, which is reflected in both the urban structure and the socio-economic connotation of its inhabitants. Emblematic in this sense is the coexistence of the residents in dilapidated and anonymous public buildings and the residents in the co-operatives houses provided with barrage gates. These are social, cultural, and human worlds with no chance to meet.

Zen (Palermo): A world apart

Compared to the city, it is a separate world closed in itself. Never been completed at the stage of urbanisation, it still suffers from the lack of essential services, and institutional inaction had left a vacuum quickly filled by the mafia that has taken root here. The resulted suburb is characterised by multiple problems further worsening the already critical situation of the city. The media, by creating a heavy stigma, have exacerbated a seriously degraded social reality, consisting in early school leaving, low education, marginal employment, economic insecurity, the presence of mafia, and the dependence on public donations. Being born in the suburb of Zen means being in a kind of trap from which it is almost impossible to escape. Not having a regular job and without any financial resources or real estates, even those who would like to leave this reality are aware that they cannot, and therefore they try to survive in the neighbourhood, ending up reproducing the usual script. The lives of entire families are structured around a set of mechanisms that mean exclusion from the world, and at the same time, integration of local codes.

Scampia (Naples): A symbol of the integration of illegality

Also born as a model neighbourhood, Scampia concretely

has become synonymous with crime and degradation. Its inexorable decline, from a garden-district to ghetto, is symbolized by the failure of the well-known *Veie*, embodying the rationalist conception of housing units, supposed to replicate the solidarity of Southern Italy quarters, but having instead become a tragic icon of illegality, discomfort, poverty and unauthorized building (the official figures indicate that 44,000 people live in the district but social workers offer a higher estimate which is equal to 70,000). Scampia has become a land of conquest for the Camorra clan that, through the international drug trade, has built a criminal empire in which numerous inhabitants risk to enter due to the absence of any other valid alternatives. Located within an area for which the risk of reproducing the organized crime is particularly high, the neighbourhood, being closed in itself and distant from the city, is linked to the global criminality of drug trafficking.

Equilino (Rome): Outskirt of the downtown, centre of the suburbs

The crisis of the commercial vocation of the district, in the late 1970s, marked the arrival of new products and ethnicities, so that the district has become an important reference point for many immigrants. First as buyers, then as employees or managers, foreigners have gradually replaced almost all the Italian component of the area, by attracting a growing number of fellow countrymen from other parts of Rome. This has caused the progressive isolation and exclusion from Romans' circuits of interest. The district is at present an "outskirt of the downtown" for Romans and the "centre of the suburbs" for the immigrants, hence the ambivalence and contradiction in the management of the local-global relationship. The encounter with other cultures upsets the neighbourhood; the issue of security is in fact in the forefront, with a clear gap between the personal and collective perception and the actual size of the problem. The neighbourhood is torn between those who reject the strangers who are seen as intrusive and those who appreciate their exotic multi-cultural traits but without the intention of getting in touch with them. In the middle point, there are the "frightened", those who are effectively the most numerous. The result of that is not a community that inhabits a territory, but enclaves that divide the space, do not talk to each other and, therefore, are unable to commonly build the future of the neighbourhood.

Ex-area 13 (Milan): An archipelago

This district represents the second most serious issue of the city, although at first sight, it does not present any particular criticality. Made up of different zones with

specific identities and histories, the ex-area 13 is a complex mixture of many juxtaposed elements, that is, strong industrial and working class presence, relevance of internal migration, intense processes of public housing settlement, arrival of non-European country immigrants. The result is the concentration of the typical problems of all the suburbs. Nevertheless, there is a good level of social self-organisation, thanks to the numerous institutional and associative resources of this area. The critical element is represented by the great urban transformations which are expressions of interests apart not only from the district but also from the city. The outcome is a rapid and profound heterogenisation/ heterotypisation of the territory, which makes very good sense of the globalisation impact on the urban fabric and causes an increasing lack of communication, so that the neighbourhood becomes similar to an archipelago.

The district Isolotto-Torri Cintoia (Florence): The dissolution of a community neighbourhood

The development of this area took place entirely in the second post-war: immigrants, refugees from Istria and Greece, rural migrants, and evacuees from the downtown or from the floods in the Polesine in the 1950s who got in contact with each other on the sole basis of the allocation of housing in the rising district. The lack of social planning activated resources of both the religious culture and the culture emanated from factory work. Both these resources significantly contributed to create the neighbourhood identity. The administrative decentralization, finally, rendered the neighbourhood an active player, able to improve the life quality, care for public areas, and build integration (by specially investing on the school). This has resulted in a significant participation from the bottom, whose effects are still visible at the present time. More recently, however, the relationship with the city is critical. A "functionalist" urban development has introduced low-quality housing blocks, out of context and with a high concentration of social problems, reinforcing the idea of being a critical neighbourhood. In these new zones of the district, some small enclaves of exclusion and marginalization have taken place. Although far from the image of slums, the recent urban changes are anyway, weakening the community fabric that had once characterized this area.

Navile (Bologna): From well-integrated working-class neighbourhood to future fragmented district

The Navile is a district, closely linked to the industrial growth after the second post-war, which made the factory the economic and social heart. It was around the latter that an extremely cohesive, social fabric had grown

together with strong class awareness, reinforced by strong local roots. Since the 1980s, the service sector and the production decentralization have changed the connotation of a working class neighbourhood. Today, Navile is the area with the highest concentration of abandoned factories, in some cases, replaced by shopping malls and new service industries, which have rendered the area the junction of connection and passage, strengthening its functional complexification. Its complexity is also given by the population stratification in at least four layers; the elderly, advocates of the local culture; the invisible middle generation; the youth showing signs of a worrying crisis and the immigrants who are silently taking root in the neighbourhood. It is especially the youth that denounces a great existential unease, namely, alcohol and drug abuse, low levels of higher education, lack of job opportunities for those with a high preparation. The outcome is a complex relationship with the neighbourhood, which becomes both a refuge and a prison, a protection unit but also a barrier. The strong localistic rootment leads to situations of conflict, especially with the elderly, for the spatial definition as some acts of vandalism seem to suggest.

Barrier of Milan (Turin): A fragile “emiphery”

Some aspects similar to those observed in Bologna can be found also in Turin, in the Barrier of Milan. The Winter Olympics in Turin in 2006, overcoming the lack of confidence after the industrial decline, produced a cohesion spirit spread even to the suburbs. However, since the mid-90s, Turin had already initiated several redevelopment projects, by accumulating knowledge and practices which have placed this city in the forefront in Europe, and making sure that none of its territories was in a state of neglect. Against this scenario, the critical areas are represented by the “emiphery” (or internal periphery), that is, a part of the city immediately placed around the center, or central or peripheral. One of these internal peripheries is the Barrier of Milan that at present appears fragile and disoriented. It is not so central to attract investments, but neither so degraded. This area passively looks at changes when it would rather require further interventions. Several different zones render the Barrier of Milan a multi-faceted neighbourhood, whose complexity is reinforced by the centrality loss of the factory and its associated identity.

A common destiny: Area fragmentation and community dislocation

In all the neighbourhoods studied, the changes have occurred in a disorganised way, without any common logic, and emphasising the gap within the urban texture.

Entire areas tend to break up and give rise to new combinations of functions and populations which often remain simply juxtaposed. The differential element is essentially given by the degree and nature of the interconnections available elsewhere. Whether it be the historical centre where millions of tourists pour in, the new residential area where significant international capital is invested, the derelict factory area where a multinational may invest or the neighbourhood where a particular ethnic group is concentrated, what counts is that the various areas development in the urban texture is linked to the interconnections intensity and direction to which reference is made. The significant aspect is that, such a development is punctual, in the sense that it refers to a single function, a single location, a single population, often with limited or even negative effects on the surroundings. For example, the cost of real estate and rent, the increase in traffic, the security problems of building a new civic centre, the transfer of a wholesale fruit and vegetable market and the housing blocks squatting are some examples of this phenomenon. On the whole, these dynamics go in the direction defined by Nancy as “the banalisation of the land”, that is, the loss of the local contexts specificity and memory, and their transformation into “commonplaces, banal locations” (in French, the root of the expression banlieue, that is, suburb, is the same as “banal”). The old neighbourhoods change without almost anyone realising it and anyhow, remain outside a vision of the whole that attempts to take into account local feelings and history.

Apart from the diverse situations and conditions encountered, the study has brought to light the existence of a destiny that unites all the neighbourhoods; the inadequacy of the concept of “suburb” is obvious everywhere, both with respect to the internal network, and to the “external” relations of the neighbourhoods which were explored. With reference to the internal network, as clearly emerged from the undertaken research, this is because of the loss of that internal homogeneity and cohesion that were historically distinctive elements of the suburbs, despite the many difficulties to maintain them. On the other hand, the dissolution of homogenous cultures (or those cultures able to produce a certain degree of integration), was evident even in those neighbourhoods that boast a glorious history in this regard (for example, the old working-class areas in Bologna, Milan, Turin and Florence). Instead, with respect to the external network, the inadequacy of the term “suburb” depends on the fact that it is no longer possible to simply refer to “satellite” areas in relation to the city centre. In some cases, such as the Begato neighbourhood in Genoa, this connection does not effectively exist at present since the neighbourhood seems to have let itself drift away, with no social or functional bonds with the rest of the city. In other cases, the point of gravity around which the neighbourhood

turns is no longer the city centre, but is represented by distant locations in other parts of the world. A case in point is Milan, where the transformation of a number of areas within the neighbourhood is due to their connections with the global economy. But another significant example is the renowned Scampia neighbourhood in Naples, where the daily life is run by criminal networks with international alliances and connections.

All this leads to the conclusion that the connection/disconnection factors no longer shape a neighbourhood in its entirety, neither are they able to involve all the people who live there. Instead, it is only from an analysis of the relationship between these two levels that it is possible to understand the effects produced on the areas and on the communities, as illustrated by the example of Palermo. From the logistics point of view, the Zen neighbourhood of Palermo is today linked to the city centre via a fast and wide roadway, but, at the same time, it has poor public transport services. In such a situation, the car possession is the parameter defining the level of connection that a resident of the area has with the rest of the city, while the area's bad reputation discourages any flow from the city centre. In order to understand the dynamics occurring in sensitive areas it is essential to bear in mind the nature and range of the connections existing between a neighbourhood, the rest of the city and other dislocated centres in the world, and the internal composition of the different populations.

Loss of functions and problematic connections

Another remarkable process is determined by the loss of functions. In this sense, some parts of the area undergo an impoverishment-emptying of the functions-populations that had characterised and linked it to the previous historical phases. However, this has occurred without new opportunities being created. The most negative result may be the complete residuality of these neighbourhoods, which in some cases become "dead zones", where even daily face-to-face relations find it difficult to exist in such a hostile context. In some cases, there is an out-and-out spatial segregation of marginal groups, especially the elderly, poor or immigrant families, that is, those categories that are considered dysfunctional in the contemporary social life framework. In some cases, this can transform these areas into nostalgic locations, where the past is looked back upon with affection; opposition is made to the change which is perceived as alien. In other cases, parallel worlds are created with no connections with anything or anyone.

If the nature and impact of the connections with the outside world is a central element of contemporary urban life, this research has stressed that in the sensitive quarters, there is a poor level of integration into the

functional circuits on the different spatial levels (whether it be on the city, national or international level), and this connection is not always positive. From the infrastructural (roads, underground railways, etc.) to the structural aspects (work and economy), individuals have in front of themselves, worlds that remain marginal and outcast. The negative heritage in terms of urban and social poverty does not offer these areas a relevant attraction and precludes the bidirectional quality of population flows, which is one of the main indicators of urban vitality, since the inhabitants of other urban areas are not sufficiently driven to move into these neighbourhoods.

In order to specifically examine this, the effects of urban policies need to be explored more closely. In the post-war era, in Italy as in many other European countries, suburbs were built from rationalist designs that based urban planning on a temporal utopia; the building of new neighbourhoods expressed in fact the trust in an inexorable progress which could overcome economic backwardness and cultural traditionalism. Such an approach needed a strong direction entrusted to the state and its powers of guidance and action. In a top-down logic, which from central government went down to the local bodies, and the council houses institutions to industrial capital, resources were distributed and tasks were assigned to the city through a central planning, indicating objectives and methods by means of laws and political choices.

This logic has progressively disappeared under the blows of many contradictions. The fulfilment of the great projects of the 1960s and 1970s betrayed many of the promises made, creating housing complexes where the abstract purity of the designs was not capable of attuning the concreteness of the groups and cultures that had settled there. This is in such a way that, in Italy particularly, the strong institutional direction often remained no more than an aspiration, and it generated vast empty urban spaces that have often been filled with discarded objects of all kinds, as well as with other powers in contrast with the government. However, apart from these aspects, the present reality needs to deal with the difficult situation inherited from that period; in fact, those that should have been functional and self-sufficient, model-neighbourhoods, conceived for culturally homogenous and socially integrated populations, have progressively become receptacles for non-communication and impersonality. As a result, this has created concentrations of populations whose only common denominator is hardship. In reaction to these failures, the last two decades have seen a reorganisation of the central government role to the advantage of private interest that has returned to take a leading role in changing the urban landscape.

In particular, this phenomenon has given rise to two consequences. The first is that the reins of the direction and control of urban areas has passed into the hands of a

wide number of subjects, under the hypothesis that the urban system may function better by overcoming all hierarchies and thus making collaboration more flexible. The second consequence is that the cities have become more powerful in terms of tasks and responsibilities; if at first it was the state that mediated between the global or national level and the local one, now it is the town hall that has gained autonomy. In this framework, local administrators are required to be entrepreneurs, able to make alliances to attract capital, form agencies to stimulate the requalification of abandoned industrial areas, create new infrastructures or restructure buildings. And, since public resources are chronically scarce, private capital is sought (also by contacting extra-local economic figures). In some cases, attempts are made to integrate local interests with the economic ones calling upon the civil society members.

From a rationalist and centralised planning with few and well-defined leading figures, a movement to a more fluid and transactional rationale has taken place. In this new scenario, institutions lose their coherence and become facilitators in the flexible and temporary interaction between supra-national figures (first and foremost, the European Union with its support programmes for local development), national governments, regional and local authorities, traditional entrepreneurs and new global economic figures, associations and non-government organisations. The balance of this new phase, at least for the areas taken into consideration, highlights a number of different problems. First, the recent evolution is often translated into a simple dislocation of decisional processes in locations far from public negotiations. In fact, the economic figures are those who strengthen the field of action, being the only ones able to place in circulation those resources that the local administrators are seeking. This means that it becomes harder to represent the population's interests in the weaker and more marginal areas. Many of the neighbourhoods examined risk never seeing economic interests that would support change, with the result of increasing exclusion and losing contacts with the more advanced areas of the city.

Secondly, even when the system is working better and the exclusion effect does not occur, the studies carried out have highlighted other types of problems. They are linked to the systematic underestimation of the new investments impact in housing communities and to the failure of the communication with and the involvement of the resident population. This second effect is clearly visible especially in five less segregated neighbourhoods (in Milan, Turin, Bologna, Florence and Rome), where some urban requalification projects only concern small territory portions, determining the dismemberment of the neighbourhood identity. There is often a total lack of mediation between the reasons for certain decisions and the community life. And this ends up generating uncertainty and identity loss. The problem in these cases is that the inhabitants are not sufficiently informed and take no part

in the occurring processes; in fact, they are simply passive receptors, and most of them cannot benefit from new opportunities¹¹.

Even where urban policies express issue forms of governance that engage local civil society groups and the single citizens, by implementing, for example, "neighbourhood laboratories", committees, etc., many difficulties are encountered. And this is not only because the forms of communication used for connecting the various sectors involved are inefficient, but also because the representative procedures, developed from the bottom, within the local civil society, are generally too late in comparison with the urban interventions. In fact, the latter are economically more attractive for the public body, mainly because private investors are positively seen as economic actors able to secure funding which, otherwise, the district could not obtain, even after cutbacks by the central government. Furthermore, delays and insufficiencies cause tension between objectives and programmes, fraying the already precarious trust that citizens have in the institutions even further.

Thirdly, the connections that exist or created between the neighbourhood and the surrounding world are not given adequate support and this tends to result in the isolation from the neighbourhood context or in the determination of reactive forms. The birth of heterotopias may in this case be restricted to extraneous presences in the area or even the disintegration of pre-existing social forms. However, the most worrying aspect is probably that the formation of connections may potentially create the risk of highlighting the distance between the neighbourhood and the surrounding environment even more.

It is right in this context that the problems ending up on the front pages of the newspapers arise. The point is that the functional and structural connections are at the same time liminal in areas that unite the neighbourhood and the external world, often mixing highly diverse cultures, interests and opportunities. Accordingly, there are insertions that do not appropriately contribute to the neighbourhood life, just cathedrals in the desert that can be placed anywhere; an interesting example in this respect is represented by the case of Via Mecenate in Milan, where new studios make up a world apart (of fashion and advanced technology), with respect to the working class buildings of "Trecca", located just a few metres away with houses in obvious state of decay. With such fragile social situations and scarce resources, the connection process is extremely delicate; it can only be carried out gradually and with care. The risk is to implement connections without an exchange, which *de facto*, end with making the distance between the inside and the outside even sharper.

¹¹ In Milan, for example, the "Nuova Milano" – Santa Giulia residential area defined as the "ideal city" is springing up with absolutely no involvement of the existing inhabitants of the area (mostly represented by the working-class).

The exile of social life and the poverty “knot”

Historically, the specificity of the typical European city derived from its ability to coordinate the different spheres of personal and community (for example, political, religious, economic, artistic, home, recreational) life within a common fertile ground that made participation possible and strengthened sociality. It is for this reason that urban contexts have always been particularly receptive for the production and reproduction of social, public and private relations: in fact, the city has tended to stabilise and integrate forms of proximity and solidarity.

Within the neighbourhoods studied, the contemporary dynamics of fragmentation and dislocation mentioned above complicate cohabitation. In particular, the research conducted has revealed a widespread presence of fundamental strategies orientated to withdrawal and avoidance that tend to worsen the situation.

The first strategy is pursued by that part of the population that has to do with the territory and has the cultural and economic resources to deal with these issues. Faced with an extremely difficult context and the possibility of having access to external opportunities, the solution is the estrangement, which leads to avoiding all involvement with the surrounding environment. It is an attempt not to become contaminated; for example, a person can work in a place, send the children to schools located in other neighbourhoods, and barricade themselves in their enclosed condominium. In this way, the outcome is the disconnection from the neighbourhood, and an insubstantial connection elsewhere, by negating to live in the area or refusing to acknowledge the surrounding situation. However, other strategies may be also employed. Groups that have little culture and economic means may be divided into four categories; the “nostalgic”, the prisoners, the exploiters and the squatters.

The figure of the “nostalgic” that is, a person who perceives that the quality of his/her existence and the level of the environmental cohesion is progressively diminishing over time, is widespread in those neighbourhoods having a past, rich in civil and social commitments, and a shared history (mostly bound by the work in the factory that developed together with the neighbourhood building). The advance of the decay and the disappearance of a life-long culture send a considerable part of the population inhabiting these neighbourhoods into a state of prostration that fuels rejection when it happens. The latter leads people to lock themselves up in their homes and try to protect their homes from the world outside. This strategy is especially common among the elderly (especially in Florence and Bologna), until generational fractures are created (for example, the conflict arising between the elderly and the young and regarding the use of gardens in the neighbourhood).

The prisoners are those aware of living in an unliveable

context but also knowing that escape is not the solution; the disadvantages of the living conditions (for example, job instability, house rental costs) make departure from the neighbourhood impractical. With this prospect, the adaptation strategy chosen is based on either estrangement, which is expressed in its weak form as refusing to see or to speak, and in its strong form, in an out-and-out self-segregation in an enclosed niche protected by iron bars, or escape, a strategy especially common among the youngest who convince themselves that they have no future and are consequently attracted by transgression or alcohol/drugs misuse. The exploiters, who are usually the minority, have the ability to condition the neighbourhood climate. Their strategy is to maximise their advantage in operating within a context that has no regulations or institutions. This leads to a systematic recourse to threats and violence in order to create and maintain this position of power. In many of the areas studied, people live constantly in a state of siege, and in some, Scampia, but also Zen and Librino, criminal control has replaced partially or entirely the legal institutions. The last category of individuals is the one of squatters, who in these neighbourhoods finds their spaces, thanks to their invisibility within areas of real and true extra-territorialism.

As the studies conducted have also pointed out, these situations tend to generate a parallel world and a kind of sociality completely separated from the surrounding social context, in respect to which even communication is at its minimal level and for this very reason social intervention with traditional instruments becomes impossible. The presence of these different groups and their strategies of adaptation explain the expression “exile of sociality”. The spaces of sociality appear buried inside the local micro-contexts, with no connection with the structural functions of contemporary social life (such as, work, school, health) and with the wider outside world. Interpersonal relations, difficult and poisoned with diffidence, are mainly reduced to interstices (that is, the private, the informal). In front of an undecipherable and threatening context on which an individual has no power, feels utterly exposed and without any mediation from the institutions for protection, one buries oneself into a microcosm ruled by known and accessible codes of action. Therefore, in contrast with a number of past phases, when neighbourhood solidarity offered shelter in difficult times, people no longer count on this resource; atomisation and solitude permeate through all aspects of daily life and microscopically undermine well-being and life quality. This augments the perception of deprivation and configures a new condition of poverty that assumes the shape of a “knot”, because it combines different dimensions; the economic (lack of regular work, of a secure income), urban (lack of adequate housing or housing in good state, lack of communal urban spaces), institutional (lack or a few presence of the institutions in the area), social-cultural (low levels of education, wasted

schooling, cultural ignorance, backwardness), and relational (lack of social capital made up of trusted relations on which an individual may count).

The poverty of those living in sensitive neighbourhoods is sharpened by the fact that it is associated with immobility. The spatial concentration of a series of negative conditions, together with the modification of the institutional background within society as a whole (with the flexibilisation and insecurity of the labour market and the privatisation of the housing market in the forefront) have resulted in the neighbourhood transforming itself into a kind of prison¹². In fact, it is difficult to imagine that those living in these areas would move anywhere else since they are in effect trapped in living conditions devoid of any resources for such a change. The hypothesis of emigrating requires external supports which are increasingly difficult to find. To live, or simply to survive, in these areas is not an easy task.

Imaginary dislocation of consumption and of the media

The analysis would not be complete without considering the role played by the consumption of goods and by images (mainly broadcast by television) on the integration level. In effect, consumption and the media are two areas that seem most able to offer, on the one hand, access to the outside world and, on the other, a definition of a sense of belonging. In fact, they may convey the feeling of being able to bridge the gap with the surrounding world. In the day to day life, there is a constant reference to the shopping malls that give a sense of security; in fact, for the sole reason of being surrounded by the crowd (albeit constituted by strangers) with whom to share the same type of actions, it transmits an idea, albeit tenuous, of community and belonging.

Furthermore, for those who can afford it, consumption contributes to the dual gratifying sensation of the individual action (purchasing is, at the end, a form of action) and the participation in a collective action, even though it is performed individually, encouraged by simultaneity and the presence of other consumers. When there is a lack of public spaces that encourage authentic participation based on relations and collective action, oriented towards a common good, the access to these consumption locations is a substitute that acts as a simulacrum for participation. It is through consumption, in fact, that it becomes possible to obtain social recognition in an individualised world and in a disintegrated context

¹² As a case in point: in the suburb of San Paolo, in Bari, the unemployment rate is 27% (while in the city this figure is around 19%). If only the female rate is taken into account, this amount reaches 42%. But even in the less problematic neighbourhoods, with an industrial tradition behind (as in Turin, Bologna, Florence and Milan), the factories decline has meant job loss or insecurity for many workers, especially the youngest.

where competition is more attractive than solidarity.

A similar argument may be put forward for television, a virtual public space producing the illusion of a community entity for the reason of being spectators of the same show. Television scans the empty hours of the poorest suburbs, and supplies accessible symbolic resources which are in a certain sense, consolatory. The highly popular reality shows¹³ reproduce the same conditions of segregation that the inhabitants of the most isolated neighbourhoods personally experience, but on a larger stage and in a more attractive setting, constitute an interesting example in this respect. "Public" is, in this case, what amplifies individual experiences (including the desire to become a star of these programmes) and places them on a lighted stage, bringing them out from invisibility.

The impact of these two elements on local culture is significant. On the one hand, consumption and television are factors that make it possible to reduce tension and create the appearance of integration and social bonds. On the other, they contribute to erode local culture. In fact, the most significant aspect is that the integration guaranteed by the access to consumption and television embraces these populations into a sort of unreality that keeps them away from their real condition, at least for a few moments.

Forms of conflict and territory zoning

Ethnographic observation suggests the following hypothesis; at the present state of affairs, the sensitive neighbourhoods of Italian cities, seem depots of distrust and depression where the risk is that of micro-conflict and widespread internal violence rather than depots of anger and despair from which violent and organised urban conflicts could arise. The social fabric is so frayed that there is no adhesive that can generate any form of organised social conflict. However, this does not mean that problems do not exist. In the first place, the divisions are internal and the conflicts which remain lateral seem to be at the base of subtle dynamics of creation and separation. This is a zoning process, which consists in the creation of distinct and segregated areas, resulting in a combination of various strategies, symbolic or functional, that the social actors implement, in their perceptions and, accordingly, in their everyday life actions, when faced with the disintegrating processes occurring around them. Such processes take place according to a number of ways. For example, one

¹³ An example with this regard is represented by reality shows such as "Big Brother" or "Celebrity Survivor", commercial television programmes presenting specific functions, i.e. the performance, bringing up to date the dream of success and notoriety, the ritualised competition, the emotional outing, the birth of a new love. They are hyper real spaces, where everything is emphasised towards the limits of the grotesque, but placing itself as a model and expectation of the real itself.

modality tends to create internal differentiation by blocks, and by large or medium-sized areas seen as homogenous and whose reinforced and symbolically over-emphasised borders seem to separate the destiny of those called to live there. Another way causes a fragmentation that tends to break up the area into finer grids, with subdivisions from a street to a street corner, from a building to particular meeting points in the area.

In comparison with the outside, the zoning process occurs with a progressive sense of separateness with respect to the city, also after the media stigmatisation that builds symbolic walls around these neighbourhoods in the name of security. Secondly, violent scenarios can be discernable in these areas and this can be associated to three main dynamics. The first deals with the closure of relations with the outside and the formation and taking root of criminal control, usually connected to international trafficking, able to control the territory and detain a sort of monopoly on violence. When this happens, as in the case of Scampia, the neighbourhood tends to produce an autonomous organisation, with its own culture, economy, and social protection. Violence in this framework is controlled and mostly orientated towards the outside (criminal organisations have everything to gain from keeping the area they command peaceful), until a power struggle occurs.

The second dynamic is also a sign of the increasing distance between the inside and the outside, which translate into a disintegration of the fabric and its relations that are so radical to generate casual violence, almost deprived of any logic. When this happens, individuals find themselves in a sense of terror, given that they live in an area where they do not know what to expect. When leaving home, people may stumble into a gang war, acts of bullism (that is, physical and/or verbal violence among youngsters for example in schools or on the streets) or occasional brawls. Begato in Genoa is the most striking example of this situation. The third dynamic involves an unexpected connection with flows on a global scale, be these flows of people, information or culture. Even where there is a history that was able to integrate, under certain conditions, the local populations coming from heterogeneous contexts, there are not sufficient resources to deal with the new condition. More recent arrivals with different histories, other cultures or interests having no connections with the neighbourhood generate unease and dismay together with the feeling of violation of one's territory and identity. Cultural heterogeneity becomes a daily encumbrance that is impossible to ignore, in such a way that, as demonstrated in the case of Esquilino in Rome, the feeling of invasion is followed by those of fear and alarm (which are not always justified) for safety. If the conflict is not manifest, this does not mean there is no violence, which is studded with attitudes and gestures of indifference, such as building of confines, non-recognition and negation of others and which, by

occupying streets, squares, houses and schools, pushes individuals to the edge of their vital space.

In all these dynamics, the spatial and symbolic points of contact between the inside and the outside, which produce specific forms of violence, unite the sensitive neighbourhoods to the surrounding world. Above all, there is the school, which relates the internal judgment criteria with the reality of the neighbourhood, and the means of transport, which physically unite these worlds apart with the rest of the city. These points constitute borders, thresholds that make the differences visible, but, at the same time, they are environments that confirm the distance between the inside and the outside; the school, because it highlights the inadequacy of the children with regard to the requirements of the surrounding world; the means of transport because they remind people that even if, on the one hand, the media and consumption seem to break down the distance with the outside, on the other, concrete reality shows that this distance is anything but inexistent. As for the thresholds, these places make it possible to assert one's existence, even if for a moment, to the surrounding world that systematically ignores the suburb inhabitants. All this can explain why the violence that concentrates in these locations is characterised by rage and exhibitionism, as if these individuals intended to cry out their existence to those living outside these areas. San Paolo in Bari is the neighbourhood where this dynamic is more blatantly manifest; here, in fact, acts of vandalism made by youngsters are frequent, both in schools and on the public transport that strives to link the suburb with the rest of the city.

Crisis in the trust in institutions and resistance of civil society

From the studies carried out it emerged that public spaces in sensitive areas are absent. In the more positive cases, it is a conquest of the past slowly eroded by the changes in the economic, social and cultural fabric. The majority of the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods under examination had no idea they lived in a place structured around a network of institutions. In these areas, the public institutions weakness has a precise implication, such as, individual exposure to events without any institutional mediation or protection. This absence of intermediation leads to several negative consequences on the inhabitants of the area, including the feeling of being superfluous, not having the chance to give voice to their life conditions, and being exposed to everything. The absence of public arenas where individuals recognise themselves as citizens and the absence of political mediation provoke a lack of interest in public good, and a distance from political participation. The population has a strong conviction that politicians

concern themselves with the suburbs only during election campaigns and their promises seldom become true. This creates a deep feeling of disillusionment that makes the implementation of any positive action more difficult. Before building trust, one must first deal with the distrust of the inhabitants who are used to being let down with promises, announcements, image campaigns and electoral exploiting. The only exception that deserves to be underlined in this overview is the school, which in many cases still manages to create extended forms of aggregation and promote initiatives involving the inhabitants. Taking advantage of its position in the area, the school is often the only link in the chain between populations enclosed in the neighbourhood and the surrounding world. From this point of view, it continues to be a valuable and indispensable resource for any lasting development project in sensitive neighbourhoods.

In some areas, the sense of abandonment creates the ideal conditions for a strengthening of real contra-institutions founded on illegal power and violence. Especially in the suburbs of southern Italy, which are marked by the serious condition of lack of work, illegal networks constitute a parallel institutionalised and substitute world against the official one, a world that is able to guarantee safety, career opportunities, improvement of living conditions and even a sort of "alternative welfare programme" (which the State is not able to offer) that provides support, including economic support to orphans, widows and the families of people who are in prison. A kind of order, albeit criminal, reigns in the neighbourhoods dominated by criminal organisations, and is able to assure a certain kind of guarantee to those submitted. With reference to the resistance factors, as well as the school, the widespread presence of different aspects of civil society must be mentioned. Firstly, the Catholic Church, which has preserved its roots and, for this reason, manages to assure a significant presence in all the neighbourhoods.

The studies undertaken have highlighted how religion represents one of the few "languages" able to communicate with the populations that live in these neighbourhoods, by putting forward the fundamental questions of existence, connecting the elements of tradition with daily life, proffering values and behavioural standards, offering the presence and testimony of dedicated and disinterested people, often a unique sign of hope in a desperate reality. From this point of view, the Church plays a fundamental role because it guarantees a close presence and is often the only link with the outside world. However, this valuable presence is not without any weak points. Faced with such a disintegrated situation, the Church finds it hard to be a universal factor capable of re-establishing a social bond beyond the local microcosm. The isolation in which the religious communities, active on the territory, find themselves, risks pushing the inhabitants of the area to search

consolatory refuge in the emotional dimension of disembodied spiritualism and ritualism or to surrender to the exploiting actions of the power systems embedded in the local microcosms. With reference to other subjects of the civil society and third sector, the first consideration is that the widespread weakness of the institutions and the precariousness of living conditions also reflect onto the civil society, rendering it more fragile. In effect, the forms of auto-organisation are in general delicate, with the exception of the residue from previous social forms (mostly linked to the working class culture) or for the presence of the Catholic world which can be found in all contexts, and in some cases they are highly organised systems.

In general, if on the one hand, the private social services manage to create locations and initiatives close to the unheeded or unsatisfied social needs, on the other, the wide fragmentation deprives these resources of any potential strength of collaboration networks and leads to contingent and improvised actions. These situations are often engulfed into forms of vertical cooperation where the state is the only interlocutor with the public because it is the funding provider. However, a rationale of pure compromise tends to prevail since the state abandons its direct struggle against poverty by enabling non-profit organisations to have full autonomy (and in some cases complete discretionary power) in the use of public resources. In this way, the internal potential of civil society decreases significantly, dissipating valuable energy within particularistic and defensive actions that risk becoming not only socially irrelevant but also not civil. Moreover, the weakness of networking prevents the civil society from having any influence on the political system and, in this way, from contributing to implement lasting programmes for social change. The interventions that have had some success in recent years are characterised by the awareness that it is wrong to try and intervene on a single aspect or as a single agency, but that it is more realistic to intervene with actions on a network scale able to focus on different dimensions of collective life. This can be successful when there is widespread consent on a project that is able to identify concrete objectives, activate resources, generate widespread mobilisation and stimulate virtuous behaviour.

The abandonment spiral

The transformation that is taking place in the cities seems profound as it is the direct expression of the systematic forces of our time. The formation processes of heterotopias, the effect of dislocation, the differentials of mobility, the new forms of poverty and isolation change social relations as well as personal identities. The disintegration of the areas and their disconnection

exposes those who live in these places to a “permanent liminal state”, in a sort of suspension where it is difficult to find any kind of anchorage or reference. The distance between those who live in more evolved areas and those who are enclosed in squalor is rising and ends up creating what can be described as a spiral of abandonment. To better comprehend this phenomenon, the root of this term (also contained in the French word *banlieue*) needs to be explored. On the one hand, abandonment is subjectively experienced by those who live in these enclaves and are aware of being only superficially or feebly connected to the surrounding world. With the weakening of institutional bonds, the physical and social immobility of the inhabitants and the irrelevance of their lives with respect to the surrounding world, it is difficult to preserve even the slightest sense of loyalty and responsibility. On the other hand, for the outsider, abandonment means keeping a distance and a separation between one’s own destiny and that of others. In the end, this attitude determines a refusal to take responsibility for the community problems and to see social issues only as factors of security.

When these two dynamics combine, they form a negative spiral with abandonment translated into a “banning” of these neighbourhoods and especially of the groups that live there, regardless of their effective conditions. As highlighted by Agamben (2005), those who have been banned, are not simply outlawed, but abandoned, left to themselves on a threshold where life and rights, outside and inside are merged¹⁴. This constitutes a boomerang effect, because banning entire groups and entire urban areas means accepting the creation of bandits, that is, individuals who act outside any reciprocal recognition and obligation. And this can only worsen everyone’s living conditions. On the other hand, it is this growing distance that is forming between who is inside and who is outside that explains the upsurge of violence and the loss of common reference points. In such a situation, the sense of what is human and what is not is open to question. This does not lead to the adoption of an apocalyptic thesis. As pointed out, there are still ligatures that tend to contrast the spiral: parts of public institutions such as the school; social workers that keep their hold on the area; sectors of public opinion that remain attentive to the neighbourhood issues.

During this fieldwork, superb people were met, both operators and inhabitants, and this is a warning against falling into an unsustainable determinism that does not stand up to reality. Having said this, it is true that the studies conducted have highlighted living conditions that go beyond what is imaginable, and more generally, an obvious difficulty of entire social groups thinking that they are part of a larger community to which belong. The issue

of the suburbs coincides with the ability to interrupt the spiral that tends to radicalise the reciprocal sense of abandonment. In order to face the problems detected, it is key, to create and renew connections and more importantly, rebuild the human contact in its integrity.

Contrasting the abandonment spiral

If looking at the global scale, the combination of the transformations that have been analysed herein involves larger portions of the territory and determines virulent consequences on the forms of urban living, such as the urbanisation processes with the increase in the number of *bidonvilles*; the formation of urban agglomerates that develop without any urban design according to a development logic of building production and speculation, with no consideration of people’s lives. And, structural changes to the capital economies, with the passage of what some researchers have defined “disorganised” or “techno-nihilist” capitalism,¹⁵ have transformed workers into unemployed and temporary workers (for a detailed analysis, see Magatti (2009)). It may be said that what is happening in many cities around the world shows the extent of the anthropological crisis that sees the very idea of mankind giving way, without any right and without any significance. The new urban forms are places where contemporary human crisis is dramatically highlighted, with a radical negation of the recognition of huge portions of population who are denied the most basic rights.

Studies (Amin and Thrift, 2005; Augé, 1993; Davis, 2002; Le Galès, 2006) too confirm our apprehension¹⁶; the city seems to be less and less a meeting place. Thus, the relationship with one another is in crisis in a city that no longer manages to produce sociality, shared significance, knowledge, dialogue and trust. The analysis of the urban situation seems to indicate that a positive change can occur where there is a detailed and capillary process of placing people, groups and institutions together. It is not an easy task, and involves everyone; the world of politics and its original vocation of the search for good in the “polis”; the economic forces called to override private and partial interests and promote cooperation rather than competition; the ecclesiastics and the religious spheres for getting together and for hospitality; associations, capable of uniting people who otherwise risk exclusion; the world of culture and education for the development of the young generations; and, finally, all the individuals and groups who in their daily lives can weave relations and reproduce

¹⁴ Agamben G (2005). *Homo sacer. Sovereign power and bare life*. Turin: Einaudi (tr.).

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis, see Magatti M (2009). *Imaginary freedom. The illusions of the techno-nihilist capitalism*. Milan: Feltrinelli (tr.).

¹⁶ See for example, Amin A, Thrift N (2005). *The city. Re-thinking the urban dimension*. Bologna: Il Mulino (tr.); Augé M (1993). *The non-places*. Milano: Elèuthera (tr.); Davis M. (2002). *Dead cities*. Milano: Feltrinelli (tr.); Le Galès P. (2006). *The European cities*. Bologna, Il Mulino (tr.).

environments where sociality and trust can grow. In fact, the intertwining and articulation of all these players and worlds constitute an indispensable resource, unless leaving the city of the future without sociality, comprising only functions and populations which pass through it. The risk is not to no longer have “safe cities” (as some scholars affirm today), but to no longer have cities that are humanly liveable.

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