

Creating the City: Differences, Inclusion, Belonging

One of the themes currently most present not only in the academic debate on the urban, but above all in the planning and governance activities of public decision makers, is the city of the future: mega, global or ordinary cities (Robinson 2013). With reference to the SDGs of EU Agenda 2030 sustainable agenda, the urban planning for the future must imagine, and realise, a future for the cities in the short term 2030, 2050 at the most, which takes into account some major challenges: the ecological transition, which has become an urgent necessity (Pickett et alii 2016); the mobility, which includes migratory flows (Urry 2007); and finally, the inclusion of differences (Vertovec 2007), which manifest all their potential in cities. The current context, which is increasingly marked by uncertainty, as the pandemic has violently shown (Gamba et alii, 2020), has long been a field of observation for scholars, such as Bauman (1999), who has highlighted its contradictions.

One of the most relevant aspects of this condition is that the uncertainty, the fragility that affects human beings and things (Sennett 1996) cannot be effectively addressed by the urban planning, if it is not included in a common narrative, capable of producing a sense of belonging, able to include differences, in a city that becomes a common good. This requires that the users of the city, its inhabitants, the people who work there and who pass by, identify themselves with this common good, take care of it and love it. This identification is based on the feeling that this common good belongs to everyone, and that it is a territory of common belonging.

This sense of belonging does not develop automatically. The city can exist, without doubt, in the vision that each person has of it; however, this vision is only justified insofar as the city responds to it with its openness, it offers opportunities for inclusion, such as work, security, social support. The practice of urban life can transform the user into a person who appreciates what the city offers. However, in order to generate a sense of belonging, of a commitment to the city, it is not enough to be a user. There must be symbolic offers of belonging, a narrative which allows each person to identify themselves with the place - in other words, a ritual of territorial inclusion.

This is the issue that I will develop in my presentation, based on research done with my colleagues Sandro Cattacin and Bob White on the cities of Montreal, Geneva and Turin (Gamba, Cattacin, White 2021). Our hypothesis is as follows: in order to create civic engagement, commitment and an attitude of care towards the city, we need to love it and feel ourselves to be part of the territory that it is, we need rituals of territorial inclusion. Not only are they effective, but it also is of fundamental importance to offer them continuously in order to respond to the city, which is continuously changing through its demographic dynamics.

It is an offer, in other words, which must be renewed in such a way as to reassure those who already live there, but also those who arrive in the city.

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