THE MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF CONTEMPORARY URBAN SPACES. Implications for design.

PhD. Cecilia Scoppetta

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the emerging of the network metaphor

- since the early-80s: **shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist production** (from "tangible" to "intangible" goods) and profound structural change of economies/societies
- market internationalisation, multi-nationalisation of productions, and increasing mobility of capitals, services and competences aimed at innovation
- **techno-economic paradigm focused on information**
- «assonances» (Goodwin, 1984) with the results of scientific and technological evolution of the «network society» (Castells, 1996): during the 90s a **powerful network metaphor as «hegemonic image** to which re-led the understanding/interpretation (planning) of contemporary complexity (city/territory/society)» (Scoppetta, 2009).
- **effects of such shift on cities and metropolitan areas** extensively studied: often interpreted as the result of neo-liberal policies developed in order to support the wide reconversion process that started with the global crisis of the 70s (a new competitive scenario)
- what still remains too scarcely examined is the issue concerning the **effects of digitalisation on the urban space**

understanding the impact of digitalisation on urban spaces

- difficulties in fully understanding the real impact of digitalisation on the urban space: **two main interpretative errors** (Latour, 1991a; Avgerou *et al.*, 2004; Graham & Marvin, 2001):
  - confinating the analysis within **a strictly technological reading** of the digital dimension, moving from the assumption that an innovative technology can be simply intended as a mere replacement of the slower and less effective previous one
  - a persistent dependence from **analytic categories** used within the different historical (and spatial) conditions of the pre-digital age
- both readings guided by the **idea of a substantial separation and independence** between the intangible dimension of technology and the tangible reality of cities,
- **a more complex interpretation** that considers the inter-relations between material and immaterial (space and cyberspace) remains largely unquestioned

rethinking traditional interpretative categories

- a large part of what happens into the cyberspace is **deeply influenced by material practices**, imaginaries, social and economic relations occurring in the material space
- what the two readings tend to ignore is that an essential implication of globalisation consists of an **increasing digitalisation of the urban dimension**
- this highlights the **limits of a mere topographical representation**, and forces us to rethink our traditional interpretative categories and operative tools (Scoppetta, 2011).

co-existence of the material and the immaterial

- the matter in hand does not consists of **a certain resemblance between virtual and real spaces** (or between virtual spaces and the imaginary of real urban spaces)
- the question rather is to highlight **the emerging of a new multidimensional nature of urban space**
- i.e.: the **co-existence of an immaterial component that is incorporated into the material**, and cannot be intended as separated from the materiality of places
- the limits of a topographical description/interpretation precisely lies into the incapacity to **capture such multidimensionality through traditional categories** that are still based on a rigid and unfruitful separation of material and immaterial

physical places with a global span

- what we perceive as local can be interpreted as a **micro-environment having a global span** for its high/low degree of inter-connection: each object that can be mapped as a place through a topographical description of its materiality is (can be) also **a part of a long-range reverberation**
  - **international finance** (highly digitalised global activity) and (very material and local) **real estate**
  - immigration, with its internet point and money-transfer services: **elements of wider territorial systems** supporting larger networks and diasporas –understanding the **disperse circulatory nature of contemporary territory**, a new constantly re-territorialising plurality
  - a "**centrality**" (i.e.: a place of concentration high-level functions, as in the case of CBD) can be no more a geographical centre with a specific physical shape (concentration of office buildings and skyscrapers into the inner city): business activities may have a disperse physical shape – the (concentrated) CBD in Chicago and the (disperse) Sylicon Valley

political implications_1

- some elements of the urban topography as the spatialisation of global and digital dynamics: the political dimension of the issue precisely **lies in their nature**
- two different possible directions of investigation:
  - assumption that such dynamics are essentially **market-oriented**, with consequences related to the privatisation of urban public spaces, social exclusion, segregation, spatial control
  - increasing **use of digital modes by social movements** and political activists (traditionally, strictly linked to the immobility of the local dimension): networks of activists interconnected through the web and **inserting their specific local territorialised instances within broader de-territorialised global circuits**.

political implications_2

- a renewed **relevance of social and political movements** in the construction of urban space: the immaterial dimension cannot leave out of consideration the materiality of the city (rather than the national level) as **the main space of political action** (also in the case of international finance)
- **Greece**: the digitalisation of global finance has led to a semi-bankrupt

but also

- the mobile synergy of SMS, alternative websites (such as Athens Independent Media Centre) and social apps have played a relevant role as **useful tools** of communication and information exchange during the struggles in Athens

but

- urban space and its uses remains one of **the main stakes (and outcomes) of the conflict**: free-zones in Exarchia

implications for planning/design_1

- **ITC real-time maps** representing multiplicity and movement of the city
- privileged technology: **mobile phone and GPS**, whose users are unwitting drawers of thematic maps with space and time coordinates (construction of a platform for collecting and exchanging data)
- control and management of specific phenomena (**traffic or concentrations related to particular events**)
- controlling and managing the **unpredictable «hypermobility» of contemporary urbanity** (result of the individualisation of working arrangements producing new «nomadic workers» with their «office on the run»)
- within traditional top-down planning/decision-making (**participation is anaware**)
- "**dark side**" : potential of controlling spaces (and also people).

control of urban flows

- the **Real Time Rome project**: aggregated data from mobile phones interpolated with traffic information:
- a representation of the (otherwise elusive) "**urban ubiquity**" deriving from an **"hybrid" inter-connection** between people, places, and technological infrastructures (between "static" and "fluid" urban elements)
- **fluidity** given by the time coordinate: allows to represent
  - **daily rhythms** of a neighbourhood,
  - if the organisation of public transport effectively mirrors and answers the **real dynamics** of movement and/or concentration
  - **behaviours** of specific groups (e.g.: tourists) or of the "**urban organism**" as a whole during a special **event**.

mapping collective emotions

- the map based on the use of mobile phones in different moments of the **final match of the FIFA World Cup** in 2006
  - representation and individuation of **places in which people was concentrated**
  - phases and trends of **collective enthusiasm**, i.e.: the map is able to represent the different intensities of (collective) ***emotion***.

On the "WikyCity Project", developed at the SENSEable City Laboratory of the Massachussetts Institute of Technology, see: http://senseable.mit.edu/wikicity

implications for planning/design_2

- social software and related **virtual communities**, i.e.: groups that differ from the traditional ones for both the lack of face-to-face contact and the use of technology as preferred tool: interpretation of **virtual "places" as public space**
- references:
  - Harvey's definition of space (2000) as «**predominantly social construction**»
  - Lefebvre's dialectical triad of the «production» of urban space (1974) (**material space, representation of space, spaces of representation**): space as a tangible place of experience, as a conceptualised mental space, as an interiorly lived space through emotions, desires, imagination, and memory
  - Lynch's study (1960) on the imageability of the city and the ways in which people, through their informal understanding, thought about its structure **in terms of their own movements and opportunity to act**

(virtual) community building

- fruitful design approach as it can be referred to an idea of **public space as a «construct»** (Pasqui, 2001) – or as «**activated construct**» (Weik, 1969)

- 2 different design levels aimed at **translating the interaction in more or less transformative consequences** about a place and based on the existence of an **identitary link** between the virtual community and a specific place (e.g.: daily living environment of the components of the community)

mapping spatial practices

- 3 levels:
- **1** the construction of the virtual community moves from **a map which is shared online**: emphasis not so much on the ability to reproduce specific real places in the virtual space by replicating them but on the possibility of using the potential, given by the interactions and feedbacks of social softwar in the **construction of social capital:** *Twinity on-line community* http://www.twinity.com/

- representations **collectively constructed** online representing places that are understood as subjectively experienced, perceived, desired, i.e.: by including the "thickness" of a narration, or of a spatial practice

constructing participation

- **2** cooperative needs of mutual exchange or specific problems or claims: express **a certain degree of potential design** and can result in **participative planning processes**

  references to:

  - Lynch's «**good city form**» (1981)
  - the mainstream of **community planning**
  - «**identitary maps**» of the "territorialist school" (Magnaghi, 1990; 1998; 2000) aimed at creating synergies between **"expert" and «local knowledge»**

seeking consensus

- 3 **institutional** online representations used within "communicative" processes too often aimed at **seeking consensus** around essentially top-down decision-making processes in which participation mainly tends to be seen as «**exit**» (as in the case of audit or similars) and not as «**voice**» (Hirshmann, 1970)

  e.g.: *i-neighbors on-line community* (http://www.i-neighbors.org) or *Peuplade on-line community* (http://www.peuplade.fr/).

implications for planning/design_3

- experiments focusing on **the unexpected emerging of a place** to which further **temporary meanings** are given thanks to their "construction" through an online interaction
- "**flash mobs**": the **sudden and temporary concentration in a public space** of a large number of people, which is activated through a **flow of communications** via web or via mobile phones, in order to play an **unusual or extraordinary action**, and then to disperse
- virtual communities, established from a shared interest (not from a place), that meet or organise an **event** into a real place

references: the **Situationists**' practices stressing the relationship between events, the environment, and its participant (see: Debord, 1994).

re-inventing territorial meanngs

- what prevails is an occasional and temporary character and the **lack of any identitary link** between virtual community and real place

- expression of instances and needs of the Castell's **«spaces of flows» rather than of «space of places»**

- virtual/real relationship referred to **a network of places** (not a single site): not the daily lived neighbourhood dimension, but **crossing** (and linking together) different spaces as a **discovery/invention of innovative territorial values and meanings**

- emphasis on spatial experience as **artistic practice** and on a **playful inter-action**

temporary virtual/real links

- the design dimension expressed through **a post-representational map** that is not assumed to be mirror of the world (it does not describe and explain it), but rather to **produce (to re-create) it by making propositions** («the construction of meaning as a basis for action»): attracting, even if for a short time, the **collective attention on a particular place**
- socially constructed (Harley, 1989) , «**dialogic, polyphonic and multivocal**»: the writing the heterogeneity of (collective and individual) "histories" and narrations onto the multiplicity of contemporary urban geographies
- «mobile subjects» **in a constant state of becoming**: the digital de-materialised component provide these post-representational maps of a sort of **instantaneous connective echoes that amplifying the organised event**

project as a hybrid device

- conceptual implications of taking the multidimensional nature of urban spaces, and the different ways in which such multivalency is expressed highlight the **shift in understanding the meaning of contemporary design**

- it can no longer be simply intended as configurative of spaces, but rather as an **interactive and hybrid device**, which is able to accommodate the categories of both **the social and the natural** (Latour, 1999), and to generate **not necessarily predictable processes** through the establishment and widening of an always changing network of **interconnections between subjects/objects/discourses**, who interpret the transformation/invention of a space as an opportunity for the *mise-en-scéne* of its own instances

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!