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Architecture and the Social Sciences

Inter- and Multidisciplinary Approaches
between Society and Space

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Contents

Part I Prelude

- 1 **Cities Help Us Hack Formal Power Systems** 3
Saskia Sassen
- 2 **Art, Contemporaneity, History** 13
Marc Augé

Part II Possible Dialogue Between Social Sciences and Architecture

- 3 **If It's Space, It's Social** 21
Fernando Bagulho
- 4 **Interdisciplinary Relations Between Social Sciences
and Architecture: Tensions, Ambiguities
and Complementarities** 33
Maria Manuela Mendes and Teresa Sá
- 5 **Architects and Anthropologists: Rapprochements
and Estrangements in the Study of Vernacular
Architecture** 51
Marta Lalanda Prista
- 6 **Contemporary City and Plural Knowledge: Reframing
Urban Planning** 69
Luis Balula and João Seixas
- 7 **Harveyan Utopian Thought and Social Justice:
Approaching Public Space** 85
Márcio Moraes Valença

Part III Architecture, Politics and Social Change in Urban Territories: Critical Perspectives

- 8 Society, Space and the Effects of Place: Theoretical Notes and Results of a Sociological Research on Social Housing in the City of Porto** 99
Virgilio Borges Pereira
- 9 Architecture and the “Right to the City”: The IBA Hamburg as a Case for Critical Urban Studies** 121
Frank Eckardt
- 10 Visualizing the Urban. Tools for Interpreting and Representing Milan Change** 137
Rossella Salerno
- 11 Participatory Approaches in the Qualification of Semi-urbanised Peri-urban Areas: The Case of the Odivelas *Vertente Sul* Area** 151
Isabel Raposo, José Luís Crespo and Joana Pestana Lages
- 12 Questioning (in)Equality. Insights from a Community Kitchen in a Migrant Squatter Settlement in Greater Lisbon** 177
Joana Pestana Lages
- 13 A Sociology of the Camps’ Persisting Architecture. Why Did Rome not Put an End to Expensive Ethnic Housing Policies?** 197
Gaja Maestri and Tommaso Vitale
- 14 Housing Policies for the Urban Poor: The Importance of an Interdisciplinary Approach. A View from São Tomé** 219
Ana Silva Fernandes

Chapter 10

Visualizing the Urban. Tools for Interpreting and Representing Milan Change

Rossella Salerno

10.1 Building an Image of the City: The Milano Porta Nuova Project

The intention of this paper is to enquire into the significant contribution played by images and representations in the decision making processes and building phases of a new urban space. The term 'visualisation' in the title highlights the fact that in the multiplicity of places in the institutional debate and elsewhere messages are transmitted by figures who work together to sharpen the focus of desires and images and, lastly, urban imagination. It is well known that the urban studies approach to the city has for some time been to see it as the outcome of physical and social space. As Lefebvre repeatedly argued, alongside concrete spatial forms, objects which can be mapped, the physical spaces generated by societies, there is a second type of space structured mentally or cognitively which takes the form of systems of signs and symbols 'elaborated intellectually' first and foremost by means of written and spoken words. It is the dominant space in any society, the space in which power and ideology manifest themselves and take shape. Edward Soja's critical theory, which makes explicit reference to the work of this French scholar, added another interesting analytical category to Lefebvre's physical and mind spaces, one which relates to lived space, the fruit of social practices and real spaces in the material world of experiences and their coming to fruition. In this analytical perspective, the lived space integrates the physical and mental dimensions of space generating a symbolic use of its objects and building symbol systems and non-verbal signs.

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In this third category—*Thirdspace*—as theorised by Soja, I would argue that images tend to take on an increasingly important role for their ability to bridge the void between real time and imagination, the ability to generate meanings and significance in the social space.

Another analytical reference which will be taken into consideration focuses on the ‘immaterial components’ which play a decisive role in the organisation of urban space. In more recent times Amin and Thrift’s approach has encompassed new practices capable of throwing fresh light on urban phenomena. The question which these two British scholars have posed as incipit to their book *Cities* is: what are cities now? How can we represent them? In addition to the social dimension and physical factors Amin and Thrift argue that other components are also to be taken into consideration: “Cities (in the past, too, but much more evidently today) are made up at the same time of a great variety of ‘other’ elements: technologies (especially those which make long distance interaction possible), images, representations, procedures, organisational frameworks, software [...]” (Amin and Thrift 2001). This interesting and relevant openness to the role played by technologies—and digital communication technologies in particular—in social and urban space formation processes prompts a widening of the field of enquiry to include the imagination and proactive dimension which takes shape in the web sphere. Social actors, communities and societies can in fact employ technological mechanisms in relation to the diverse political and cultural conceptions too. The issue of the creation and pervasiveness of images of the city on the web combines with the web’s collective imagination database and, more generally, with our multimedia imagination which represents the outcome of the sharing of events and visibility regimes strongly conditioned by TV (Mapelli 2010).

One last necessary introductory reference is based on those whose approach to technology is not simply a matter of their practical applications. While technologies may effectively constitute solutions to real or apparent problems, make our lives more pleasant or straightforward and our cities more ‘smart’ or safe, it is also true that to some extent we cannot escape being drawn into their orbit and power to contribute to improving urban societies (De Waal 2014). Thus in setting out its subject matter this paper will also pay attention to the relationship between technologies and urban images and the role that these new means of communication can play in urban communities. It is, however, evident that the diverse levels and multiplicity of image and debate generation spheres which combine to build a social space which is both perceived and imaginary at the same time, impact on both opinion formation and, to an even greater extent, on decision making processes.

On the basis of these critical insights the aim of this paper is to put forward the case study of a recent urban transformation in Milan—the Porta Nuova project—focusing on the way a city image proposed by investors and the local government takes shape both in terms of its reception in ‘residual’ debate contexts and especially in the social media and on the web. The project put forward here as a case study involved the renovation and redevelopment of a huge area of Milan, the Garibaldi Repubblica area which, though in the city centre, had effectively been abandoned for more than 50 years. In town planning terms the work designed to

“Renovate and redevelop the areas situated in the Garibaldi—Repubblica zone” required an amendment to Milan City Council’s Local Strategic Plan. An integrated public and private action plan for the development of the area was drawn up with the objective of creating a prestigious and important development both institutional and otherwise for Milan and Lombardy: the new Lombardy Region headquarters, the city council offices and other public bodies covering a surface area of around 220,000 m²; a Fashion, Design and Communications City on a further 110,000 m²; the ‘campus’, i.e. an urban park inspired by the very best international models. This redevelopment also took on improvements and rationalisation to the existing infrastructure re-organising the road network, creating green areas and public facilities for the use not just of the area itself but for the whole community. Residential buildings covering 15,000 m², hotels on a further 15,000 m² and exhibition spaces (20,000 m²) were also planned and have been partially built.

In more general terms, as well as being adjacent to the city’s historic centre, the area is easy to access from both the city and the wider area, i.e. from other parts of Milan centre. The sponsor and principal investor was the Hines Group—Intelligent Real Estate Investments. The Lombardy region and Milan city council took part in the development of the project as public bodies thus obtaining decision making power over the redevelopment of a key part of the city with private resources including a share of the resources needed to build their new headquarters. In 2003 the area’s three main segments (the institutional centre, the Fashion City and the Campus) were put out to international contest: the Giardini di Porta Nuova (Campus) contest, the regional headquarters contest (Polo Institutionale) and the new Fashion City masterplan.

The overall cost of the operation has been estimated at €2,500,000,000. These figures provide an overview of the operation which will be described here above all in relation to the following points which develop the issues set out introducing this paper:

- the building of an image of change and design in a large public area—support for a real estate operation and the creation of a new city skyline;
- the way the area was represented in the communications strategies of both investors and the city council;
- the dissemination of ‘dominant images’ and the appearance of ‘residual images’ as a contemporary iconographical process.

In his *Milano e il suo Immaginario in Milano Porta Nuova: L’Italia si alza*, edited by Luca Molinari and Kelly Russell Catella, Luca Doninelli wrote: “I very soon realised that the idea underlying the Porta Nuova project was not simply a matter of urban building just as its relevance was not specific to Milan. It was a global idea of Italy, its strength of character, its traditions and obviously its future” (Doninelli 2015). This sums up the *leitmotiv* of the whole real estate project. This paper will attempt to set out the various pieces which the individual players contributed to the complex, composite mosaic of this urban change proposal. Contributions to the implementation of the Milanese project were many and varied.

First and foremost it was Gerald and Jeffrey Hines who decided to invest in one of the few large spaces available within a European metropolis. Their vision for Milan was set out clearly in the words of one of their developers, Michael Topham: "Being a developer in the Hines world means being capable of dreaming and what we brought to Milan was precisely this: the ability to dream what most people cannot even imagine" (Topham 2015). Topham then went on to say that achieving this objective required developing a successful project involving putting oneself in the shoes of those who walk along the area's road with their children, trying to imagine what it would be like to spend time in and live in the area.

If this is, in fact, one of the most complex and multifaceted projects implemented in Italy since World War Two it is also true that the project has also been given an overall unitary framework consisting of building a large scale public space capable of linking up three Milanese districts—Corso Como, Isola and Gioia-Repubblica. The project area, as referred to above, is central and served by three transport networks—metro, bus and train—and its proximity to the historic city centre and large size give it strategic importance and the space for a large park. On one hand the aim of this project was to combine history, urban and architecture traditions and innovation, on the other hand it raised the issue of looking closely at those quarters of the city overlooking this large decayed area, redesigning its borders but at the same time looking after people in "a new district which was to dialogue with the historic centre, finding its own personal space sensitively in the midst of historic buildings" (Catella 2015). Thus the attention paid by the project to public spaces, or rather the relevance accorded to them, was the Porta Nuova project's starting point and enabled it to meld the three districts mentioned above into a single open space unit with links to the rest of the city. This also enabled a strategy targeting the public dimension to be drawn up recognising the crucial importance which open spaces play in the quality of life. Flow distribution and access were carefully analysed, users identified and relationships between full and empty spaces and type of area use analysed with the final aim of achieving excellent quality of living standards in the area.

From 2005 onwards three internationally important architecture and town planning studios began work on redevelopment projects for the old Garibaldi-Repubblica railway station: the Gehl Architects studio in Copenhagen for the research into the type of public spaces to be used in Porta Nuova; the London EDAW studio for landscape consultancy; Milan's LAND studio with an intermediary role between planners—many of whom are foreigners—and local players and interested parties with the role of local architect translating international design styles into local language. The overall structure of the project comprised four skyscrapers, a retail park, luxury urban accommodation and a number of other public and private buildings. The project as a whole was named Porta Nuova and overall governance was entrusted to American architect Cesar Pelli. The following is an overview of the architects who developed the various parts of the project together with the names of their work: UniCredit Headquarters/Pelli Clarke Pelli Associates; La Corte Verde e Isola 8/CZA Cino Zucchi Architects; New apartments in Corso Como/Muñoz + Albin Architecture and Planning inc.; Fashion and

Design Museum/Grimshaw Architects; E3-West/Michele De Lucchi; Office buildings 3-Est/MCA—Mario Cucinella Architects; Stecca 3.0—Incubatore per l'arte/Stefano Boeri, Gianandrea Barreca, Giovanni La Varra; Porta Nuova Edifici E1 E2/piuarch; Hotel "F"/Valentino Benati.

A number of these projects—some of which have not in fact yet been built—resulted not simply in changes to the area in which they are located but also to a city skyline which had only few tall buildings previously—Torre Velasca, Torre Branca, Grattacielo Pirelli. The overall view of the city for those arriving, for example, by train at Milan's Central Station is a city which, in contrast to 10 years ago, is dotted with skyscrapers packed into a relatively small area in the context of the overall size of the city and which emerge from a fairly compact urban fabric. Certainly this marked change is the result of a 'renewal' strategy which has impacted on the whole city. The vision which the whole Porta Nuova project has attempted to bring to fruition is on one side a new city and on the other a city capable of balancing vertical buildings and horizontal public spaces. This latter theme is taken up energetically in the volume referred to above by Molinari and Russell which describes the project in a multiplicity of voices: "It is two years", wrote Molinari, "since the Porta Nuova project area opened to the public. [...] What immediately struck me was the simplicity with which thousands of people visited the place, where the shops had not yet opened, in a constant flow of families, individuals and youngsters curious to see the buildings that had so quickly occupied a place in the skyline over Milan, giving rise to differences of opinion between those who protested against the colonization by globalised works unrelated to the context and those who instead gazed with interest on what was perhaps finally solving one of the city's great urban problems" (Molinari and Catella 2015).

A number of themes which are central to the development of this real estate project emerge from Molinari's comments:

- the building of a dominant image identified with the creation of a large urban public space;
- the role of the work in changing Milan's skyline and thus generating a new overall image of the city;
- the debate between 'innovators' and 'conservatives' which has reverberated extremely in the internet.

This is the way in which questions linked to the new image that the district was to give to the city emerge from the 'strategic actions' of another of the project's centre stage players, Manfredi Catella, Hines president and chief executive officer in Italy: "Before the first bulldozers set to work preparing the ground for this great project, going against the normal Italian way of doing things Manfredi Catella wanted to create a place in which everyone would be able to find out about what was soon to take place on the site by means of a model, a large animated rendering and written texts" (Molinari and Catella 2015). Fondazione Catella's communication strategy worked on multiple levels: first and foremost, the use of rendering designed to provide an image of future and change reinforced by the depiction of

happy people as a backdrop to the architecture itself and as framework to the new public space. It also involved making a large model to be placed in the Fondazione's venues whose aim was to present the project in the concrete form which is more accessible to a 'non-expert public' and enabled the general public to gain a very clear idea of the urban changes which the Porta Nuova project intended to promote. This great mock-up showed the strategic solutions implemented very clearly: the way in which the void between the district and the rest of the city was to be dealt with and the building of a new fulcrum in city life, Piazza Gae Aulenti, a radical change in the city's symbolic layout.

After work finished Manfredi Catella commented on the work thus: "Absolutely the most important thing is to go to Piazza Gae Aulenti, take a seat and, as we did more than once, people watch. This element is the measure of success (...) Seeing people take over this place (...). Porta Nuova is a bridge just like the one which once linked Corso Como and Via Borsieri (...) The site is becoming an icon: you see it in communications, in advertising campaigns. I recently went past the cathedral and saw a large poster inviting passers-by to go up onto the roof to admire the new skyline (...) Italy is going through a period of profound cultural transition and at such times positive symbols showing the country's ability for innovation and top quality and not only examples of bad management are important" (Catella 2015). For Manfredi Catella Italy has in the past taught the world how to build extraordinary cities and innovative infrastructure and thus the time is ripe to renew this great tradition and transform the country into one of the world's most important town planning and architecture workshops. This is, in essence, the image that Porta Nuova, this symbol of virtuous public-private partnership, is sending out Italy wide and beyond.

Mayor Albertini's institutional support for the project and vision is in line with those of Hines and Catella: "Architecture", argued Albertini, "is the art which brings everything together: painting, accountancy, capital and politics. All the great architectural work done over the centuries has been done for clients, be they popes, states or the communities they represented. I like to think that what has happened over these nine years has been a little like this. This area of Milan is now packed with absolutely top level urban quality. If you go to Piazza Gae Aulenti you feel like you're in New York!" (Albertini 2015). The vision of the project and the city has, moreover, been amplified by Fondazione Catella's communications strategies which are illustrated here in the words of Kelly Russell Catella herself after work began at the Varesine site: "The first narrative strategy was giving the work a single name and making it into a logo which would be recognisable over the inevitably long time frames in which the people of Milan would see only bulldozers, cranes and foundation columns (...)" Porta Nuova was the name of a historic Milanese gate which is still standing, the name of that ancient entranceway to the city and its evocative power made it the perfect symbol for the whole area's urban redevelopment. "As far as the logo chosen is concerned", continued Russell Catella, "it conjures up the image of a gateway and a leaf symbol to represent the project's civic, infrastructural and environmental sustainability" (Catella 2015).

The second narrative strategy paid a great deal of attention to the phase of work which involved the whole area from 2007 onwards making it the largest urban building site in a historic city centre in Europe. Right from the start the objective was to set in motion and keep active a communication channel which enabled citizens and media to gain an overall vision of the project, of the meaning of what was happening, and follow progress.

10.2 The Dissemination of ‘Dominant Images’ and the Appearance of ‘Residual Images’ as a Contemporary Iconographical Process

But parallel to the official version of the project’s promoters, both public and private, a considerable number of other images, bearers of approaches and opinions which were not always in line with the project’s powerfully innovative messages, were disseminated on the theme of the transformation of the Porta Nuova area and more generally on ‘Changing Milan’. Photographer Gabriele Basilico, who died prematurely in 2013, created a full-blown photographic account of the seven years of transformation in the project area, first by photographing the abandoned areas waiting for work to begin and then the various building phases until work was virtually complete. Basilico had already developed an interest in the urban landscape in his valuable photographic work and this came across very clearly in his comments: “If we look at the city as a great body to be observed with nearly scientific curiosity there is also a waiting period, a space to listen to what is to come, something which is ahead of us but as yet invisible, ready to reveal itself if questioned or observed in the right way. [...] What interests me constantly, almost obsessively, is the contemporary urban landscape, the social and aesthetic phenomenon of the great, rapid, irrepressible changes under way in the planet’s cities, and I think that photography has been and will perhaps continue to be, an especially sensitive and effective way of registering this” (Basilico 2014).

In addition to the critical—and not purely documentary—role played by Basilico’s photographs, other, slightly marginal but no less interesting, debating spaces can also be detected. In the academic sphere the focus of Milan’s urban transformations has coalesced around the embryonic Urban Simulation Workshop at the Politecnico di Milano, founded in 2007, which focuses precisely on Porta Nuova. To monitor this great project with new tools Peter Bossellmann was invited in as visiting professor on the basis of his experience in similar workshops in both Berkeley, his own university, New York and in Tokyo. The building of a great mock-up of the area on a scale of 1:500 was an occasion for interest and experimentation sponsored and encouraged by the manager of the Milanese workshop, Fausto Curti, who died prematurely a few years later. This three dimensional representation which grew out of a two dimensional photo, i.e. a huge photographic image of the area seen from above, gives a feel for the dimensional terms of the

impact of the planned building work, the relationship between vertical and horizontal development, the heart of the project which, as we have seen, focused on redeveloping a vast public space. The objectives of the Urban Simulation Workshop are education and experimentation, but on more than one occasion representatives of the city government involved in the development and implementation of the project were called in. The approach that the workshop's activities intend to sponsor in particular is generating effective images which ordinary people can identify with without indulging in the attractive but often not lifelike images disseminated by the official communications machine.

In recent years the building of an image of 'Milan in the Future' has also taken the form of digital maps providing social and up-to-date insights at least equal to those taking place in the main European metropolises. Of these the images of the city in areas popular with tourists and residents drawn from Twitter accounts in various languages by Erich Fischer are worthy of note. Before we look at what happened in the debate around Milan's urban transformations on the web, however, it would be useful to make reference to certain useful analytical parameters in order to limit our discussion to the themes dealt with by this paper.

We will hand over the task of gaining an insight into this world, then, to L.E. Gries who has analysed the dissemination dynamics of web images in an interesting paper called *Computers and Composition*: "Images, like music, often circulate across a wide and diverse range of physical and digital ecologies once they are distributed in networked pathways (Hawk 2011). As images enter into new associations and transform in genre, medium, and form at seemingly simultaneous rates, divergent materializations emerge with time and space. [...] With the proliferation of the World Wide Web, social networking sites, weblogs, digital file hosting services, YouTube, etc., the rhetorical force, circulatory range, and dynamic transformation and transfiguration (change in functions) of images only intensify" (Gries 2013). This American scholar's approach to the issue offers interesting insights with which to follow the development of rhetoric which, on the web, is built and disseminated with widespread use of images. In some way the 'iconographic tracking' of image flow proposed by Gries to monitor transformations in meaning contributes to turning our attention to social life with a special focus on the collective experience of images after they are taken and initially circulated, the rhetorical component and persuasive ability of images to take meanings on board, their tendency to unpredictable transformations, differentiations and variations thus revealing that their meanings have never been stable (Gries 2013).

In general, the images of the city on the web are sponsored by many discussion forums in which photos illustrate comments. Whilst images, and thus urban images, travel in all directions on the web gathering consensus and dissent, they are fed by discussions and comments which can send them off into not always predictable directions. Media and cities find common ground on the web: the *Skyscrapercity* site which polarised interest on a great many urban elements has hosted a lively debate on the case of Milan, on the subject of the intense building activity in sections of the city and the birth of a new skyline. The public has not simply made comments but also taken an active part in uploading images and expressing

judgements and opinions through them, making international comparisons or rejecting the new architectural solutions on historical grounds. Images and comments interact giving a fragmented and multi-faceted image of opinion groups and individuals. Images and communities thus interact taking on representation and communication dimensions and creating new collective imaginations.

Let us try here to gather together the threads of a 'work in progress' debate on Milan city integrating references to the Porta Nuova project. Of great usefulness in projecting ourselves into this world of images and urban imaginations is the video, posted in 2007, on the *SkyscraperCity* page "MILANO—progetti approvati" (<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=419468>) with a title which is in itself replete with images of the future, "Milano domani—Milan tomorrow". The video shows the most significant work of the last ten years: Porta Nuova and Citylife, Santa Giulia, the Renzo Piano project for the Falck area, the Portello area and the smaller settlements which have so far not been dealt with in official reviews. Documentary care and technical skill are the features of many of these projects which have developed their own communication channels dedicated to web users. The urban image which emerges is coherent with the message of the bulk of contemporary urban transformation projects, a varied and attractive representation of Milan as the city of the future to be put forward and supported. Information technologies contribute to rendering the result persuasive rather than concrete, both allusive and elusive at the same time. Images are packed with shiny surfaces and clear glass. Vegetation is equally pervasive, proliferating, flourishing and verdant in buildings which always appear ultra new. The impression given is of environmental condition and imaginary visibility simulations. The use of 'iconic canons' aims more at a high degree of consensus than providing information. The images seem to interpret and reiterate architecture slogans exalting technological progress, concepts which spring from the pages of the specialist press, celebrating light weightedness, transparency, innovation, naturalness, sustainability. The vision which emerges is of a 'touched up' city requiring a more circumstantial and self-aware approach.

An interesting phenomenon is that relating to image 'migration', namely their transfer from official contexts to more marginal channels, web sites used by amateurs or laypeople. The *SkyscraperCity* web community mentioned above clocked up an average of around 300 users and message volumes of over 26,000 during the building of the Porta Nuova Garibaldi project. The Porta Nuova project story told in a Hines film on the company site (<http://www.porta-nuova.com/filosofia/>) also appears on anonymous user channels (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5389KuXpYk>) and in advertising by the studio which was entrusted with this role by Hines (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWWr6v-eAQc>). What is interesting in these 'minor' channels of communication is the presence of opposition voices and criticisms of the official vision which highlight the limitations of the architecture and city planning solutions chosen and focus on hidden aspects. Comments of this sort, drawn from the *Vivi e progetta un'altra Milano* discussion channel are commonplace: "Certainly... and do you think that the fabulous bird's eye views of the project with happy people strolling through an enormous park with

birds cheeping is an objective vision rather than an advertising campaign... WAKE UP!" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96HLTmZ-Tu8>) (Romanato 2015).

The communications structure of the web has a proliferation effect which derives from its technological characteristics. Thus messages are interpreted and disseminated at the same time as images which enter that flow space which juxtaposes with physical space and interacts with it. The critical comments on the subject of the liberal rhetoric sponsored by the large scale urban work done in the Milan area are numerous. The following illustrate themes which are commonplace and reiterated:

If building skyscrapers means 'Americanisation', 'emulation' then I agree with you!! If building skyscrapers is an intelligent way of building whilst leaving space for large green areas and not building over more and more land, then I welcome them. If others have got there before us, we're the ones who are too dumb to have got there sooner and who are still eating up land which seems even more wrong to me! (posted by "dreamjay" on 12.12.08)

Enough of this provincialism taken to extremes! We're an OLD and STATIC country. If we don't get a move on we'll end up like Greece, a Disneyland invaded by tourists who come here, take a photo in front of some ruins and then go home.... (posted by "franxit" on 11.12.08)

I think the problem starts much earlier than this and is a matter of Italy's inability to attract the big multinationals and their offices. Years ago I saw that in comparison with other countries and G8 we were in numerical terms really at the bottom of the pile—and even more so if we consider the relatively large size of our economy. (posted by "Xesar" on 05.04.11)

But the point is that Milan has been rebuilt before as well. Just remember that, by contrast with many other Italian cities, the Roman city—which was one of the Empire's great metropolises—was practically taken down brick by brick leaving almost no trace. It is a historic tendency of this city which economic development and war have certainly sped up. Today much of the work—including those posted—keep the city alive in continual renewal. What are rules for? I mean, a little flexibility increases the real estate value of property making its redevelopment paradoxically easier and more straightforward. (posted by "Eddard Stark" on 25.07.07) (Romanato 2015)

The debate has been continually supplemented and equipped with images which taken together show the extent to which the city is always under observation by means of photographs. These forums, including *MILANO|Foto*, *MILANO|Aggiornamento vari cantieri* also demonstrate an interesting point of view of the city which do not show up on the official communication channels. The web communities dealing with city related issues and urban transformations in a way which is very different from generic communities or social media resort very frequently to image based communication. The traditional communicative value of photos is here supplemented by the dynamic nature of inter-subjective communication between users targeting mutual exchanges of information, interpretations and comments operating on a prevalently ironic level. In other words it is evident that this medium contributes to generating and nurturing a user contribution continuum the outcome of which is the formation of social know-how which finds expression here. Thus building designs, panoramas, views and single photos converge in an image of the city, passing messages and contents on in a continuum with an urban

debate whose knowledge or criticism connotations would not otherwise come to the fore.

A relevant issue revolves around the immediate and widespread availability of urban images as the following post seems to synthesise:

Thanks to everyone for the wonderful photos and updates but these two are incredible*-* *-
* *-* I love Milan and you have no idea how much I'd love to live there. (posted by "nossiano" on 05.05.14).

The suburban dimension of the subject is thus projected onto the symbolic-emotional status of belonging to a community. In other words technological progress allows a demand for belonging to an urban dimension to be satisfied via the web without the need for full-blown citizenship, taking a purely social media part in the city experience.

The Porta Nuova case which emerges here only implicitly is emblematic of a vaster interaction dimension between urban images and web users which we could interpret as a social image building phenomenon. The attribution of personal and collective meanings is channeled into judgments on the city and its places, alternating positive and negative opinions, doubts and certainties and thus a debate on the city's future. It is in any case a fragmented collective imagination in which uniform aspirations amongst the multitude of subjects is difficult to detect. It can, however, be useful to take up the gauntlet of this challenge from below, from a variegated social urban image construction in that it is revealing of a dimension of the relationship which unites citizen and city. Direct and deeply felt expression of individual and group preferences prompt reflection on the ways in which emerging social demands sometimes conflict with the establishment's holographic constructions.

10.3 Conclusions

The objective of this paper has been to develop considerations on the main transformations which have taken place over the last ten years in Milan city under the aegis of Porta Nuova. The critical approach adopted is drawn from that sector of urban studies which looks at cities as the outcome of dynamics which encompass both physical and social spaces and focus in particular on the social practices which this dialectic develops. In analysing the ways in which the area studied has changed as a result of large scale real estate investment both public and private, the main focus of the paper has been the symbolic use which has taken place in the site, the building of a system of symbols and values belonging to the 'immaterial' sphere which have in any case played a decisive part in urban spatial organization. The paper has attempted to give a view of the plurality of approaches to the formation of a new urban image by the project's stakeholders, citizens and users and lastly by the new digital communication channels.

Communication technologies in fact play an important role in social and urban space formation as they are capable of conveying an imaginative and pro-active dimension via the web including alternatives to the establishment view. With the term 'visualising' chosen for the title of this paper the intention has been to synthesise the diverse processes which have channeled images, ideas and visions of the future of the city of Milan. The specific case of the Porta Nuova project has taken on an importance which goes beyond the district dimension, however vast in size, and communicated the desire for investors, the local government and part of public opinion to generate a new way for Milan city and Italy as a whole. The role of representation and images has been central to this process: from the vision of web debate promoters in which a 'desire for city' has taken shape which has showed itself capable of generating new scenarios via non official channels.

A demand for a sense of belonging to an urban dimension which is not always coherent with full-blown citizenship seems to have emerged from blogs and dedicated debate forums giving free expression to an essentially social media involvement in the urban experience. In other words it would seem to be possible to argue that these new channels of communication, nurtured over time by a continuity of intervention by users, contributes to generating knowledge which takes the explicit form of social image building—or a plurality of urban images. In this sense the analytical parameters at the heart of this case study could usefully be employed in parallel enquiries on other large scale urban transformation work at least on a European scale, the dimension which Milan city belongs to.

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