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Feltrinelli Camp

Researches and Practices
for Urban Futures

a cura di
Paola Piscitelli

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UTOPIE

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About this book

The first edition of Feltrinelli Camp took place on February 16th and 17th, 2018, two days of closed-door workshop in the field of urban studies. One hundred young researchers and practitioners with international background gathered into the large luminous space of the multifunctional hall in Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli to discuss the present and future of cities. Eight thematic tables were the center of the exchange of research and professional experiences, as well as of discussion and debate, issues, mapping exercises, sketching, generation of new ideas, claims and arguments. The eight working table attempted to conceptualize proposals for solutions to crucial problems affecting our cities. Each thematic table corresponded to a theoretical and practical challenge to be solved in relation to 8 selected issues:

1. Envisaging fairer diversities;
2. Realizing potential urban landscapes;
3. Making the city through housing;
4. Regenerating the city as a common;
5. Planning the immaterial city;
6. Designing new naturescapes;
7. Pushing the borders;
8. Framing mobility as a spatial capital.

Following on the first volume of the publication upon the critical positioning of the Coordinators chairing the working tables and the reports of the debates occurred over the two days, the present volume collects some of the most interesting reflections, practices, cases studies and research projects proposed by a selection of promising, international junior scholars, researcher and practitioners.

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Feltrinelli Camp

Researches and Practices for Urban Futures

Alessandro Frigerio

Breeding Common Grounds. Metropolitan Agonism in Sub-Saharan African cities

A few weeks after the Feltrinelli Camp roundtable on ‘Pushing the borders’, I’m walking around the Oraba check-point, where a tarmacked Ugandan road turns into its dusty South-Sudanese counterpart. The border stretches in a valley bottom carved by a small river finding its way to the Nile. Somewhere behind the hills on the left there’s Congo. The checkpoint is not as militarized as expected, people now cross it on foot without even being checked. Someone tells me “we are the same people”, opening a confused sequence of questions.

Political boundaries here are quite recent and they rarely correspond to local cultural ones. Lugbara people and other ethnic groups traditionally inhabiting this region found themselves split across different national modern states imposing exogenous laws and foreign languages. However, being deeply culturally rooted, the pre-existing social structures survived to all the erasing attempts and, in 1993, were finally incorporated in Ugandan constitution as cultural institutions. Formal and customary borders, norms and rights inconsistently overlap in a tangled interlace that is difficult to penetrate from the outside, but that apparently keeps contemporary Uganda together.

What brought me in the West Nile Region is a Capacity Development Studio organized by UN-Habitat and Politecnico di Milano in cooperation

with the Ugandan Ministry of Land Housing and Urban Development and Arua municipality. Due to its strategic position, Arua is a rapidly growing cross-border commercial centre and an important base for international organizations dealing with the crises of neighbouring countries. In Arua District, 23% of the population are refugees (more than a million in the whole West Nile Region), towards whom Ugandan attitude is inclusive. Progressive policies allow refugees to work, get services and move relatively freely, a way for the government to make them contribute to the expanding economy (while getting international recognition).

Arua municipal borders are much smaller than the regional and international socio-economic dynamics affecting the town. Government's plans present it as one of the ten urban centres to become a *city*, in accordance with the proposed decentralized development of the country. Its boundaries will be enlarged and infrastructure enhanced with a focus on air and rail connections. Yet, expanding and growing, Arua will need a broader integrated territorial vision to foresee its role as regional and trans-national hub.

The current discussion on the African Continental Free Trade Area and Protocol on Free Movement of People will probably push this perspective further and the borders wider.

However, innovative planning and governance tools to address the complex transformation of these territories are lacking, as well as local human resources to develop and implement them. The speed of the urbanization process is already threatening existing socio-ecological assets. Which shared concept of publicness to agree and build on as robust structure for a sustainable development in this tangle of borders? Two interlinked research pathways.

First, appropriate mapping. Knowledge and awareness on the inter-scalar interdependencies matching urban spaces and economic and socio-ecological values should be improved by data collection and effective

visualization to understand existing and potential cross-borders relations (intending any kind of administrative, cultural, psychological borders). Innovative digital interactive tools could have a crucial role in this effort, turning maps into decision-making platforms to harmonize intangible assets and physical infrastructure through scales, keeping together metropolisation and local cultural patterns.

Second, capacity development. Supporting and facilitating intercultural and interdisciplinary training occasions is crucial to foster local inventiveness towards original solutions. In rapidly transforming contexts, the contentious nature of publicness requires breeding common grounds by revealing the overlapping of multiple porous borders, values, and patterns of care. Rising awareness and enhancing specific skills could trigger agonistic pluralism among urban actors improving urban resilience.

In Arua, with a multicultural multidisciplinary team we started from water, the strongest value crossing borders and compelling to take shared decisions. This resulted in the intention of the mayor to set up roundtables with neighbouring colleagues to discuss shared water-related policies and in a number of ideas on how to deal with water scarcity and food security while improving public spaces with the help of communities. Visualizing and discussing the nature of borders was a first move to reveal and build on common grounds for envisioning sustainable futures.

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first and foremost a matter of thinking, as others have put it, an intellectual venture, engaging, radical, and capable of critically propose ways of dealing with the troubles of our generation.

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