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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

Alice Buoli

Counter-narratives of diversity: some insights from artistic co-productions in the urban and digital public space

In his lecture for Feltrinelli Camp 2018, Mike Raco¹ discussed mainstream understandings of urban diversity in European cities, exploring the manifold connotations of local social imaginaries, the economic and cultural conditions under which these are produced, and their potential effects on relational interactions in contemporary urban contexts (Raco, 2018).

Along with the risks connected to over-simplification of intercultural urban diversity, the increasing political and institutional (*in*)*visibilisation* of new citizens (Heller et al., 2017) and the diffusion of binary representations of human mobilities are among the most compelling concerns at the centre of civil society debates and urban research agendas in Europe and beyond (Gilligan & Marley, 2010).

Participants in the “Envisaging Fairer Divercities” working group at Feltrinelli Camp 2018 have been engaged in a proactive discussion on these issues, which can be synthesised around two interconnected themes and challenges:

1. Rights, Narratives and Public Engagement: how to overcome existing cultural paradigms and stereotypical representations of migrations and migrants, to enhance the political engagement of old and new citizens in the public urban arena;
2. Emerging Communities and Place-based Interactions: how to support positive encounters among emerging communities to cope with changing welfare conditions and social mobility in cities.

These two trajectories find a potential common horizon of research inside the creative field in the form of collective cultural and artistic practices in the (digital / urban) public space as opportunities to deal with emergent plural demands and social imaginaries performed by increasingly diverse urban societies.

Indeed, over the current and the past decade, a growing number of creative practitioners, citizens, activists, and researchers have been performing new imaginaries and representations of diversity through artistic and cultural interventions.

Some of these initiatives – often related to independent or public-funded programmes at the intersection between academia, art practices and human rights activism – appear particularly relevant as regards three complementary dimensions: a) the co-production of narratives, research methods and media of expression involving actors with very diverse backgrounds and expertise; b) a cultural / conceptual perspective in which all actors involved are seen as *active subjects* of the creative process, and not as “objects” of research; c) methodological approaches based on *praxis*, performance, inter-disciplinarity and new media.

Among many, a significant example is the “Fadaiat”² artistic project and cycle of events organised in the years 2004-2007 across the Strait of Gibraltar (Spain-Morocco) by a transnational network of activists, artists and citizens. The project mapped, imagined and co-produced a new (physical / digital) territory across the strait that questioned and subverted the divisions imposed by the border (DeSoto & Buoli, 2017).

Another case in terms of “aesthetics dissensus” (Amilhat Szary et al., 2016) is the “Mapping Europe. A remix Project”³ (2012-2014), funded by the European Cultural Foundation, which has involved 50 young media makers with a migrant background from four countries (Spain, Poland, the UK and Turkey), with the aim to deconstruct existing imagery of migrants by adopting a visual “re-mixing” methodology (Doc Next Network, 2014).

Similarly the “Migration Trail”⁴ project developed by the Rotterdam-based office Killing Architects has explored the potential of fiction and real-time narratives about migrations through a multi-media interactive platform following the journeys of two migrants travelling to Europe across the Mediterranean.

These few samples suggest and invite for new research and strategies of intercultural interaction and reciprocity through contemporary and collective artistic co-productions to question existing dominant social and political imaginaries of diversity and provide new opportunities of public participation and social agency for citizens, researchers and intercultural policy-makers.

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Notes

1. Chair of Urban Governance and Development at the Bartlett School of Planning.

2. http://www.hackitectura.net/osfavelados/txts/fadaiat_2004/fadaiat_cronica.ht

3. <http://www.docnextnetwork.org/remappingeurope/>

4. <https://www.migrationtrail.com/>