

POST(COVID)CARDS

Seeing the city

what motivated you to initiate these projects?

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SUBMISSIONS



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THE URBAN TRANSCRIPTS JOURNAL

ABOUT US

with Nausicaa Pezzoni, on mapping perceptions of European cities

1. Could you describe your project on mapping perceptions of European cities by people with migration backgrounds, and

The project of mapping the city through the hand drawings of migrants aims at exploring an emerging issue in the contemporary governance of a city that is increasingly inhabited by transitory populations, namely, how its new inhabitants relate to the urban landscape. I have chosen to focus on people with migration backgrounds as exemplary of this transitory

living, and of a relationship with the city more characterized by assigning meaning to urban spaces rather than appropriating them. In anthropology and sociology, the literature on the meaning of life as related to movement and instability is extensive and by now consolidated. From Bauman's liquid modernity to Sennett's exile man, to Attali's nomadic man, some descriptions have taken on the role of mapping our era.

In urban planning, however, movement and temporariness remain under explored. Planning tools are still oriented towards permanence. Moving populations urge urban planning to update this consolidated paradigm based on permanence. The first motivation to initiate my research sprang from this consideration.

2. What motivated you to choose the medium of cognitive maps to open up a dialogue with research participants? I started from the hypothesis that rethinking the city, and any attempt to consider temporary living in urban planning, cannot be separated from the observation and experience of people who live under the condition of transiency. How migrants

represent the city also provides an opportunity to listen to people who are at the same time "guests" of the new city and are architects of its transformation.

I have chosen the medium of cognitive maps as the most adept instrument to bring to the surface the lived space of a transitory living, both in the mind of those who draw and in the resulting drawings. Giving the pencil to the newcomers means giving them the possibility to propose their ideas of the city through its representation, as the representation itself is expected to produce a particular vision of reality, in contrast to a scientific,

objectifying vision, which sees the map as a reflection of reality. It is a reason linked to the need to introduce new tools in order to read the contemporary city, as well as to expand the audience of subjects who can express an idea about the city.

"How does a stranger build an image of a new city?", I have proposed an empirical research using and adapting the medium of mental maps first introduced by Lynch. Indeed, the question suggested by Lynch seemed to be very current in the city nowadays and had never been answered since it was asked.

Starting from the question asked by Kevin Lynch sixty years ago to deepen his study on "The image of the city" (Lynch, 1960),

European cities represent the landfall territory, the threshold to cross and a place to live in. They also represent a place to build a new idea of the city itself, and of the society that could be. In the framework of an epochal migration crisis, my research took on an ethical aspect within urban policies. Maps become, in this context, tools to try and describe European cities differently from how they have always been represented and conceived. A migratory phenomenon of unthinkable proportions until ten years ago found in Europe inhospitable land, unable not only to host the populations that press on its

borders, but also to see their possible contribution in the wider horizon of ideation and planning. As such, maps represent a city knowledge device in terms of building of a new awareness of the city itself.

immanent condition.

perceive cities of transit?

their connection to the city as well as their personal history?

3. Based on your research, what do European cities represent for migrants?

A new project was conceived, "Migrants mapping Europe", aimed at applying the method introduced in Milan to other Italian and European cities, starting with the exploration of Bologna and Rovereto. This is the second phase of research, aimed at incrementally building a European map of the present time that brings to surface the meaning and forms of the first landing and of the transitory living conditions in the territories of contemporaneity. 4. What were your expectations at the beginning of your project? Have they changed whilst carrying out research? If so, how?

At the beginning of the research project, I did not expect the reaction received from of almost all the participants who were asked to draw their cognitive maps. However, the initial disorientation, disbelief, incomprehension, and often the interviewee's resistance to draw, progressively disappeared. It was replaced by the surprising acceptance of that improbable challenge, which induced 150 migrants to a creative observation of the city, fully participating in a project that had no purpose that was immediately evident.

What I understood and changed whilst carrying out my research is the necessity to project the interviewee into the current

experience within the landing city, without looking back towards their past experiences, but rather focussing on their

When, at the beginning of the survey, some participants were asked to speak about their backgrounds, their migration journey, their past, before drawing the map, those migrants found it impossible to draw any map, at all. Looking at the city they currently live in was actually the only way for them to be able to draw. It has proved to be a determining factor for the actual creation of the maps, and it has further convinced me that it was much more critical to invite participants to think about their current living conditions, rather than asking them to look back to their personal history.

I try to speak about the kind of participation involved in this experiment, and about its significance from the newcomers' point of view. Amidst widespread and growing efforts to conduct participatory research, this survey has a particular goal, that is to offer a possibility for migrants to appropriate the city by recognizing their relationship to the urban space. Through their drawings of the map, they develop their sense of belonging to the city. The representation of the urban landscape drawn by

migrants who are trying to find their bearings in the city is an act of self-organization within the landscape. The action of imagining and drawing the urban geography corresponds to the act of mentally inhabiting the city and in this way taking

5. How do you ensure inclusion and participation in your projects? And how do you create a safe space for individuals to share

possession and transforming it from a space of estrangement into a space which is more articulated and complex, where even a person who has recently arrived can conceptualize and live within it. This is the reason why it is important for migrants to look at the city and not to look back at their history. We can say that the exercise of mapping makes explicit the act of taking to oneself to a space which, no longer about an estranging experience, becomes a space open to unpredictable inhabiting conditions. There is an ethical reason for this kind of participatory process. It is the opportunity to listen to participants' point of view with the intention of building a level of equality between the expert and the disorientated gaze: It is an attempt to overcome the prerogative of power over the other that has always divided those who belong—to a territory, to a right, to a system—from those who are excluded.

I chose one map of Bologna, one of Rovereto and one of Milan, which are the first three Italian cities included into the project "Migrants mapping Europe". These surveys are going to be published in the second edition of my book with the title "La città" sradicata. L'idea di città attraverso lo squardo e il segno dell'altro" [The Uprooted City] (2020, O barra O edizioni, Milano)

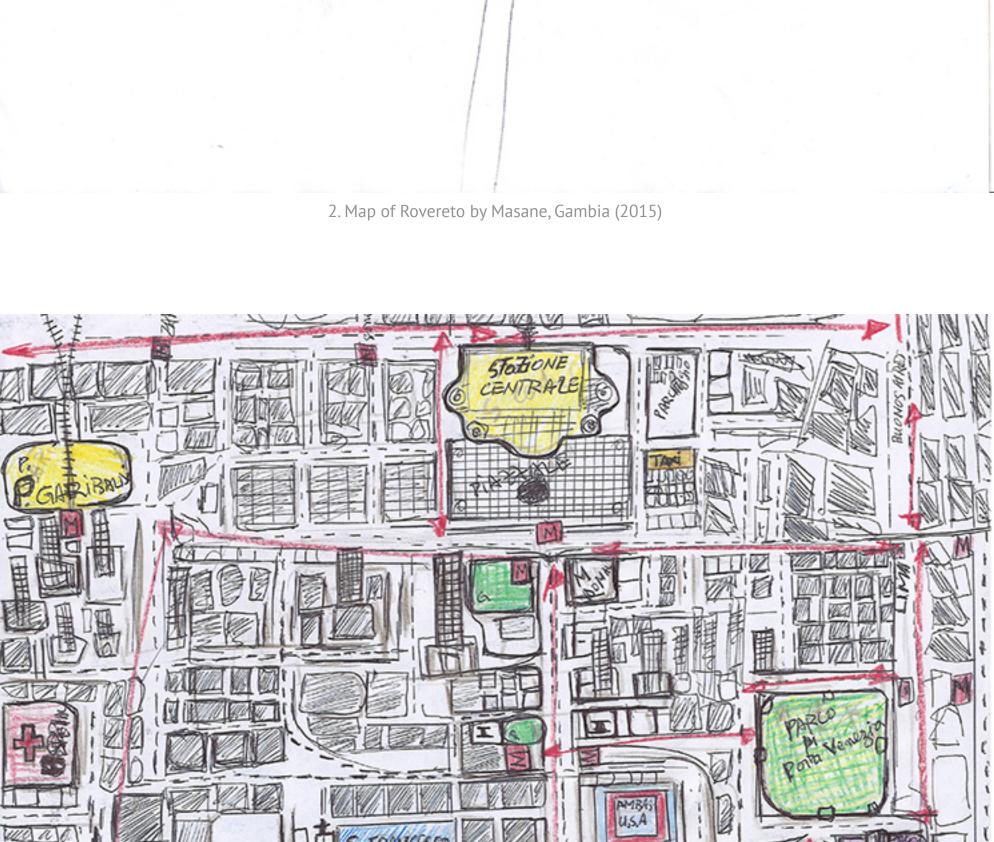
6. Could you share three maps that convey a particularly strong visualisation of how people with migration backgrounds

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3. Map of Milan by Ako, Togo (2011)

7. Your projects have investigated and voiced migrants' perceptions of several cities, how were these settings similar and

In all the cities so far involved, the sample of interviewees included people from all over the world and who had not yet

The instruments used for each interview were a sheet of A4 paper, pens, crayons and markers, which were left on the table

available to the interviewees to choose the most appropriate graphical tools to draw their map. On the back of the map,

settled in the city. Thus, they had a mobile point of view, characterized mainly by instability.

current condition, to open up a reflection on the arrival city.

where they were attending an integration program with local associations.

newcomers were asked to write their name, age, country of origin, the location of their hometown, and duration of stay in that The interview also included information, if participants were willing to share, on the migratory path and the current working situation, to build a more complex picture of their condition. However, as I was saying earlier, the survey did not focus on the

reasons for migration, nor the living conditions in the original country; the idea was to bring the newcomer directly to his

The locations of interviews were different in the various cities, depending on the context in which the research originated. While in Milan they were chosen to reflect the heterogeneity of places where newcomers have their main activities, in the other Italian cities, interviews took place where the group of participants involved lived (Bologna) or where they attended

8. Who would you say is the target audience of your work and how has your work been received so far? At the beginning I thought I would address my work to urban planners. In fact, I used an interdisciplinary method to

investigate the city, other disciplines were interested in opening up a dialogue with my research. Serveral discussions, in Italy and abroad, found food for thought and fertile ground for cross pollination in the areas of geography, anthropology, sociology,

and the sciences of representation, in addition to the field of urban planning. The workshops I developed in the different

cities are the results of these cross-pollinations. Recently, I took part in a seminar of postcolonial studies and it was on this

school (Rovereto). In Paris, a group of people with migration backgrounds was interviewed at the École Normale Supérieure

occasion that I conducted the last workshop with migrants in Paris. 9. What are going to be the next developments of your projects?

The next developments of "The Uprooted City" are to map new cities, with the idea of changing the point of view on Europe as a whole. My hypothesis now is to propose an idea of Europe whose identity is not predefined. It is the possibility that its representation could be transformed by the observation of migrants, and it is the idea and the wish that Europe may be able to transform itself in relation to the foreigner who is coming. It is a hope that migrants could induce each city to represent itself with another map, in a framework oriented not to speak in the name of the other, but to allow the other to lead the narrative of the city.

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an urban planner at the Metropolitan City Authority of Milan and a researcher on the new forms of welfare for the contemporary city, and on migrations and new urban geographies with a specific focus on the relationship between new inhabitants and space through

the representation of the city. Alongside this she is an adjunct professor in urban design at the Polytechnic University of Milan.

Among her recent publications are: "La città sradicata. L'idea di città attraverso lo sguardo e il segno dell'altro", O barra O edizioni (2020); "The image of the contemporary city: migrants' maps to explore today urban landscape", Ciudades (23) (2020); "Entre politiques d'accueil et régénération urbaine. Le projet Maisons audelà-du-seul à Milan", Metropolitiques.eu (2019); "An inclusive, multilevel planning experience to regenerate Milan metropolitan peripheries", In: Planning for Transition [Conference Proceedings] (AESOP, 2019); "Abitare i margini, progettare l'accoglienza", *Ibidem* (2018).

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different from one another?

city.

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