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Gypsy Palaces: A New Visibility for the Roma in Romania?

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Over the last 25 years, a new type of dwelling has spread in some Romanian cities and peri-urban belts; the so-called Roma or Gypsy Palaces. Roma/Gypsies have been considered for centuries as a foreign, vagrant and poor outcast ethnic group that should be educated and eventually assimilated. After 1989 they became a 'discriminated minority' deserving of pity and help. The numerous imposing and flashy buildings owned by nouveaux-riches Gypsies, although often unfinished and empty, challenge the main stereotypes afflicting Roma people, those of poverty and vagrancy. These palaces are still considered as typical productions of an exotic 'Roma ethnic culture'. Such a culture is in fact being constructed by activists and various political institutions in the name of a political Roma ethnic minority. Rejecting such an outdated culturalist/ethnicist and essentialist approach, I see the 'palaces' as the mere and common expression of recently acquired wealth and of the desire to belong to the new rich cosmopolitan élite. Hence in my view, Roma palaces are foremost a symbolic way of affirming one's new social status. They are not particularly Roma.

Keywords: social representations, new urban dwellings, Roma, stereotypes, ethnicization

When Romania joined the EU in 2007, 19 non-Romanian minorities – that is, 10% of the population, regrouped in a *Council of National Minorities* – enjoyed a very liberal status, allowing them to create their own political parties, to appoint deputies and to develop cultural activities with the financial support of the Government. A special unit had already been established in 1997 at a governmental level to facilitate the development of these minorities: the *Department for Interethnic Relations*. Education played an important role, mainly for the conservation and the development of the vernacular languages. The differences among the so-called ethnic minorities and the titular Nation (the ethnic Romanians) were, as a side effect, reinforced due to the application of this kind of political model of multiculturalism. Competition among the minorities themselves was also stimulated. As positive as this discrimination can be, it remains discrimination. At the level of stereotypes and common attitudes, such a policy has not brought about a greater sense of equality. Many surveys conducted after the fall of the Ceausescu regime on intercultural relations in Romania, including a research project I directed during a period of three years with colleagues in that country (Poledna, Ruegg and Rus eds 2006), have confirmed the permanence of ethnic stereotypes. Hungarians for example are still considered as hard workers; Roma are instead seen as lazy and dependent of Government subsidies, not fit for sophisticated jobs, to name but a few.

In addition, the vast movement of temporary economic emigration of Romanian citizen from Romania to the Latin Western European countries has provoked another chasm. Following some widely echoed acquisitive crimes perpetrated by Romanian Roma in Italy, ethnic Romanians challenged the new name given to Gypsies: Roma. Indeed, in Western

Europe, all Romanian citizens were taken for Roma. It is a matter of fact that the reputation of Romanians in general has suffered a lot from these events. It is not infrequent, even amongst an educated population in Western European countries, to find this sort of confusion; Eastern Europe and Romania in particular hitting only the front page for scandals of pollution, corruption or other kinds of crime and catastrophe.

Another side effect of the multicultural model, as we shall see, is the ethnicization of research itself. As a consequence, research focused on particular minorities as if they were not a part of the national community and had no common history and memory, particularly a long common socialist, and fascist interwar past, affecting them all, not to mention their shared Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman history. Hence many anthropologists, either locals or outsiders, taking the ethnic groups for granted and homogeneous, produced very good pieces of ethnography indeed, stressing ethnicity and what is supposed to characterise each minority, according to the old traditional culturalist model. In addition, sociological *intercultural research* has too often been limited to superficial reciprocal analysis of representations, conducted with written questionnaires or calibrated interviews. Research on Roma ‘identity strategies’ are mostly linked with how they declare themselves in the census, or with which religious affiliation they choose, but rarely rests on their habitat.

In Eastern Europe, Roma are a popular example of an exoticizing process. In the specialised literature, they are described as eternal victims of the bad ‘Romanians’ who first ‘enslaved’ them (Pons 1995) and later ill-treated them (Fonseca 1995). One should recall that Vlachs (= ethnic Romanians) were equally ‘enslaved’ by their landlords, Romanian or Greek Boyars and monasteries, and that there was no Romanian Nation, in the modern sense of Nation-State, before the middle of the 19th Century. Furthermore, Romania, with its present borders, including Transylvania, was created in several steps following the *Traité* of Trianon (1920).

This is why a purely ethnic approach is not appropriate to tackle issues such as Roma/Gypsies and their housing, be it a tent or a palace. My intention here is to analyse the flourishing of Roma/Gypsy palaces in Romania as a socio-economic phenomenon, rich with symbols that of course have to be interpreted but most importantly must be linked with the striving for a new social status (Bourdieu 2001: 281-323) rather than with the demonstration of typical ethnic traits. Despite the visibility of these palaces and their glamour, they are diverse in styles and uses, reflecting diverse groups of Roma following different models and different strategies in different cities of Romania. Moreover and most significantly,

Roma/Gypsies are not the only ones to show off through the possession of individual monumental buildings. Instead of taking these 'objects' as expression of Gypsiness, as it is done by many ethnographers, architects and the media, I argue that they must be placed in the context of a larger claim for social recognition, by an élite which follows the old pattern of new rich behaviour. This process can be observed elsewhere, in the United States as well as in many newly rich countries, as for example Kazakhstan: the bigger the house one can afford the more esteemed one will be. The use of eclectic architectural elements as well as the references to world known historical monuments of architecture can be observed everywhere in every revival monument. Nobility needs a remote origin to be recognized. 'New rich behaviour' knows neither border nor time limit. It is on this common knowledge about newly wealthy communities or families and my personal observations that I build my interpretation. In this article, I have no pretension to propose more than a re-interpretation of the symbolism of Gypsy Palaces, in a non-ethnic perspective. At this stage of my on-going research I am not in a position to develop the comparison with new rich dwellings outside of Romania.

If informality is part of the stereotype afflicting Roma/Gypsies, housing is not the most studied topic concerning them. The main reason is that in the social imagination of researchers and journalists they are still nomads living in 'informal shelters', tents or carriages; if sedentarized, they live in 'miserable huts' which do not even deserve the name of houses (Ruegg 1991). It is not surprising either that the surveys and research about Roma/Gypsies, particularly in Eastern Europe, are mostly devoted to topics related to their poverty of which housing is only one aspect. Poverty goes well along with the 'informal economy' they traditionally practise. Their poverty is attributed either to an adverse past (Ruegg 2009a and 2009b), made of exclusion and serfdom, or to present discrimination. These long-lasting stereotypes about Roma/Gypsies, which help to create their ethnic identity, make it difficult to speak about rich Roma, as it is about those who quietly joined the average middle class, sometimes called the invisible Roma (Ruegg and Boscoboinik 2009). These Roma are either ridiculed for escaping their 'true identity', i.e. ethnic poverty, or rejected by their communities as traitors to their ethnic group.

Moreover, it is no longer politically correct to declare that Roma/Gypsies are responsible for their situation of poverty and discrimination, as it was the case for centuries, when assimilation was the principal policy chosen to eradicate poverty and difference. This policy was still applied in the 1970s in Switzerland towards the Yenish, a rather sedentarized group of Gypsies, whose children were placed in foster families or institutions in view of

eliminating what was considered to be an inappropriate socio-ethnic legacy. But the new fashion for multiculturalism imposed mainly by the European institutions and money on the freed Eastern Europe States has provoked a radical turn in policies addressing Roma/Gypsies. In post-socialist States, minorities are now benefiting of a special status and sometimes even political representation in Parliament, as it is the case in Romania, which enhanced the construction of ethnic communities. On the one hand these minorities distinguish themselves ethnically from the titular Nation; on the other hand they are supposed to become homogeneous social groups, as if ethnicity was a strong enough factor to abolish the internal differences. In the case of the Roma, such differences concern mainly language, religious affiliations, type of labour and traditional occupation assigning the sub-groups names, wealth and the level of education.

Before delving into my topic – rich Roma houses as a challenge to informality – I would like to discuss deeper the matter of the construction of the Roma community itself around poverty and discrimination. This construction ignores, as aforementioned, other groups who are either integrated and invisible or, on the contrary, very visible because of their ostentatious wealth.

The construction of a ‘Roma community’ around poverty, discrimination and solidarity

Poverty and discrimination are the classical western socio-economic notions used to describe different groups of Roma. Chosen indicators are generally limited to income, unemployment rates, housing, hygiene, health and education, to name a few, a highly ethnocentric perspective to which a humanitarian concern for ‘these poor and discriminated people’ is added to engage morally into action.

Contemporary anthropologists can easily recognise here the same *miserabilism* or *bonism* that invaded anthropology when it had to come back home after decolonisation. Poor people were and still are our new savages. This is particularly true in urban anthropology because of the old North-American sociological heritage of the School of Chicago that almost exclusively paid attention to the marginals in the cities and to those citizens who embody the hobo-like individual – replaced in France by the SDF or more generally in Europe today, by the Roma.

On the positive side of the Roma stereotype, however, several social scientists¹ have pointed out solidarity as being one of the defining characteristics of Roma communities.

¹See among others Michael Stewart (1997).

Anthropologists here will again remember that the same had been said earlier about a variety of small, exotic, segmentary *traditional ethnic* communities or minorities, as if their very size would naturally engender solidarity and harmony among them. This stereotype applies particularly to Indian tribes of the Amazons who were seen as the perfect model of non-authoritarian societies in the 1970s². According to this social representation, such ethnic groups informally celebrate trust and solidarity which are mainly built upon kinship and alliances. Of course this adds to the claimed homogeneity of such groups. Yet, the problem lies in the fact that if there happens to be ‘solidarity’ among a particular community, and this term should still be looked at in a closer way, the construction of a global *Roma community*, based on such western-humanitarian values, is utterly misleading, primarily because there is no such thing as one Roma community. As documented already in the 19th century Ottoman Empire (Paspátis 1870), a strong rivalry separated nomad Gypsies from established Gypsies, the latter being blamed by the former to have mixed with the local (Bulgarian) population. Similarly, *Travellers* (Sinti, Yenish, etc.) in different European countries do not admit to having any link with the mainly Eastern and Central European *Roma*. In Switzerland, for example, local *Gypsies*, the Yenish, refuse to have anything in common with other Gypsies/Roma and particularly with Eastern European groups. They regard them as dirty and uncivilised as they often leave rubbish and disorder on their camping sites once they have left, which in Switzerland is considered as one of the main offence against Swiss traditions (these having been well incorporated by the Yenish). Recent events in Western Switzerland, amply related in the press, would confirm this.

Despite numerous initiatives launched by Roma and non-Roma activists over the last twenty years, aimed at uniting all Roma in a common ethnic/cultural community through the creation of a common language and a new common culture (Liégeois 2007), there is only a *community of fate* and not (yet) of *destiny*. In other words, the Roma common identity is a negative one. Since they are and have always been segregated in diverse ways, under different political regimes (Barany 2002), they are publicly recognised as a globally *discriminated minority*. This ascribed identity – used in turn by the Roma to gain public international attention – does not help to understand the social variety and stratification among diverse Roma/Gypsy groups.

As applied to the Roma, informality is in fact primarily linked with their legendary *mobility*. Mobility, associated with nomadic and/or a traveller’s lifestyle still represents the

²See the essays by Pierre Clastres (1977) or Robert Jaulin (1971), and others in France. However, there are many counterexamples and among them the famous Iks studied by Colin Turnbull (1972).

main ingredient for the construction of the image of the Roma, and even serves as a derivative for their ethnic definition, at least in Britain (Liégeois 2007). Despite the politically neutral connotation of the term ‘travellers’, or ‘gens du voyage’ in French, mobility has strong negative social implications as it is intricately connoted with instability (which contains the notion of unpredictability, a notion that in turn contradicts the very aim of applied political or managerial sciences). The concept of informality applies to social identities and how they can be essentialized when applied to the Roma.

Following classical theories of social representations (Jodelet 1989), informality can be seen as a major characteristic of the Roma/Gypsies. As Norbert Elias had observed for the court society (Elias 1969), social status depends mainly on public opinion or social representations of the majority. In the case of the Roma, informality applies to their identity and status, helping the construction of stereotypes and prejudices linked traditionally with informality. The fact that Roma/Gypsies mainly rely on informal networks and informal economic activities is also common knowledge. *Informality* is a part of their assigned and assumed identity and also contributes to forming the stereotype which has stuck for years; in the negative light of vagrancy and laziness or, positively, as the expression of their freedom and detachment from or even despise for ‘bourgeois’ values (Ruegg 2004).

Poverty as the expression of informality and the incapacity to manage one’s life has attracted much more attention from the scholars and activists than the informal networks linked with corruption and trafficking. However, as far as housing is concerned, the wild urbanisation or acquisition of properties by the new rich – Roma or not – has not hit the front page. For the Roma, informality is primarily a survival strategy in asymmetrical social relationships, particularly in economically difficult times. I also believe that *Roma informality*, as their major survival strategy, will not be recognised as positive as long as their social status remains as it is now, i.e. that of outcasts. But what about the rich Roma and their visibility? Do they correspond to the stereotype of informality or do they challenge it, as they challenge the stereotype of poverty?

Roma palaces as the sign of an unacceptable Roma establishment

I would argue that the visibility of new rich Roma in solid and ostentatious buildings, in Romania as in other Balkan countries, challenges the representation of their supposed informality and marginality. It also breaks down the stereotype according to which Roma can only perform survival economic activities and live in poverty. In addition, for the external (moral) observer, successful informality is immediately linked with illegality, which allows

public opinion to reject this 'exception', rich Roma and their palaces, into the criminal basket of outlaws.

Roma and informal housing

As far as Roma housing is concerned, the image of their nomadic habitat, a wagon or tent, reflects the same stereotype of informality. But even the habitat of sedentary Roma, the majority in Eastern Europe, is considered as 'informal housing' made of poor materials and located in peripheral *mahala* (quarters/sectors). However, since 1989, wealthy Roma in different regions of Romania have designed and constructed a new type of habitat, the so-called 'Gypsy palaces'.

These huge flashy, exotic buildings contradict the current stereotypes and renew tensions between the non-Roma and the Roma, particularly when they appear in the city centre. My aim is to analyse now how such wealthy Roma and their palaces challenge social representations of informality and marginality (poverty) attached to their (constructed) ethnic identity.

Wealthy Roma, owners of Palaces: who are they?

No more than any other group do all Roma belong to the same economic strata. Despite the poverty stereotype discussed earlier, Roma, as each ethnic group or minority in Romania, do have élites of different sorts. Some of them are integrated into the business and the political community. As it has been observed among the Roma, certain 'families'³ tend to monopolise some type of trade or occupation or even social behaviour. According to a research we have coordinated in Moldavia⁴, the new, innovative, intellectual and entrepreneurial Roma élites are almost exclusively recruited among the *Ursari* (originally bear showers). Others are more visible and constitute what the late Prof. Adrian Neculau (2009) called 'cardboard élites' using a metaphor underlining the artificiality or the bluffing aspect of their status.

In Western Romania, in the city of Timisoara, the owners of already famous palaces are all *Matase* which means silk workers. In Bucharest, *Caldarari* (cauldron or pot makers) are the owners of the palaces (Delepine 2007). Not all of them are rich or really newly rich; some gathered their fortune during the Communist times, notably by collecting gold and making other shady informal dealings.⁵ Although it was common for them to have

³I prefer to speak of families rather than clans, since these groups are not organised as traditional clans in the ethnographic sense but rather as extended families.

⁴See Neculau, 2009.

‘extravagant’ economic behaviours, spending fortunes in the blink of an eye – a kind of *potlatch* – these were punctual and could be attributed to their famous prodigality.

However, through the building of striking palaces, this new élite of Roma has attracted public attention mainly at home and also on the web. Like tribal societies, Roma are frequently used and misused by the media to show some extravagant or exotic features. After early marriage among traditional Roma/Gypsies (blacksmiths are among the most traditional groups, preserving their visible exotic identity and customs), luxurious housing has become the new exotic characteristic for Roma/Gypsies. But only a few socio-anthropological studies have been devoted to this topic.⁶

Why palaces?

As previously mentioned, Roma/Gypsies had no ‘real’ or at least fixed homes. Like other nomads of the Balkans, they practised a bi-seasonal type of dwelling: in the summer they would use removable (black) tents or their carriages/wagons. The wagon still figures as the ‘traditional’ shelter of Gypsies, although it has been totally abandoned in South-Eastern Europe for more than half a century. Actually, this mode of seasonal housing is or was very common in all pastoral societies particularly among Indians and Inuit or other groups of Eskimos (Mauss 1904[1960]). Temporary shepherd huts, made of straw, are equally observed by travellers and in use to this days in the entire Balkan regions.

What is important to recall from these descriptions is the negative image of improper, dirty, sometimes even underground holes, where people lived ‘like animals in promiscuity’. This is at least what one can read in the accounts of travellers in the 18th Century. Like the nomad stereotype, the miserable housing of Roma/Gypsies is still alive.

In the winter, however, they used to stay in ‘holes’ or so-called *bordei* – semi-buried houses. The latter have no ethnic characteristics and were inhabited by Romanians, Serbians and Bulgarians as well as by Gypsies in the plains along the Danube. Described several times by travellers and ethnographers (see, e.g., Stahl 1972) because of the strange impression they leave, their chimneys rising directly out of the ground, they are sometimes seen more positively. However many travellers note that when occupied by Gypsies these holes are in rather poor conditions:

⁵It is worth noting that a similar older new rich élite established in a *mahala* in Soroca, in nearby Moldova, started constructing palaces long ago.

⁶ Neculau’s interviews in Boscoboinik & Ruegg (2009: 84) offer good ethnographic examples.

Gypsies live even under the ground in pits above which they build a thatched roof. Their kitchens are located in front of the pit, in the open air (Taube 1777: I, 52; my translation)

The level of the house above earth depends on the type of soil they are buried in. According to some theories, the level would raise with time and a higher standard of life. *Bordei* would be the ancestor of earthen houses, made with diverse techniques of constructions⁷ even out of uncooked bricks.

Today in in the Balkans and more precisely in Romania, Roma/Gypsies are known to live in the *mahala* or peripheral parts of cities and towns, or even of villages. There are cases when they live in slums, but this has happened only after the fall of the Communist regimes. This means that they tend to live in communities, but not necessarily in one single Roma community. Many different scenarios are possible. In Transylvania, I have witnessed (Munti Apuseni) small communities living not far from each other, but having nothing in common besides the belonging to the Roma/Gypsy ethnic minority. The first was composed of well-off *fierari* (iron workers), working hard on different types of wrought iron, keys, horseshoes and mending diverse items. A few kilometres away I met a ‘very poor’ community of Roma, living in traditional local wooden houses which were falling apart (had they recuperated them from Romanians?) and begging each visitor. They were not inclined towards doing anything to repair a leaking roof or a falling window but would instead set plastic foil above their beds. Elsewhere, they lived as a community again, in simple wooden or mud house they built themselves and practised one of their traditional occupations: collecting iron, glass, selling clothes, etc. Some Roma/Gypsy communities in Romania are actually called brick-maker (*caramidari*) and exert this profession, making either uncooked or cooked bricks.

It is not possible to find a house that would be exclusively associated with the Roma/Gypsies. There is no typical Roma/Gypsy architecture, since they dwell in whatever type of house is available to them or, recently, if rich enough, ask architects to draw up the plans for their new palaces. Perhaps, then, the reason why they choose to build these so-called palaces today is to break completely from the constructed expectations of what *type* of housing a Gypsy would choose to live in or have built, considering their historic dwellings. As we shall see, it is also an attempt to join, symbolically, a cosmopolitan élite.

⁷ It can be a mix of clay and straw/manure simply piled up in layer or cased or even clay on wickerwork.

Gypsy housing in Communist times

The policy of the Communist regime towards Gypsies was to integrate them in the mainstream working class society, which was carried out in two ways. Sedentarization was a first objective, taken from older traditions going back to the *Aufklaerung* (Ruegg 1991). It is an obvious measure that has been used by all colonial and neo-colonial powers, in Africa as well as in Latin America, to civilise and modernise the ‘savages’. This process includes also a *normalization* of the house that consists mainly in imposing the use of solid materials: bricks for the walls instead of mud, concrete for the floors instead of earth and corrugated iron for the roof instead of straw or shingle. Under a regime that was keen to civilise Gypsies and include them in the labour force, one of the solutions was the constructions of the so-called blocs of three or more storeys, in which any workers would be housed, independently of their ‘nationalities’ or ethnic belonging. The history of soviet type architecture, from the time of Lenin to Brejnev has been largely described and can still be seen in the main cities of Eastern Europe as well as in the countryside where factories were newly established.

In Romania, ‘normalisation’ of the housing was a part of Ceausescu’s plan to eradicate the rural type of dwellings in order to transform (modernise) the design of habitat with the view of achieving the industrial revolution. However, the planned destruction of hundreds of villages never came through. What can be generally said about this period is that the forced assimilation policy helped to integrate Roma people into the general Romanian working class. As other citizens, they joined the newly created urban spaces and lived in the worker’s blocs. Having said that, let us try to identify new trends in Roma housing since the opening of the borders in 1989.

Using other people’s houses: informal settlements

This trend actually pre-dates the opening of the borders in Romania. The massive emigration of Germans from Transylvania started under the Ceausescu regime as early as the 1960s. The German government was actually ‘buying’ Germans to be ‘repatriated’. These Germans, settled during much earlier colonisation initiative from the Middle Ages to the 18th Century, lived mainly in towns and cities of Transylvania and the Banat. They left behind them empty semi-urban houses. Some were sold, others simply occupied by the Roma/Gypsies. Today one can still see Roma settlements in the fortified medieval villages of Transylvania, constructed by the Saxons in the 13th Century.

Modernised and Renovated Houses of Converts to Neo-Protestant Churches

Among diverse social changes that have occurred in South-Eastern Europe and particularly among Roma/Gypsies after 1989, conversion to neo-Protestantism plays a crucial role. These conversions have been covered by many researches, showing how converts would split from their previous community and create new ones based upon their new identity (Gog 2009).

One could be tempted to attribute new resources and renovated houses to the flow of foreign money channelled through the diverse churches these newly converted Roma families belong to. The reality is more complex. Some financial help may have originated from the US or from more global/international projects of help and development, but it is impossible to generalise. During our research in Romania we witnessed several cases of renovations of older Roma/Gypsy houses through their adherence to neo-Protestant churches. It corresponds not only to the access to financial resources, but also to the adoption of a new style of life, based upon classical Protestant (capitalist) values. This could count for a first exit from informality and poverty, particularly for pastors and leaders of the communities.

Urban housing

Here again it is impossible to draw a single line of housing policies and practices for and by Roma/Gypsy people. However, we can confirm that, in general, special parts of the city were traditionally inhabited by Gypsies in the margins of urban centres (Delepine 2007) and that, as elsewhere in the urbanisation process, they were pushed further out during the more recent urban developments and gentrifications. The very name of 'gypsy neighbourhood' does not mean that the majority of the population is actually Roma, nor that the houses were different from other houses in the city. It may simply have a depreciative connotation which refers to the poor conditions of older buildings. It is remarkable that in one particular city, Constanta, Muslim and Christian Roma do not occupy the same neighbourhood.



Image 1: Christian Roma Family Palace (Constanta) Photocredit F. Ruegg

Palaces

Since the fall of the former regime, Gypsy palaces have been built in every region of Romania. According to one of the few rigorous, though strictly architectural/ethnographical, studies of the palaces (Gräf 2002), all of them were only built after 1989 in Romania. However, we have been able to visit a Gypsy *mahala* in the city of Soroca in the North of the Republic of Moldova, where similar palaces have been built before this date. These palaces show globally the same features as the Romanian ones. They reproduce some famous historical monuments or imitate Western and Eastern styles, from French mansard roofs to Soviet triumphal youth palaces.

In Romania there is a tendency to build *à la française* in the West, near Timisoara for example, or to use a more Rococo style partly imitated from the bourgeois urban national Romanian style. Gräf also distinguishes the western palaces in Banat following western models (neoclassicism) that are both local imitations and more recent ones in Transylvania, following local models of architecture, particularly Baroque and Rococo churches built under the Austrians in the 18th and 19th Centuries. In Southern Moldavia they follow the Neo-Romanesque Romanian style from the beginning of the 20th century. Hence, Neo-classical

Gypsy/Roma palaces imitate Romanian bourgeois houses from the turn of the 20th century like they were built in Bucharest or in other big cities of the country.



Image 2: Roma Palace *à la française* near Caransebes. Photocredit F. Ruegg

However, according to Delepine, a French geographer who was able to interview the architect who drew the palaces of Timisoara, the latter copied the Royal Palace of Budapest, the Madeleine Church in Paris as well as Viennese and Bucharest models (Delepine 2007: 113).

One can identify other architectural styles:

- An ‘oriental’ style particularly characterised by the bulbous church-like roof with also neo-oriental furniture and decoration as observed in Soroca;



Image 3: Roma Palace in Soroca (R. Moldova). Photocredit F. Ruegg

- The Caransebes tin roofed (concrete and marble) houses which can be said Oriental too, or Rococo;



Image 4: Roma Palace in Caransebes (Western Romania). Photocredit F. Ruegg

- The new store house (in Constanta) belonging to ‘Turkish’ or Muslim Roma with a shop at the bottom;



Image 5: Urban Muslim Roma Palace in Constanta (Eastern Romania). Photocredit F. Ruegg

The symbolism and ornamentation of the houses are extremely varied and do not necessarily correspond to any particular architectural style. They tend to symbolise wealth and power in the form of the material used, white marble and the animals which are represented – lions, and eagles. Similarly, the emblems can be seen as astral (stars) or as a car brand (Mercedes), depending on the number of branches they show. The two can actually be mixed. A common feature of the palaces is the fact that they are unfinished and often uninhabited. The fact that they are empty emphasises on the one hand their symbolic value as pure representations of wealth, but can also be seen as the sign of an unsustainable wealth cut short.

Are these characteristics enough to give the palaces an ethnic identity? This is what Gräf tends to take for granted. Despite his very serious attempt to approach this new phenomenon, I do not share this view and consider it an old fashioned and narrow minded ethnical approach. His ethnographic bias, studying only the architecture of the new rich Roma, brings him to assume that Gypsies have built a typical kind of architecture that relates to, or even worse, that partakes in their ethnicity or culture. This resembles too much the national approach of rural architecture that has dominated the ethnographic scene for a century (Ruegg 2011). In addition, Gräf bases his analysis on another old fashioned ethnographic-folkloristic dichotomy, where culture is divided in two parts, the material and the non-material culture, and tends once more to essentialise Gypsies as a particular ethnic group. The fact that Roma are still often living in a separate district of the town is not enough an argument to establish an ethnic style of housing. Similarly, the fact that a majority of the palaces owners are *caldarari* and so tend to isolate themselves from the rest of the community does not give license to ethnicise the house style.

On the contrary, it is possible on the one hand to identify different styles corresponding to different models taken by the owners of the palaces. On the other hand, it is necessary to compare these ‘Roma’ palaces with other new flashy buildings in Romania and elsewhere. Since our research is still on-going it is not yet possible to demonstrate systematically that there are many other architectural expressions of wealth which are as kitsch or pretentious as the Roma palaces. A good example however is this neo-classic mini-palace built by a medical doctor which I found in Cluj. Through the chosen building materials (marble) and its neo-classic quasi temple design, as well as by its iron gates, it expresses also the willingness to be separated from the neighbouring profane world and to show off in the darkness!



Image 6: Romanian Palace in Cluj. Photocredit F. Ruegg

This is to me a strong argument in favour of interpreting palaces as a quest for a better social status, a process that can be observed among all new money élites and that has nothing to do with a Gypsy culture whatsoever.

Roma Palaces: A Sense of Misplacement?

Until recently, Roma/Gypsies were more or less invisible in the architectural urban landscape. As I stated before, having no specific architecture, they tended to disappear in the periphery of the cities or towns and villages, at least from the public conscience. They were visible only as social actors passing through the city, as craftsmen, salesmen, beggars or musicians. They would never dwell in the centre of cities and even less so in their historical sectors. This was but a tacit law, enforced by the tradition and the fact that Gypsies would not have the means to do so, nor would the authorities of the city, even in the Communist time, let them squat these urban areas reserved for the élites. The construction of palaces and the acquisition of important urban villas by Roma have to be linked with the advent of a free-market economy and the lucrative deals that were done then by the former élite members of the Romanian society who knew the rules and the ways.

As in other parts of Romania, the Roma of the Timisoara area are also building palaces on the outskirts of the city, in so-called Gypsy districts or along the main road at the exit of the towns. This is the case of the Palaces we have observed in Constanta (fig. 1) Caransebes (fig. 2) or Soroca (fig. 3). This practice may be more or less tolerated or seen as normal for a *Bulibashi* or a Gypsy King as it is the case in Buzescu, a village in the South known as the 'Home of the Roma Kings' and already reported on by the National Geographic

Magazine in 2012⁸. But the dwelling of Roma in the centre of the city of Timisoara and their acquisition of historical buildings has (and still does to this day) provoked many demonstrations of anger among the urban population of Timisoara.

It is their presence in an ‘inappropriate place’ in the traditionally bourgeois parts of the city that has created a row. According to the theory of symbolism expressed in *Purity and Danger* by Mary Douglas (1966), one will remember that it is not the essence of the object that makes it clean (= acceptable) or dirty (= unacceptable) but the shared values on what is acceptable and the sacredness of this consensus. Hence these palaces seem ‘misplaced’ (*déplacés*) in the moral sense of ‘inappropriate and sacrilegious’. In Timisoara they add to the already shocking visibility (a Roma should be invisible and vagrant) of their central place. The centre is still supposed to be reserved for well-established ‘indigenous’ or majority élites, or possibly to international companies. Since Roma have no urban history, their presence in historical parts and buildings creates in itself a scandal.

It is their *new* and *arrogant* – at least this is how it is perceived by the local population – architectural presence that seems to create a major problem. As it is for the resurgence of (Roma) beggars in post-modern Western societies, it is the challenge that their presence represents to our social representations and values that creates the obstacle. In addition, a *normal* Roma is supposed to be poor and to deserve at best our pity; a rich Roma is thus an abnormality that does not fit into the social landscape. Houses, even if unfinished and empty are more visible and stable than cars; no longer can the Roma identity be properly covered by informality or poverty alone. Around the globe new rich are showing (off) their wealth, particularly through their most visible acquisitions: cars, women and houses. Why should the Roma be an exception?

⁸ See the reportage by Tom O’Neill in the issue of September 2012.

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Symbolic Policies and Citizenship: The Case of Naples¹

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Drawing on the theoretical framework of territorial and urban governance, this paper focuses on changes in urban policies in Naples. Based on the analysis of three policies, it argues that: 1) the City government uses the rhetoric of urban change in the city to build political consensus; 2) the construction of such rhetoric is based on the involvement of the citizens through various tools and forms of participation, in order to create legitimacy around the work of the local administration; 3) the weight of citizens' participation in the governance networks and the substantive effects of this participation is minimal; 4) the shift from the rhetoric of the announcements to the implementation of the projects and measures leads to symbolic policies that do not improve the conditions of life of the population. Three urban policies will be compared. The first policy (the Bagnoli district) was started more than twenty years ago; the second (Historical Centre) started about fifteen years ago; the third (Free Trade Zone) never started but has fuelled a very lively and interesting public debate. These are three of the most important policies adopted by the City Council, and they have all had the same outcome: a difficult implementation that has thwarted their potentiality to contribute substantially to urban change.

Keywords: territorial governance, urban policies, symbolic policies, citizenship.

Introduction

Drawing on the theoretical framework of territorial and urban governance, this article focuses on changes in urban policies in Naples. Based on the analysis of three urban policies, it argues that: 1) the City government uses the rhetoric of urban change to build political consensus; 2) the construction of such rhetoric is based on the involvement of the citizens, through various forms of participation, in order to create legitimacy around the work of the local administration; 3) the weight of citizens' participation in the governance networks and the substantive effects of this participation is minimal; 4) the shift from the rhetoric of the

¹ A first version of this work was presented at the International and Interdisciplinary Conference on 'Issues of Legitimacy: Entrepreneurial Culture, Corporate Responsibility and Urban Development' (Naples, Italy, 12-14 September 2012). This article benefits from discussion and comments at the conference and from the peer-review process and feedback from this journal's Editorial Board. The discussion is based on the results of a research programme that I have carried out on urban changes in Naples over the last ten years. The first research was on a Variation on the Regulatory Plan of the city approved by the City Council in 1998. It was based on 330 interviews carried out with residents in Bagnoli (a quarter at the periphery of Naples) concerning their expectations and levels of information about the project of urban regeneration (De Vivo 2000). I also draw on the analysis of three urban policies that I have studied over the last four years with the aim of understanding the differences between them. The research was based on the use of secondary data and documents and on thirty-five in-depth interviews with mayors, public officials and citizens.

announcements to the concrete implementation of the projects leads to symbolic policies that do not improve the conditions of life of the population.

The discussion that follows addresses the critical role played by the local institutions and citizens in the process of urban transformation and its impact on the city. The literature on the topic recognizes that the role of local government in the development of the new urban space is often direct and forceful. In this perspective, urban governance becomes a collective action based on cooperation and coordination among many actors, both ‘vertically’ and ‘horizontally’, involving, respectively, multi-layered relationships of governance (at local, national and European level) and the relations among local actors (Le Galès 2011, Mayntz 1997). Coordination among these vertical and horizontal relationships should lead to a coherent integration of responsibilities, competences and visions. This is not as straightforward as it may seem. Scholars have pointed the differences between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ way of interpreting the theoretical and practical meaning of governance and of the attending ‘dilemmas’ (Bevir 2011, Pardo and Prato 2011).

In the case of Naples, the strategic policies for the renewal of the city have not taken fully into account citizens’ needs and it is unclear who the major beneficiaries are. Naples, after Rome and Milan, is the third Italian city for number of inhabitants, just over one million people (three million in the metropolitan area). In the ranking of the Italian cities, Naples is in the lowest positions for GDP per capita and employment, and in the highest for poverty, unemployment and criminality. The city is currently in search of a new urban vision capable of overcoming its decline in recent history. In spite of a continuous supply of proposals, ideas and projects to make Naples again competitive with other Italian and European cities, the focus has become increasingly unclear and the economic revival and social development of the city remains out of sight.

The City government has offered a large number of tools to address the urban complexity and the backwardness of the economy, but the results of its political and administrative action have been limited. Also the implementation of the Strategic Plan for the city, approved in 2004 and thought of as a main tool for supporting the regeneration of different parts of the urban territory (the old centre, the port and the dismissed industrial areas), is encountering many difficulties; some projects and activities are still at the beginning stage, others are at a standstill, due to an impasse affecting the decision-making process and the bureaucratic choices necessary to implement the plan. In spite of the great potential that some proposals have to enhance the urban resources, in their implementation they encounter

serious obstacles. In the discussion that follows I will discuss why and how this happens, looking in detail to the situation on the ground. The discussion will develop as follows.

A first point that deserves attention concerns the recent advancement occurred in the field of urban policies, namely the emphasis on planning and on an integrated strategy that includes tools for social inclusion and economic growth. From a theoretical perspective, the literature on this issue brings out the potential of these tools, in the sense that they seem to provide a way to address social and economic problems (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007, Hodd 1986, Linder and Peters 1989, Bifulco and Leonardis 1997). More attention, however, needs to be paid both to the problematic of implementation process and to the adaptation of these tools to specific contexts (Burroni, Crouch and Keune 2005; Parés, Martí-Costa and Bonet-Martí 2012). Only in this way the benefits that the adoption of urban policies can bring to citizenship can be fully appreciated. I will then offer a systematic exploration of these aspects, looking at the aforementioned theoretical issues in the light of the fact that while Naples shares with many other large cities in the world problems and development opportunities, it also has distinctive characteristics that need to be taken into account.

Global Cities in Competition: The Role of Urban Policies

In the light of the progress made in the field of urban studies, the first aspect that needs to be considered concerns the strength of the cities in the processes of economic and international exchange. Over the last few years, the issue of governance has gained growing attention in the theoretical framework of urban studies, and sharp analytical differences have arisen. Three main approaches can be identified: 1) one focuses on the changes that have occurred in the relationship between the national, regional and local governments; 2) a second one focuses on the growth of the role played by the European Union in the policies and decision-making of the national states; 3) a third one focuses on the process of globalization (Le Galès 2002, Robinson 2007, Sassen 2008). There is a strong interdependence between these three lines of analysis, but what is relevant are the changes in the spatial scale and the influence and the impact that these changes have on the economic processes. As a consequence of the erosion, or transformation, of state intervention, there has been a reorganization in the central and local political and administrative apparatuses (Cerase 2006). In some cases, this reorganization has produced competition between such apparatuses; in others, it has generated cooperation in the attempt to solve shared problems. Some cases have been marked by the shift from urban *managerialism* to urban *entrepreneurialism*, while, at the opposite

end, new forms of cooperation among institutional actors and policies have been observed (Harvey 1989, Sassen 2001). Moreover, the cuts in the national budgets have drastically reduced the policy-options open to regional and local governments, which are often forced to manage the resulting tensions at the local level. For instance, local and regional governments have to learn how to face the reduction of the financial resources transferred to them from the centre, and most of the time they can do so only by imposing new local taxes or by increasing the existing ones. At the same time, they have to deal with the declining quality in the supply of public services, or find ways – also drawing on resources from the private sector – to finance activities and services aimed at improving the quality of urban life. In short, the line of action of public intervention has increasingly moved toward the periphery of the administrative systems. Regional and local governments have experienced an increasing responsibility in trying to contrast the risk of fragmentation and marginality in local societies (De Vivo and Sacco 2008). For these reasons, when the national governments lose their capacity of steering and guiding the society, or see it eroded away, the cities gain a stronger role as ‘collective actors’ compared to the past.

In an attempt to protect the local interests, the urban political élite try to adjust to these processes by balancing economic and social demands; thus, policies aimed at economic development are combined with redistributive measures. Where, acting in this way, the urban political élite have succeeded in opening new opportunities for social mobility and for the well-being of the citizens, they have gained in terms of their own image. Of course, this brief outline of the new developments in urban studies does not make justice to the different contributions offered by a great number of scholars (Borraz and Le Galès 2010; Jouve 2005; Pardo and Prato eds 2012, Sassen 2008); there are, nevertheless, common points in the literature which are worth emphasizing. One of these is that in view of the decline experience by many cities, particularly in Europe, increasing attention has been paid to the revaluation and possible exploitation of the city old centres, also in cultural terms (Vicari Haddock 2004). More generally, emphasis has been put on the fact that cities are represented and perceived as the places where the most relevant social and economic infrastructures for global competitiveness are concentrated.

During the Fordism period, and under the influence of Keynesian policies, economic development was entrusted to the ability of the cities to provide adequate conditions for competitiveness: logistic spaces, structures for services, human resources and so on. For a long time urban policies failed to attract much attention — due also to the influence of a

prevailing neo-liberal political approach. Today things have changed and one main reason for the renewed attention to the role of the cities in the international relations of exchange is the expansion of the financial and telecommunication sectors and the media; that is, sectors in which innovation technology is key and needs to be continuously updated. The processes of spatial reorganization of the economy have contributed to the development of the so called 'global cities': New York, London, Paris and Tokyo are characterized by a strong capacity to attract financial investment and human resources (Sassen 2001). These capitals have reshaped the urban geography, connecting with each other through complex political, cultural and economic exchanges. Alongside the establishment of functional and international links, each city has developed a 'specific competence' in some economic field and this has led to a development based on specific sectors (like manufacturing, culture or fashion). The network that the most relevant cities of the world have built among them, as an outcome of the transaction of financial and human capital and of the exchange of products and services, provides also a frame to establish what position they occupy in the international division of production, labour and culture (Sassen 1991, 2001; Mariotto 2007). Of course, this network is also a consequence of the functioning of capitalistic development, which needs equipped spaces in order to expand. In these processes, the cities that predominate are those that have improved their competitive performance through efficient governance. These political and administrative urban élites have managed to produce an effective mix of political reforms and economic measures: on the one hand, they have actively pursued external financial investment, on the other, they have offered incentives to the development of human resources and technology. The point is, then, that the best-performing global cities have succeeded in implementing urban policies aimed at encouraging economic growth, while attracting private investment for the promotion of public programmes aimed at the renewal of the urban infrastructures. Thus, they have managed to modernize urban infrastructures and to protect urban spaces from decay. Let us now return to the Naples situation.

Although the need for an international re-launch of the city is particularly felt by its urban élite and especially by the city government, Naples plays no role in the network of global cities. This finds explanation in an approach shared by the political élites that have governed the city for the last twenty years, whereby a rhetorical and symbolic management of urban change does not translate into an improvement in the conditions of life of the population.

The Challenge for Naples

How competitive can Naples be among global cities? For about twenty years many commentators have dwelled upon the policies that could address the revitalization of vast areas of the city and help overcoming its many shortcomings (the closure of industries, poverty, unemployment, criminality and so on; Cavola and Vicari 2000, Leonardi and Nanetti 2008). One expression of this political and cultural debate is the variety of proposals that have been put forward, ranging from the definition of new models of strategic planning to the reorganization of the political and administrative functions and competences of the city via the reform of the municipality; from the idea of reviewing Naples' links with its metropolitan area to idea of reconsidering Naples' relationship with the other cities in the Campania region.

The efforts of the local government have not engendered the promised development (De Vivo 2007). Opposite forces seem at work: one pushing for the advancement of the city, the other for bringing the city backward. As a consequence, the city is in a marginal position both in the international and the national ranking of large cities, while holding a predominant position in relation to the other cities in the Campania region. The predominance of Naples in the region depends on its supremacy both in terms of size – Naples is by far the most populous city of the region – and in terms of services and administrative functions. As it is, the city has to face a growing tension between the overall demands by the citizens and the poor quality of its urban infrastructures and services.

One main reason for the persistence of the opposition that I have described lies in the fact that Naples (like others southern cities) is completely cut off the network which at the national level link together the most strategic large Italian cities (Cafiero 2009). Cities like Milan, Turin and Rome are driving the national economic development and they have found – or seem determined to find – a specific cultural and economic identity in the current stage of Italian and global capitalistic development. Naples has difficulties in entering this network. The city appears unable to express a definite identity, nor does it have any specific economic characteristics. Due to the sea and its impressive historical heritage, Naples is often considered a tourist city; but at times it is also seen either as a post-industrial city or as a city still in search of industrialization. In the end, Naples appears to be a city with a big unexploited potential. As a consequence, Naples seems like running without having a precise destination in the ongoing challenge with other cities.

In this situation, the urban policies lose their effectiveness because they face a double challenge: on the one hand, the need to keep the city at the forefront of an increasingly globalized and competitive economy; on the other hand, the need to put an end to, and deal with, the consequences of the present lag. However common to most urban contexts this double challenge may be, in the case of Naples meeting it implies first of all for its political and administrative system to fill the existing gap and modernize its material and non-material infrastructure (above all through growth and investment in its human resources; Pardo 1996 and 2001). In order to meet this challenge, however, it is important to avoid the trap of turning the existing conditions into a pretext for undermining urban transformation and the search for innovative models of political and administrative action. How, then, can the city break away from this situation and how can urban policies contribute to stimulate economic development, combat social marginality and facilitate the participation of citizens in public decisions? I will try to deal with these questions in the following pages.

In Search of Change: Making Use of Urban Policy

Before attempting to answer the questions that I have just raised, we need to review briefly the policies undertaken in recent years by the local government in the attempt to overcome the difficulties and the obstacles which frustrate local development. First, it must be noted that for a long time – almost twenty years – left-wing parties have been in office. This long period started in 1993 with the election of Antonio Bassolino as a mayor leading a new left-wing administration and continues today with the election of Luigi De Magistris, the winner of the last election held in 2010. The official political idea that has guided uninterruptedly local governance over this period of time is based on the involvement and participation of citizens in public life. What this means in practice is, however, not easy to explain. In brief, I note that the use of citizens' mobilization is primarily a political method and a way to create legitimacy around the action of the city government (see also Pardo 2001 and Pardo and Prato 2011). In this sense, the differences between the various City Councils that have governed the city are minimal: all the programmes for the development of the city emphasize the concept of citizens' participation. Yet, comparing the first period of Bassolino's term in office to the most recent, under De Magistris, the relevance of social mobilization and citizens' participation appears to have declined. More precisely, in spite of the emphasis he placed in his electoral campaign on wanting to spur citizens' involvement, the present mayor tends to decide on his own. The government of Antonio Bassolino lasted seven years, a

period of exceptionally long stability for a city that in the previous three decades had seen a succession of 26 different City Councils. Bassolinos's administration was initially identified with the 'renaissance' of the city and was seen as an example of 'good governance' capable of improving the quality of local life. The city government returned to play a key role in urban planning by revisiting proposals of urban innovation that had been frozen twenty years earlier and by demonstrating a new vitality.

However, it was only in 2004, under the mayor Rosa Russo Iervolino, that the City Council approved the Strategic Plan for Naples, while elsewhere similar plans had been adopted much earlier (for example, in 1988 in Barcelona; in the second half of the 1990s in other Italian cities). Strategic planning can be seen as a new form of urban governance that is needed to manage a growing special complexity in the context of global competition and of the new challenges cities have to meet. In the case of Naples, the city plan included main projects such as the regeneration of the dismissed industrial areas, the revaluation of the city centre and the modernization of the port area. They were all thought of as a way to reverse the negative image of the city. The strategy also included new institutional instruments, such as the Urban Free Zone; that is, the delimitation of an area allowed to have a special system of low taxation and which is set up by the national government with the aim of attracting international investment and promoting occupation and social inclusion. If all these projects and instruments had been put into practice, Naples would have probably become more attractive in terms of economic competition, sustainable environment and quality of social life. Instead, as the review of two examples of urban policies included in the strategic plan – the renewal of the Bagnoli district² and of the Historical Centre – and the attempt to adopt the Urban Free Zone in delimited areas of the city will soon show, the difficulties that the City government met during the process of implementation undermined their potentiality for urban innovation.

There is a good reason for comparing these three urban policies in that the first project, pertaining Bagnoli, was started more than twenty years ago, the second (pertaining the Historical Centre) was started about fifteen years ago and the third (the Free Trade Zone) never actually started, even though it has fuelled a very lively and interesting public debate. In essence, these are three of the most important policies adopted by the City Council, and they have all had the same outcome: a difficult implementation that has thwarted their potentiality for urban change. Interestingly, for all three policies the method used to achieve

² Bagnoli is a municipality at the immediate Northern periphery of Naples.

the strategic objectives was based on the negotiation of local interests. The city administration, as the main public actor involved, should have acted as coordinator between the private and other public parties involved and should have facilitated forms of participation and the active involvement of the citizenry.

The Urban Renewal of a Dismissed Industrial Area

The first policy addressed the urban renewal of the dismissed industrial area of Bagnoli. Public intervention in the urban regeneration of this area began about twenty years ago but, to date, remains incomplete. The area was characterized by the presence of a big steel plant, established at the beginning of the 19th century. The plant was located in one of the most beautiful spots in the gulf of Naples. In 1992, after many vicissitudes, it switched off its chimneys.

The de-industrialized area of Bagnoli extends for 340 hectares, making it the largest urban void in Europe. In 2012, after twenty years, the first public work financed jointly by the municipality, the region and the European Union actually started. After so many years, then, something is finally being done in an area considered strategic for the development of Naples. Two key questions are: *What to do with the district of Bagnoli?* Or better, *What should it become?* Linked to the wider national and international debate on how to deal with urban voids, the projects that purported to offer answers to these questions have generated endless discussions locally. The urban redevelopment of the extensive portion of coastline of Bagnoli has been seen by many as a unique opportunity for the revival of Naples and its image. Indeed — like in many other brownfield sites — the recovery of the environmental quality of the area, which was heavily compromised, directly and indirectly, by the presence of the Italsider steel plant, is not only meant to promote its tourist development but also provide a most suitable location for research activities related to advanced industry.

However strategic, the renewal of Bagnoli appeared to encourage a new development path for the city. Yet, its implementation sparked bitter conflict among the different actors and interests at stake, resulting in endless confrontations. To name only a few, building contractors and organized crime groups behind them started to exert pressure to secure procurement contracts related to the implementation of the project; the public institutions variously involved became quarrelsome about the volumes of the construction of the new

buildings; for a long time the central government froze the funds for the recovery of the soil occupied by the Italsider plant (about 81% of the total industrial soil).

Going back to the questions, what kind of development, what kind of renewal one notes that reclaiming an abandoned area means, in the words of some actors whom I interviewed, starting with the reclamation of the soil and then proceeding to reclaim the whole local environment (De Vivo 2000). The aim is to move toward a green city well embedded in a broader process of sustainable development. This idea was originally expressed in the variation to the Plan Controller presented in 1999 by the City Council, and adopted at the beginning of 2001. Undoubtedly, the environmental cause has its reasons: Naples needs to regain environmental quality through the re-naturalization of its territory for, here, the ratio population/green in the city is the lowest in Italy. Thus, although neo-industrialization and the consequent growth of employment is an urgent need, the idea of making Bagnoli a tourist area, also including a technology park, is widely shared by the citizenry. The pace and the extent of change pose interesting problems. Projects of urban renewal like this require huge financial investment and far-reaching actions that cannot be supported by a single entity; they call for new organizational decision-making mechanisms, new operating tools to reach consensus and to bring together the interests of different actors. Since the presentation of the project concerning Bagnoli, the City Council has placed great emphasis on its willingness to rely on the active participation of citizens in every phase of the project. This stand was heavily broadcast through press releases, announcements and information campaigns. The results are, however, contradictory. A first issue that needs attention concerns the apparent contrast between a good level of information to the public about both the elements of the project and its promoters and the citizens' little involvement in activities related in its formulation and implementation. As a local man in his late 50s said to me, 'this year, a lot of politicians have come to Bagnoli during the electoral campaign and they all illustrate to us the same project; so we have understood everything about the issue of re-generation, but after twenty years we wonder when and how the project will be completed. I think never'.

Information is not the only factor that can drive citizens to participate. Participation can be more strongly stimulated by the mobilization of local associations. The willingness of the City government to engage the local community in the redevelopment of Bagnoli extends to the involvement of groups and associations, the assumption being that they could serve as a link between civil society and the public sphere. Groups and associations could serve as a

point of collection and dissemination of information, thus facilitating communication, contributing to a better understanding of the issues and providing a framework within which members could find an explanation and make sense of the process involving them. As the bearers of organized interests, groups and associations could influence the opinions and preferences of their members and contribute to consensus-building. Yet, the associations do not seem to produce these results, nor do they seem to have much influence on the participation of their members and of the citizens in general in the activities related to the implementation of the project. In the end, their impact in mobilizing and organizing the participation of citizens has been weak. The restoration project of the area is currently managed by the Urban Transformation Society (STU) 'Bagnolifutura', which was established in 2002; local authorities (predominantly the City of Naples) are the major stockholders, but a small proportion of private stockholders are also involved. However, the main institutional actors responsible for the actual implementation of the plan, the City Council and the STU, are unable to overcome the negative attitude of the citizenry, based on previous experience. The view is widespread, across the local community, that the work of the local institutions is an additional constraint to the advancement of the development path outlined above, as opposed to being a stimulus for its realization. During a meeting organized about ten years ago by the municipality of Bagnoli, an old man, who had been a worker of the steel plant, gave a speech about the bad condition of the territory and of the life of residents. He was very angry and at the end of his speech, he said to the participants 'I think that I'll die before something will change in Bagnoli. The true problem of Bagnoli are the politicians, not the lack of financial resources'. A few months ago I met the son of this man, who was then unemployed. He recalled the words of his father, remarking that he did indeed die without having seen any change in Bagnoli. The changes brought about by deindustrialization have, on the other hand, generated hardships for lower social classes, and the future prospects of the area have influenced the housing market making house prices rise dramatically.

So, the urban policy pertaining Bagnoli is still far from having been implemented and, after countless announcements about the change it would bring, local people's living and working conditions have not improved, instead they have worsened. A most critical point is that citizens' participation has badly weakened. The promises made by the various municipal councils about the change that would be brought about by the closure of the plant are now seen as empty rhetoric, a view that also applies to the urban policy concerning the historical

centre. Although the actors involved are partly different, the results appear to be the same: empty rhetoric and no substantial change.

The Regeneration of the Historical Centre

Much has been written on the Historical Centre of Naples, the most frequent target of local government interventions. Here I will focus on a few key issues. The fact that in 1995 the Historical Centre was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site implies that its protection must be internationally accountable. The traditional perimeter of the Historical Centre includes both the districts of the Aragonese city protected by UNESCO (720 hectares) and those derived by the Variant of Safeguard of the territory approved by the City government in 1996 as a modification of the regulatory Plan of 1972, which covers an area of about 1972 hectares. The first delimitation (Piano Regolatore 1972) included, in whole or in part, 12 of the 30 districts of Naples. In spite of the interventions implemented during the nineteenth-century, these districts have remained almost unchanged. The districts have lost part of their population due to the process of decentralization experienced by Naples since the 1990s. Between 1981 and 2001, the historic centre lost more than a quarter of its population in favour, first, of the suburbs and, then, of suburban areas at the periphery. Just under 320,000 inhabitants live now in this part of the city (about 30% of the total population, as opposed to almost 70% in 1951).

As is the case with many other world metropolises, in this relatively small area are concentrated the city's core economic and cultural activities: the University, important commercial activities and more than half of the services of the entire city. However, the commercial vocation of the old centre is counterbalanced by the reduction of manufacturing activities, especially along the waterfront (just under 20% of residents are employed in the industry, 20% work in commercial activities and over 50% work in the tertiary sector). The districts of the old centre can be grouped in two categories. On the one hand, those with a predominance of professional groups, attracted by gentrification; on the other hand, the oldest neighbourhoods, marked by the deterioration of housing and by economic decline. The City government has attempted to improve the economic, urban and social conditions of the historic centre through various plans and programmes. Last among these measures is the Urban Integrated Programme, involving 80% of the area declared by UNESCO as an historical site. The best known, however, are the Urban Project and the Project Siren. The

first is a programme aimed at redeveloping a specific area, the Spanish Quarters,³ with the aim of improving the overall housing, social and health conditions. In 2002, the City Council started the consortium Si.Re.Na,⁴ a large project for the restoration of private housing, based on concerted actions between citizens and construction companies. The programme was supposed to give an impetus to reclaiming the historical and cultural heritage through triggering a sort of spontaneous regeneration based on the self-organization of local private actors. The Naples Integrated Programme operates along similar lines focusing on 'Great Cultural Attractions' financed by the European Union structural funds through the Regional Operational Plan. This programme includes many projects which also affect places of worship.

A public servant working for the Campania Region remarked, 'the Naples Integrated Programme "Great Cultural Attractions" isn't simply a document; it is an agreement between the actors involved in it. At this time, I believe that there isn't a correct perception of what they have to do all together. Where is the sharing? Each actor is isolated and doesn't want to work with the others. The actors don't trust each other'. A dealer in religious goods stated, 'private actors don't risk their own financial resources...They wait and wait, without taking any kind of initiative. They always want public money. We need private actors to change their mind-set'.

Also in this case bitter conflicts arose among different public institutions, which was compounded by the fact that the requirements for the conservation of historical monuments collide with those for modernization. In the end, the measures undertaken by the City administration fell short of the expectations that it had fostered. This was also due to the lack of an effective communication policy on the part of the administration, as well as to its inability to mobilize the residents in taking an active role in carrying out the project.

The story of the redevelopment of the historical centre and the difficulties inherent in the process of change that it implies provides clear evidence of how the thrust toward change can be thwarted by entrenched social ties and connections. The map of these relationships that comes to light gives a good idea of the local order they produce, and of the influence that this order exercises on what happens in the area. Formally, employers, trade unions, local parties, local government, environmental groups and individual citizens are all part of the

³ This area is known for its high presence of organized crime.

⁴ Company for recovery initiatives of Naples established in 2001 by the City of Naples and by the Association of Builders of the Province of Naples.

network around which the process of transformation of the town can be built. However, this key point is that within this order not all actors have the same weight and power. The resources and interests involved are quite different. For the business component, for example, the main interest is to secure as much financial resources as possible; instead, interest-groups such as trade unions and political parties aim mainly at enforcing consultation mechanisms in order to protect the interests of the groups that they represent; the objective pursued by public actors appears more complex, in so much as their task usually consists in reconciling limited organizational, economic and financial resources with the need to mediate the demands of the different actors involved; from the start, environmental groups tend to be mainly engaged in trying to ensure environmental sustainability; finally, citizens as a collective subject turn to one or to the other party involved according to their motivations and demands. This gives a sense of the complexity of the network generated by the ties that connect the actors involved in the renewal plan; even more complex is the task of the local administration in trying to ‘construct’ and manage a virtuous decision-making process. This is not to say that the actors involved cannot establish cooperative relationships aimed at the advancement of the plan, but this depends on the extent to which they are able to influence the dynamics of the different demands elicited by the renewal plan, drawing on their material, ideological, political and cultural resources, as well as on their actual participation and involvement. To sum up, whether the network structure generated by the plan will provide a basis for its effective enactment is an open question. Given that such a structure is both socially constructed and contingent, it depends on how it is managed. The City government can play a key role in so far as it is able both to mediate the different interests at stake and to enforce ‘rules of the game’ to which all actors must abide to. A review of the implementation of the plan highlighted, however, that also in this case the city administration was unable to mobilize citizens’ participation and that the impact of the plan on the territory turned out to be minimal.

In spite of so many programmes, a real process of recovery of the historical centre has never taken off. Unsurprisingly, UNESCO has repeatedly reprimanded the City Council for the bad condition in which the historical centre still is. Moreover, the various local actors involved in their implementation lacked the capacity to coordinate and negotiate among themselves. Let us now look at the Urban Free Zone which, unlike the two policies examined above, requires constant mobilization.

The Urban Free Zone

To start with, it is important to explore the logic that has inspired and guided the establishment of Urban Free Zone,⁵ a legislative instrument particularly suitable to supporting the economic and social disadvantaged groups living in Naples. Its main objective is to combine environmental concerns and urban development with economic growth and social integration. There are at least three reasons to pay attention to this project, as it takes into account lessons learned from previous territorial policies experimented elsewhere. The first is that its implementation has produced positive outcomes in urban areas (for example in France) that were facing social and economic challenges not unlike those in Naples. The second is that it addresses the issue of tax benefits, leaving behind the option of direct and automatic incentives to the enterprises, and trying to boost the international role of the city by capturing foreign investment. The third refers to the construction of social and institutional practices for the implementation of development programmes. Comparatively, the French experiment remains a milestone, although also other countries have implemented similar programmes. Here it will be useful to mention the urban transformation processes occurred in specific disadvantaged French towns, because their socio-economic conditions are similar to those of parts of Naples (De Vivo 2007). Introduced in France at the beginning of the 21st century, the 'Urban Zones' are one piece of the larger mosaic of urban policies best known as *Politique de la Ville*. The Urban Zones policy was conceived to address social exclusion and urban segregation, and is an appropriate mix of interventions for housing renovation, of support programmes in the economic, social and employment fields, of programmes aimed at encouraging the local people's mobilization and participation in social life and of programmes aimed at containing the phenomenon of school dropout among young people. A strategy of integrated action has achieved the intended objectives striking a good balance between public and private expenditure, investments and initiatives. In light of the French case, then, the question arises, is it possible to replicate an experiment of this nature in Naples? In spite of the emphasis that the Naples City government put on it – 'The Urban Free Zone will re-launch Naples in the world', the mayor of the city declared to a journalist. The project never went beyond the announcement stage. Yet, citizens have been involved in forums that have debated its contents.

⁵ The measure adopted by the national government through the Finance Act of 2007 (L.296/2006), confirmed by the law 244/2008, assigned 50 million Euros for the Urban Free Zones but has not yet been implemented, despite a myriad announcements and changes.

In the case of the Urban Free Zone, it is also important to consider the role played by the national government, which used this project as a tool to divert attention from weak public intervention in the South. In Italy, the central government has pledged to make available financial public resources to address the social and financial hardship that characterize the southern cities, with a focus on their slum areas. But an effective overall plan is still lacking.

As in the French case, the Urban Free Zone could have a positive impact on the revitalization of public and private investment in Naples. However, since it was conceived as a possible solution to the problems of a limited part of the city, it cannot serve to overcome the overall shortcomings that besiege Naples. The socio-economic problems besetting the city are deeply entrenched in its past and recent history: organized and widespread crime, de-skilling and impoverishment of human resources, lack of private investment, low interest of banks to finance private development projects and to participate in the financing of public infrastructures. Furthermore, in an over-populated city with an urgent need for an overall urban restructuring, it is difficult to find suitable space for new industrial plants. The zoning restrictions imposed by the regulatory plan — as well as those pertaining the preservation of the historical and environmental heritage and those stemming from a web of bureaucratic licensing and permits — are formally so strict that the possibility of finding rapidly a suitable space for new economic enterprises is practically nil. In France, a ‘consensual urbanism’ was promoted in order to avoid these predictable obstacles. This practice consists in an ongoing consultation between public and private entities involved in the programme of urban renewal which has allowed to reach agreements with maximum flexibility and to use the planning instruments in order to respond effectively to the demands of the community. Finally, the interest raised by this tool is explained mainly with the success it has had in France; in Naples, however, due also to regulatory uncertainties generated at the national level, it never took off. It became, instead, part of an intense political communication strategy. For several months a public debate — involving politicians, scholars and citizens — went on, highlighting the relevance of this initiative for the international revival of Naples. To date, it is not yet clear whether and how the Urban Free Zone will become effective. Meanwhile, Naples continues to be excluded from the international trade exchanges among global cities, and its citizens continue to be deluded that the change occurred in France could happen in their city.

A Blocked City

As we have seen, the three policies that I have examined have basically had discouraging outcomes. In the last twenty years the left-wing parties that have governed Naples have outspokenly pursued a model of cooperation between the public and private spheres and, above all, have sought citizens' involvement in public choice. The question is whether they mastered the necessary resources. Considering the many negative factors that hold back the city and frustrate entrepreneurial initiative, the question to be asked is whether it is possible to escape the straightjacket of the starting conditions in pursuing urban policies. The role played by the European Union and by the Italian government apart, a positive answer to this question implies focusing on the role of the City government. So far, through strategic planning, it has adopted a systemic approach to urban policy. It could perhaps achieve more by implementing the urban zone device for, thus, it might foster the separation between the long-term mission of city planning (whereby the city is seen as a single entity) and a short to medium term strategy aimed at programming, managing and monitoring the achievement of specific objectives. Paradoxically, the vision that looks at the city in all its complexity has to face all the urban problems at once, and this ends up hindering rather than facilitating the task of an overall urban renewal. The five quadrants in which Naples is divided by the Strategic Plan — Western, Northern, Eastern, Historical Centre and Waterfront — reflect clearly the vision of the City government, centred on the regeneration of the peripheral areas and the re-launch of their competitiveness. Yet, despite the effort to systematize and redefine the frame of the city, the starting priorities and the criteria and indicators selected to orient public choice appear inadequate. Even where the city government started a programme of urban regeneration — like in the Bagnoli district or in the Historical Centre — after many years the results have been minimal. In both cases, the time schedule and the allocation of financial resources for specific work seem to be dictated more by emergency considerations than by a planned strategy with precise and targeted goals. Moreover, the choice to work simultaneously in more than one direction raises the issue of substantial financial and organizational costs. This situation is further exacerbated by a weak formal monitoring of the work to be done. The limit of this approach lies in the fact that the City government underestimates the complexity of managing and implementing an overall urban renewal and overestimates the organizational capacity of its administrative machine. A selective method of intervention, based on measures aimed at given areas of the city and engaging its residents in public choice, may be more effective. A sort of 'microsurgery' operations in the treatment

of the urban problems might well be appropriate. Thus, the City government would be better equipped to keep a close eye on specific programmes and monitor their implementation. Moreover, thus the accountability of the measures undertaken would be enhanced.

Past experience shows that building consensus among public institutions is particularly difficult in Naples. This difficulty has contributed considerably to the disappointing performance of the policies examined above. However, it is also clear that the other actors involved – associations, citizens and so on – have to learn how to perform differently from the past. The implementation of integrated policies needs the active participation of the many components that structure Neapolitan society, opening the road to an urban regeneration which will benefit the entire community rather than those of limited groups. However difficult it may be, developing new modes and rules of interaction between government and civil society is a main step in that direction.

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From Heterotopias to Cultural Landscapes: On Reconstructing Buraku Leather Towns into ‘Japanese National Spaces’

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In this article I analyse the spatial marginalization of ‘buraku areas’ in Japan, and examine the town-making programmes implemented in some urban buraku districts. In contemporary Japan, people labelled as ‘burakumin’ (hamlet people) are commonly described as the descendants of Tokugawa-era outcasts of Japan, who were engaged in special occupations (leather industry, meat packing, street entertainment, drum making) and compelled to live in separate areas. Despite the heterogeneity of these populations, the definition of ‘buraku origins’ has remained fixed over time and is based on one’s birth, former or current residence in a buraku and engagement in the buraku industries. I describe the case of Kinégawa and Naniwa leather towns in Tokyo and Osaka respectively; in particular, the urban revitalization activities organized by the Museum of Education and Leather Industry (Archives Kinégawa), and the ‘Osaka Naniwa Human Rights Respect Town Making’ project. The study draws on ethnographic material collected during visits to the neighbourhoods and leather factories and through my participation in community initiatives and exhibitions. The findings show that buraku minority networks transform ‘heterotopic’ categorizations in dominant and political discourses (isolation, marginalization, dirtiness and smell of the leather factory) and reconstruct leather towns by drawing upon both local and national conceptual spaces (e.g. the ‘nation’, ‘cultural landscapes’, the ‘hometown’, the leather industry, the ‘city’).

Keywords: buraku, heterotopia, minority, town-making, museum

Introduction

The ‘buraku’ in Japan is a fluid social construct that encompasses a variety of individuals of different cultural and social backgrounds, subject to constant reconfigurations and transformation including industrialization, urbanization, migration, and inter-marriage. People labelled as ‘burakumin’ (hamlet people) are commonly described as the descendants of Tokugawa-era outcasts of Japan, who were engaged in special occupations (leather industry, meat packing, street entertainment, drum making) and compelled to live in separate areas. Despite the heterogeneity of these populations, the definition of ‘buraku origin’ has remained fixed over time and is based on one’s birth, former or current residence in a buraku, and engagement in the buraku industries. After the abolition of the status system in 1871, and the implementation of the Law for Special Measures for Dōwa (‘assimilation’) Projects in 1969, the condition of burakumin ameliorated. However, these people still face discrimination in terms of access to education and housing, discriminatory messages circulating on the web, as well as background checks conducted by private agencies for employment and marriage. The image of ‘buraku’ continues to be associated with poverty, spatial separation, dirtiness, and ideas of social exclusion.

The discussion that follows lends support to recent research that examines how new minority identity politics and ‘practices of multiculturalism’ (Hankins 2012) question the

separation of ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ and renegotiates the role and power of minorities in society through a variety of initiatives (Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008, Graburn et al. 2010). This perspective is important to challenge commonplace descriptions of the issue that are based on the historical relationship between former outcast groups and the current problem, but that do not consider recent changes and experiences relating to the buraku (Amos 2011, Hankins 2012). In particular, I argue that individuals and networks engaged with the issue (e.g., activists, performers, teachers, adults and children living in a buraku district and working in buraku occupations) re-organize popular descriptions (isolation, marginalization) and major factors of categorization (in particular the smell and dirtiness) on positive principles (local attachment) and interconnection with the ‘non-buraku’ (economic and social value of the industrial areas) (Wimmer 2008; Cangià 2012, 2013) through urban practices (community events, activities, and local exhibitions). Museums and community activities in this regard represent ‘strategic’ terrains that help build new meanings (Foucault 1986, De Certeau 1984) and challenge the association of buraku people with ‘its’ territory. I interpret ‘locality’ as the relational and social contexts in which actors cooperate and exercise their capacity to influence wider political forces and environment, by playing different roles, producing and re-shaping spatial boundaries and identity registers.

Theoretical Background

In order to investigate the ‘buraku issue’, I relate to the notion of ‘heterotopia’, which was originally introduced to the social sciences by Michel Foucault (1986). Heterotopias (from the Greek ‘hetero’ which means ‘other’ and ‘topos’ which means ‘place’) were defined as ‘places in which all the other emplacements of a culture are at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed’, as those ‘places that are outside’ (Foucault 1998: 178); yet they are related to representing and inverting all other places. Foucault makes the example of the cemetery ‘as a place unlike ordinary cultural spaces that is however connected with all the sites of the city state or society or village, etc., since each individual, each family has relatives in the cemetery’ (Foucault 1986: 25). The concept has provoked many interpretations and applications in the social sciences, and came to signify also new forms of representation of marginal spaces. Heterotopias were described as counter-hegemonic representations of, and forms of resistance to ‘the centre’ as ‘third spaces’ (Bhabha 1994) with new meanings associated with marginality (Shields 1991; Hetherington 1996a, 1996b, 1997; Davis 2010). They correspond to what Jerome Krase (2012) has called ‘ethnic theme

parks’;¹ in other words, stages for performances and spectacles produced by locals in order to represent their social and cultural reality in front of outsiders and tourists. Heterotopias, like ethnic theme parks, are more than mere representations of reality, and contribute to determining what the viewer should consider as ‘real’ of the locality (Krase 2012). They represent dynamic processes in which people engage to promote social change, by employing and transforming heterotopic symbols and characteristics that make spaces somewhat ambivalent into new boundaries and meanings (Lefebvre 1991, Hetherington 1997). The interpretations of these meanings can be multiple, different and at times contradictory among local inhabitants, ordinary people and institutions (Gotham 2005).

Here, I interpret the buraku as heterotopia in a double sense. On the one hand, I describe how the issue has been historically associated with ambivalent meanings (dirtiness, isolation, disorder, smell) in commonplace discourses. On the other hand, borrowing Hetherington’s definition of heterotopia, I describe buraku practices as ‘the sites in which all things displaced, marginal, rejected or ambivalent are engaged, and this engagement becomes the bases of an alternative mode of ordering’ (Hetherington 1996a: 159). I illustrate the interplay between the taking-on and re-positioning of categorizing principles through interconnection between social roles and experiences.² I examine these social fields of buraku activism not as mere counter-hegemonic spaces existing apart from the ‘non-buraku’, but as alternative modes of ordering and reconfiguring the issue by adopting, blurring and transforming the boundaries between the two dimensions. I discuss the strategic ways in which the buraku practices adopt the marker of difference, blur the boundaries with the ‘other’, and preserve features of both the buraku and the non-buraku to build new experiences. Heterotopias, in this sense, can be defined as the processes resulting from

¹ ‘Ethnic theme parks’ are sites for ethnic emporia such as exotic food stores, restaurants, merchandise and souvenir shops (e.g. Little Italies, Chinatowns), and represent part of the urban consumption economy (Krase 2012).

² I use the expression ‘taking-on’ rather than ‘resisting’ to describe buraku practices, following Sara Ahmed’s (1999) interpretation of Franz Fanon’s argument concerning the ‘white gaze’ of the black body: taking on external categorizations in this sense means appropriating the external gaze and, in Fanon’s words, letting the ‘black body’ be ‘sealed into that crushing objecthood’ (Fanon 1986: 109). The transformation of external and common categorizations for the buraku occurs by first accepting and appropriating the symbols and characteristics of marginalization, rather than resisting them, and then repositioning these on new standards.

boundaries-blurring and re-positioning practices. To understand these processes, I draw on De Certeau's understanding of 'strategy' and 'tactics' simultaneously, and try to overcome the opposition between these two dimensions. On the one hand, buraku urban practices work as strategies, insofar as they 'assume a place that can be circumscribed as proper (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations' (De Certeau 1984: xviii). On the other hand, they act as 'tactics', by insinuating themselves into the other's place, 'without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance' (De Certeau 1984: xix). The practices that I illustrate in this article act between these two levels, both circumscribing their own place of operation (the buraku) and infiltrating and move in the symbolic dimension of the 'other' (the 'Japanese') to look for new spaces of representation. These spaces are a new form of management of difference by minority networks — which I call 're-positioning' — in addition to the four patterns that were identified by Joseph Doyle Hankins and that include *enlistment*, *equilibration*, *authenticity*, and *wounded-ness* (Hankins 2012).³

I focus on the urban initiatives in Kinegawa (Tokyo) and Naniwa (Osaka) leather towns, in particular the activities organized by the Museum of Education and Leather Industry (hereafter Archives Kinegawa) and the Osaka Naniwa Human Rights Respect Town Making' project. I conducted fieldwork research in these social fields between 2007 and 2009 and, during this time, regularly visited districts, museums and leather factories, participated in community activities and conducted informal interviews with activists, museum personnel, educators, experts, and community people. Here, I draw especially on the exhibitions and my visits to the neighbourhoods and leather factories.

Archives Kinegawa is an exhibition hall on the ground floor of the former Kinegawa Elementary School in Kinegawa district (Tokyo) that was built in 2004 after the closure of the school. Teachers involved in the organization of the museum are also engaged in activities in the surrounding districts, including educational and community initiatives in collaboration with the local branch of the Buraku Liberation League (hereafter BLL).⁴ Most of these

³ 'Enlistment' refers to the identification and placement of minorities alongside each other in a list as evidence in the struggle against homogeneity; 'equilibration' entails an assumption that all minority groups need to be rendered equivalent under a rubric of human rights; 'authenticity' demands for a culture to display as a proof of the existence of minority groups; finally, 'wounded-ness' is the description of these groups as victims of social harm and violations of human rights (Hankins 2012).

⁴ The Buraku Liberation League (BLL, Buraku kaihō dōmei) is the main buraku political movement and was founded in 1922 under the name Zenkoku Suiheisha (National Levelers Association).

initiatives concern the re-definition of the spatial image of the district and the surroundings with new meanings relating to the locality, the production of leather, and its importance within the wider context of the nation.

The 'Osaka Naniwa Human Rights Respect Town Making' project, in turn, was initiated in 2002 in Naniwa district (Osaka) by the BLL with the support of national, municipal, and local administrations. The project includes the Museum of Human Rights *Liberty Osaka* and the 'Road of Human Rights and Taiko (drums)', and aims at shedding a new light on the *taiko* drum industry in the district and transforming Naniwa leather town into the 'hometown of the drums' (*taiko no furusato*).

In the next section, I outline the history of the buraku districts as heterotopic spaces, their marginalization, identification and current condition. In the second section, I describe programmes and language of cultural nationalism in Japan as the institutional and ideological framework for buraku activism. Ultimately, I introduce the two leather towns, museums and other activities and their engagement in local development programmes.

The Buraku as a Heterotopia and Its Transformations in the Urban Context

The spatial boundaries of the buraku areas have long been subject to constant transformations and reconfigurations. In medieval Japan (1185-1600), the areas in which outcasts were allowed to live were geographically mapped. These groups were called 'base people' (*senmin*), lived in tax-free areas and engaged in occupations such as care-taking of tombs, collecting food for the hunting falcons of the nobility, funeral services, strings making, leather tanning and working, butchering, drum making, footgear and shoes manufacturing, and *tatami* floor mat making. Other professions were artistic, religious and shamanistic practices undertaken during funerals and rituals. The ambiguity associated with these people referred also to their residency in peripheral and marginal locations. While some special status people did not have permanent residence, others resided in settlements in undesirable areas such as river-banks, under bridges and near slopes. All these different categories of Medieval *senmin* fell under the outcast groups during the Feudal time (1603 onwards) including the *eta* (literally, much filth) and *hinin* (literally, non-human). The *eta* included people engaged with occupations such as caretaking of tombs, funeral services, leather tanning and working, butchering, drum and shoe making. The term *kawaramono* (people of the river banks) referred to those people living in riverbed districts and dealing with occupations such as gravediggers, road cleaners, comb makers and ritual puppeteers (Law 1997: 70). A number of

other categories of people were included in other non-resident groups, such as the *hinin* (non human) that were mainly criminals, prostitutes, diviners, people who took care of prisoners, artists, and wandering monks (De Vos & Wagatsuma 1966; Koyama 1990). *Sanjo* (scattered places) and *honjo* (central/real place) were the terms used to refer to the districts inhabited by these people during medieval times (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987). Most of the *sanjo* districts originated as special compounds for ritual performers attached to major ceremonial centers, as well as for lepers, animal skinners, and leather workers resided in these areas (Law 1997: 73). A great variety of characters were used to write the term, including scattered place, place of divination, birthing place, mountaintop and third district (Law 1997). This variety, according to Law, ‘tells us something not only about the range of meanings that these places had but also about the confusion and even the hysteria that signifying the unsignifiable has generated in Japanese society over time’ (Law 1997: 72).

With the Meiji Restoration (in 1871) and the Emancipation Edict (*Eta kaihō-rei*), the *eta* and *hinin* groups were renamed *shin-heimin* (new commoners) and were granted the freedom to move and participate in all social activities. However, while these ‘new commoners’ had the legal right to move without restraint, they lost their monopoly on traditional occupations as a source of economic livelihood. Representations of buraku people from the Meiji period onward started to describe these people as the underclass of previous times and the residents of the previous outcast areas (Uesugi et al. 1992). These people and other disadvantaged groups and individuals were all lumped together into the modern category of buraku, the descendants of previous outcast groups, and kept being associated with ideas of poverty, and certain occupational practices and spaces.

From the end of the Meiji period through to the post-WWII period, governmental policies for assimilation and new political actors emerged. The Burakumin were officially defined as people who ‘live together in particular districts and form separate communities’ (De Vos & Wagatsuma 1966: 44). Another way to identify buraku areas and people was known as the *koseki* system (Family Register), established in 1872: addresses, births and deaths in the family, and social status (in the old *koseki*) of all heads of family were recorded and enlisted and held open as public record. The buraku lists include a series of directories containing information on buraku community locations, number of households, major occupations etc. throughout the country. For instance, the symbol (...) near the address means that the area concerned is considered to be a buraku district; the numeral 4 inside a circle, or a circled letter D (for Dōwa), stand for ‘being a Burakumin’ (Gottlieb 2006: 55). In 1968, the

lists ceased to be freely available for public perusal. However, cases of discriminatory practices through illegal consultation of these lists continued, in particular with private companies and detective agencies to inquire into the background of job applicants in recruitment, individuals in case of marriage or areas in case of real estate.

Since the late 1960s, the identification of buraku areas by the government was characterized by the official denomination as *Dōwa chiku* (literally, assimilation area) that served to identify the areas for implementation of affirmative actions and the 1969 Special Measures Law, aimed at improving the infrastructures and economies of buraku areas. These policies lasted until 2007. Nowadays, many cases of discriminatory attacks continue online and include messages about buraku areas and people, as well as the use of internet maps and search engines to obtain and share personal information on names and housing location of members from these communities.

Despite the heterogeneity of the discourses and approaches towards the issue throughout history, categorization of the buraku districts still remained linked to ideas of dirtiness, separation and habitants' engagement in unskilled occupations. These same factors are taken and transformed by buraku networks, associations and individuals through the implementation of urban development programmes and local activities. These initiatives aim at re-constructing the 'buraku' as the 'hometown', thereby re-formulating the idea of the 'buraku' through readable and commonplace signs. They do so by drawing upon positive principles that relate both to the locality, local attachment, community-based relationships on the one hand, and 'national' social, cultural and economic values (e.g. traditional industries, 'national cultural landscapes') on the other.

The shift of interest in the urban community dimension that occurred in the 1990s in Japan became the framework for these spaces of representation. In particular, the national community measures adopted in the 1960s by the Liberal Democratic Party (e.g., *machi* and *furusato zukuri*, 'town and hometown making' programmes), 'human rights enlightenment activities' (Mutafchieva 2009; Amos 2011), as well as the projects sponsored by the *Agency for Cultural Affairs* (hereafter ACA), represent the institutional framework in which I understand these practices.

Cultural Landscapes and Hometown Making Programmes

Machi zukuri (literally town-making) programmes were initially conceived as an ideological counterpart to the city planning programmes back in the 1960s, and were intended as a social

contribution to the making of municipalities. The programme represented a community-based and ideological trend slowly integrated into the state's city planning institution with limited direct input by local people. In the mid-1990s, however, shortly after the Great Hanshin Earthquake, the government recognized the role played by the local and regional Non-Profit (NPO) and volunteer organizations to cope with the crisis and the reconstruction of towns. On this occasion, the social aspects of community development, the local dimension and the involvement of peoples began to be taken into consideration as a set of priorities. As a result, *machi zukuri* programmes began to receive special attention, in particular between 2002 and 2007 (Mutafchieva 2009). At the same time, the BLL began to use these programmes as the political and institutional framework for reconstructing buraku areas.

Another important framework is the ACA's programmes for the promotion of cultural landscapes (*bunkateki keikan*), and the preservation of the Japanese key industries. In this context, government organizations, NPOs and NGOs were supported to help local people 'learn the significance of discovering the value in the scenic landscapes with which they are familiar in their daily lives' and experience the 'quintessence of the cultural landscapes', rooted in the traditional industries and mode of life of local hometowns (*furusato*). According to the ACA, 'cultural landscapes, being close to the hearts of people who were born, grew up and live in the locality, symbolize the image of the hometown (*furusato*) (...) In order to maintain and protect 'cultural landscapes' in an appropriate manner, it is necessary, building upon the inherited mechanism of traditional industries and modes of life (...)'.⁵

Furusato — usually translated as hometown — is an important notion employed in national policies and programmes, in particular in local and touristic advertising campaigns where local cultures were promoted. *Furusato zukuri* (the evocation of furusato through home/native-place making) is the making of some native aesthetics as temporally stable in the social imaginary (Robertson 1988), and is strongly linked with the preservation of cultural landscapes and traditional industries. Since the 1980s, images of furusato were also promoted in urban settings: for instance, the nostalgia for a lost Japan was created through images of romanticized rural landscapes in Tokyo's urban environment, through the so called 'Furusato Tokyo campaign', in which revival of crafts and culinary traditions were distributed (Creighton 2009).

I argue that these conceptual frames were reformulated at the local level by the social

⁵ From the Report of the Study on the Protection of Cultural Landscapes Associated with Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

practices introduced in this article. These work as interesting interpretations of minority roles within the national context, by looking at the place of marginality within the urban and national environment. In the next sections, I describe these practices, with a special focus on exhibitions, adult's and children's narratives concerning the locality, and the major elements employed in these urban reconstruction programmes.

Kinegawa Leather Town

Kinegawa (today known as Higashi Sumida) is an important pig leather, oil, and soap producing industrial area in the east of Sumida Ward (Tokyo). The area became a buraku district at the end of the nineteenth century when the city implemented urbanization policies that led to leather factories and workers being relocated from the old buraku district (Asakusa) to the suburban areas of Arakawa and Higashi Sumida. The immigration of newcomers, intermarriages, and the emigration of buraku residents further modified the demographic composition of the district throughout the twentieth century. Currently, people living, working or commuting to Higashi Sumida include Koreans, Chinese, South and Southeast Asians (Filipinos, Thais, Malaysians, Bangladeshis), Africans, and Japanese.

Kinegawa community-based programmes include the *Sumida Kodomokai* children's organization,⁶ school activities, exhibitions, visits to the surrounding leather factories, and community events. The source of Kinegawa community activism is represented by the past experiences and memories of the former Kinegawa Elementary School, which was opened in the district in 1936 and has been operating as a Dōwa education institute since 2003. The school was closed as a result of increasing discriminatory attacks against the 'children of Kinegawa' by children living in the surrounding areas. In 2004, teachers and part of the community decided to establish the Archives Kinegawa Museum in the former school's building in order to maintain the memory of the school and valorise the district. The exhibition includes the history and educational experiences of Kinegawa and portrayals of the everyday life in the district, including the display of leather tanning machinery, artefacts,

⁶ Sumida Kodomokai is one of the children organizations (i.e., part of the Kaihō Kodomokai, 'Children's Liberation Society') established by the BLL throughout the country to involve communities in addressing buraku and other forms of discrimination. Children aged between 3 and 13 and their families gather on Saturdays in the BLL's building located in a nearby district, and meet with teachers and BLL supporters to cook, draw, play, craft objects, visit factories, and discuss various topics (for example, daily life, discrimination).

pictures (of workers in factories and children crafting leather objects) and children's diaries.

People in the community are aware of the various factors that negatively define the town; for example, a local informant remarked, 'the place in which I live is called Kinégawa and is full of leather and oil factories. Everyone says that it smells bad, that Kinégawa has a weird smell'. However, the initiatives and exhibitions organized by the museum pay special attention on certain factors commonly associated with the heterotopic character of the buraku, and invert these into positive aspects relating to the nation or the city, thereby reducing the idea of separation between the buraku and the non-buraku. In addition, a special emphasis is put on those elements that reinforce a sense of local attachment and interconnection. In particular, the interplay between different individuals, identities, and experiences crossing local boundaries of the district on a daily basis, leads to a special engagement in and attachment to the locality of the town that, in a 'bifocal' perspective (Durham Peters 1997), is not seen as separate from wider social relationships. Social actors simultaneously experience the attachment to the local as both the cause and effect of wider relations with the 'national' (for example, with an emphasis on the connection with the everyday life in Tokyo, Japanese industries). Multiple fields of exchange in which the participation of people might be extended are hence organized. These include, for instance, ethnic cultural events like food corners and fashion shows, leather industry events, visits to leather factories organized in collaboration with schools from the whole city and companies within the context of *Dōwa* education.⁷ The participation of people and individuals living in the surroundings of Kinégawa represents an important consequence of this process.

Archives Kinégawa museum includes three main thematic areas strengthening this local attachment: the history of the town (diaries, pictures); leather tanning, manufacturing techniques, and industrial materials (leather made objects, machinery, pictures); the educational project (hand-made items, drawings, pictures). Narratives in Archives Kinégawa (poems and labels) emphasize aspects of the hometown (*furusato*) by employing geographical properties of the area, historical accounts (Kinégawa before and after World War II) and local experiences (leather factories in Kinégawa and the relationship with their surroundings).

The museum plays a *heterotopic* role in Hetherington's sense by engaging all 'things

⁷ *Dōwa* education was initiated by the government and the BLL to tackle buraku and other forms of discrimination and include programs in schools, programs for buraku adults, and programs for non-buraku to learn about the issue, often organized in workplaces such as companies.

displaced, marginal, rejected or ambivalent' and proposing 'an alternative mode of ordering', through a rigorous selection of objects and narratives, as well as through the translation the buraku into readable conceptual spaces (e.g. local attachment, industries, objects of everyday life). Maps marking the number of leather factories and old pictures of the district are displayed. As a matter of fact, the increase in the number of factories as a sign of local improvement, and their size and the modernization of the leather production are described as positive aspects and representation of the wider context of Japanese industries: the replacement of urban and environmental negative aspects (the smell, the dirtiness, the narrow street and grey colours) with positive ones is illustrated by the presence of objects, poems and parts of children's diaries. These exhibitions display the community and its people's pride in their social relationships, the work of parents in leather tanning, family relationships, and the attachment to the locality.

Another part of the exhibition, and of the whole district project, includes children's experiences in the life of the community. The children's imagery of the local environment is one of the priority interests of buraku education and neighbourhood activism intended to strengthen self-esteem and social relationships. During school time, children write diary notebooks (*seikatsu noto*) about their daily life. Some diaries written between 1964 and 2003 have been compiled into the collection called 'Children of Kinogawa' and displayed in the last section of the museum as historical documentation. Children are asked to write about their daily life in the district to identify, to describe and reflect on aspects they consider important, to think about the local environment, as well as to give testimonies of personal experiences. These writing practices help foster the relationship with their hometown and the community. In some diaries, children reformulated the image of the district by exchanging dominant features like touristic spots (Tokyo tower, Ginza district) to create a parallel between the hometown and the rest of the city. Other essays contain descriptions of factories and explicit concerns about discrimination. Children demonstrated awareness of the district's problems and the need to intervene in their environment, by highlighting negative attributes (the smell) through personal feelings exemplified by remarks such as, 'I used to wake up to the sound of cars and the smell of the oil and I did like it'; alternatively, they replaced the negative aspects with other positive images, saying 'the oil can be used for making food, soap, instant noodles, bread, margarine, cookies and perfumes' (Cangià 2012).

In general, during my staying in the community, I have observed a common identification of the district as 'not different from the rest of the city', as a 'big industry' with

‘old techniques of production that are preserved for future generations’; a special emphasis is thus put on the connections with the ‘outside’ and on the economic value and the historical relevance of the industrial area. On a few occasions, the tradition of leather tanning in Kinegawa was expressly described in term of ‘roots’ and ‘Japanese culture’.

Urban, educational initiatives and the exhibition language in Kinegawa appropriate commonplace spatial features associated with the ‘buraku’ and re-frame these within a wider dimension that expands to national boundaries. Although at first localized in the *here-and-now* of the district, these practices transcend specificity and local borders, by employing an *assimilating* strategy (Karp 1990), a strategy that highlights similarity (based on social, economic and cultural principles) rather than difference. However, they pride the community on the industry in the town and its history by crossing local ethnic and social boundaries, and tell about experiences of a vanishing locality of the area (with memories of Kinegawa in the past) by reconstructing community relationships in its present.

Naniwa Leather Town

Naniwa ward (formerly Watanabe village) is an important industrial area and leather trade centre in Osaka engaged in the tanning and secondary leather-work, in particular *taiko* drum manufacturing. Historical outcast groups were gradually moved to the limits of the city and relocated in Naniwa. The district has been at the centre of activism by the BLL since the late 1960s, and is home to the Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute. Currently, Naniwa is an officially designated ‘assimilation area’, where a variety of individuals live, especially buraku people and Korean communities.

The ‘Osaka Naniwa Human Rights Respect Town Making’ is a project of community development implemented in the area in 2002 by a committee including the Osaka Municipal Government, Japan Rail East, the Osaka Taiko Industrial Association, the Naniwa branch of the BLL and various experts. The area, composed of thematic zones on human rights culture and taiko tradition, runs from the Ashiharabashi railway station to Liberty Osaka museum, including information boards and exhibitions. The programme aims at turning Naniwa into the ‘hometown of drums’ (*taiko no furusato*) through a twofold strategy, which includes two main projects: the Museum of Human Rights *Liberty Osaka*, and the *Road of Human Rights and Taiko*. The participation of the community, as well as other individuals from other areas of the city and tourists, is particularly strengthened in this context through a variety of initiatives, including cultural programmes, posters, promotional brochures, seminars,

workshops, festivals (*matsuri*) and concerts (Asaji 1997, Cangià 2009, Amos 2011).

Liberty Osaka (formerly the Osaka Human Rights History Museum) was built in 1985 and was renovated in 1995. Divided into four main units ('Human Rights Today', 'Our Values and Discrimination', 'The Activism of People who are Discriminated Against', 'Human Rights and You'), its main objective is to introduce the history and conditions of minorities, indigenous and other vulnerable groups in Japan (i.e. the burakumin, the Ainu of Hokkaidō, the Ryukyans of Okinawa, Korean and Chinese communities, women, homosexuals and the survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki). The corner on the 'buraku issue' is divided into two parts. The first space, called 'the leatherwork', is composed of pictures and testimonies of leather-workers, leather-working tools and uniforms, as well as artefacts such as taiko drums and leather sheets. The second space, 'Community Reform and the Buraku Liberation Movement', describes the struggle against discrimination undertaken during social movements through the display of pictures, flags, former posters and other historical materials.

As a result of visits to the museum and conversations with the personnel, I identified common aspects that are employed to represent Naniwa leather town: these include economic standards (national production of leather), history (Naniwa industry in the context of national history) and cultural principles (cultural property, Japanese culture). At the same time, the museum looks for representative aspects that help develop pride in the locality and buraku culture such as the importance of the taiko drums in the national culture. It also exhibits instruments and uniforms of leather tanning, taiko drums, techniques of leather-tanning, and the life stories of tanners. A special emphasis of the exhibition is put on the historical transformation of the area into the 'biggest leather centre in Japan' and the consequent trade developed with the rest of the country. Watanabe village is described as 'the heart of leather production and distribution'.

The history of Naniwa is framed under the rubric of Japan's minority and human rights issues. Thus, the interpretation of the buraku issue crosses the borders of locality and uses the local context of Naniwa as one of the geographical starting points for a broader focus on human rights issues in Japan (Amos 2011, Hankins 2012). Interestingly, the components that are part of the town-making programme are not merely contained in the museum and exhibition itself, but ideas over human rights and history are supported by the surrounding environment (Amos 2011).

In this regard, the 'Road of Human Rights and Taiko' is an important project initiated

in 2002 by a committee including the Osaka Municipal Government, Japan Rail East, the Osaka Taiko Industrial Association, the BLL Naniwa branch, and various experts. The road's construction was intended to bring tourism to the area and to reclaim the history of drum-making in the district (Cangià 2009, Bender 2012). The impetus for the project was the success of a local band of drummers, called *Ikari* (literally anger) formed over a decade earlier by a group of youngsters interested in reviving the traditions of the taiko in the area. The Road is composed of ten zones, from 'Taiko makers' to 'human rights culture' zone, and runs nearly 500 meters towards the Osaka Human Rights Museum (*Liberty Osaka*). The Road includes taiko-shaped benches, telephone boxes, display of drum music pieces, statues, and information boards all of which concern the history of the district, the production and typologies of taiko drums. In the area nearby Liberty Osaka museum, several bronze statues of drummers are located and explain the production of drums. Some statues represent Japanese traditional drums, while others represent Okinawan native drummers and Korean percussions. According to Bender (2012), the statues function to include these other minorities as part of the multi-ethnic tapestry of modern Osaka. As a matter of fact, the museum represents the conditions of different minorities and develops a multi-ethnic nuance and a kind of cultural authenticity (Hankins 2012) in its exhibitions.

One of the major aspects of the Naniwa project are the taiko stores (*taiko-ya*), the factories in which the drums are produced, often mentioned and represented in the museum scripts and in the Road. The taiko stores are described as the 'places where traditional techniques of taiko production survive', a tradition that is 'shared with the community people and the rest of the country', and the means to change people's perception and understanding of the practice.

Naniwa town-making *strategically* retains some typical museum features, such as the search for more authentic forms of representations and the creation of a discursive logic, by 'equilibrating' (Hankins 2012) various minorities within the broader contexts of human rights. Moreover, it looks for representative objects to define the buraku culture; thus it makes use of stereotypical visual and material images to highlight self-awareness, sense of pride and related struggle undertaken by buraku people over their history. While a discourse on 'human rights culture' (Amos 2011: 179)⁸ links the issue with other groups, a special emphasis is especially put on the 'buraku culture' (*buraku no bunka*) through identification of

⁸ The expression, 'Human Rights Culture' is popularized in the Plan of Action document authored for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (see Amos 2011: 149).

certain practices as the ‘authentic’ (Hankins 2012) culture of the buraku. This is different from Kinegawa, in which a more inclusive identity is registered that includes different backgrounds. Here a demarcation line is made between buraku groups and other minorities when it comes to the leather production (as the culture of the buraku), whereas links and cooperation with other minorities are emphasized when it comes to the ‘human rights culture’.

However, like Kinegawa town-making programme, the project in Naniwa challenges the idea of separateness from the Nation by simultaneously highlighting local aspects and features of the area, while recognizing the contact with the rest of the city and the nation by a special emphasis on trade activities (Naniwa as a leather trade centre) and the urban everyday life in the district (the Road).

On Reconstructing Buraku Leather Towns into ‘National Spaces’

Like both De Certeau’s ‘strategy’ and ‘tactics’, the practices illustrated in this article operate through a twofold approach: on the one hand, they limit their place of operation within the spatial boundaries of the ‘buraku’ (industrial area, factories, taiko stores) and celebrate the community on these very aspects; on the other, they try to search within the conceptual spaces of the ‘other’ (the Japanese) for new forms of identity representations and meanings (the ‘nation’, ‘national culture’, socio-economic values, the ‘city’) where identities merge. The result are spaces that connect with pre-existing shared and accepted images of the ‘Japanese’, as well as those of disconnection, insofar as the buraku areas maintain characteristics of discrimination to challenge social relations and commonplace categorizations. ‘Authentic’ cultural forms become the basis for more complex manoeuvres of multiculturalism in which heterotopic modes of re-positioning and boundary-blurring challenge the idea of separate-ness between the Japanese and minority groups.

The urban programmes in the two leather towns make use of native aesthetics of the past, local attachment and social and economic values of the industrial areas within the wider context of the ‘city’ and the ‘nation’. This is done without opposing the two, and combining elements of the local imaginary of the past with the present effects of urbanization and industrialization. In Naniwa, for instance, taiko shapes are integrated in the urban life of the district through bus stops and traffic signals. In Kinegawa, the factories are presented as a source of economic roles producing things for everyday modern life via old techniques and hard work. Consequently, the view of the ‘marginal’ and the ‘central’, the buraku and the

non-buraku, as well as other migrant identities and personal experiences, as homogeneous social spaces is challenged and re-defined in view of more complex identity factors.

In this context, the reconstruction of urban spaces occurs through the employment of 'marginal' features and their integration into the environment. This integration is not a mere process of inclusion but a form of re-ordering of the buraku and of all their associated images and social relations. As a result, ethnic identities are not seen as discontinuous, separated and rooted in different dimensions. Buraku people, migrants, Japanese, individual and collective stories and experiences are extended and cross borders thereby inhabiting new landscapes in which these dimensions meet and intertwine. Challenging the fragmented landscape of these dimensions contributes to our understanding of the connection between social change and difference (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

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Molding of a Rite of Passage in Urban Japan: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives

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This article focuses on the Japanese childhood ritual of Shichigosan and its changes over the last two centuries. The transformation of Japanese society has affected traditional customs to a great extent, including rites of passage. Social and economic processes such as urbanization, the rise of a consumer lifestyle and the proliferation of commercial services influenced the shifting trends regarding the ritual that constitutes the case study of this article. Evidence of commercialization of the celebration and the presence of consumption are often categorized as negative indicators, implying a potential loss of ‘authenticity’. The discussion attempts to re-interpret the role of consumption practices, arguing that these can be viewed in more positive terms and indeed have a legitimate place within the creation of a ritual experience in modern urban contexts.

Keywords: ritual, consumption, commercialization, urbanization, social change

In the highly industrialized and urbanized society of contemporary Japan, the childhood ritual called Shichigosan is observed within the midst of a dense consumer culture. This ritual has roots in a pre-urban past when it was previously observed in various forms by children between the ages of two and seven. Today it is celebrated by children of three, five and seven years of age. These age restrictions are reflected in the name of the ritual itself, as Shichigosan¹ indicates the three numbers, literally Seven-Five-Three.² The actual date of the ritual is November 15th but the single elements of the celebration can take place on different days.³ Typically, the celebration consists of worshipping in a Shinto shrine (or in Buddhist temple), a visit to a professional photo studio or a family feast in a restaurant. One of the most characteristic marks of the ritual is the festive clothing worn by the children, which is most often a traditional Japanese ceremonial dress. The formal professional photographs taken of the children dressed in elegant festive attire later occupy an important place in family photo albums.

¹ The name, Shichigosan entered everyday use only around the end of the 18th century. Before this period, a number of different names were in use to indicate the series of rituals that differed greatly by regions not only in name, but also in pattern.

² Today it is typically observed for three and seven years old girls, and five years old boys (at times boys of three as well).

³ The date of the celebration varies in different parts of the country. In many regions the event was held on the fifteenth of the lunar month which was believed to be an auspicious day. Today parents take their children to shrines on the closest weekend either before or after the 15th of November.

Today, the Shichigosan celebration is one of the most popular ceremonial events in Japanese households. It provides an interesting example of a pre-urban traditional practice that has flourished in a highly urbanized and developed consumer culture. I argue that in spite of its commercialized aspects — or perhaps because of them — contemporary Shichigosan is a meaningful event for most families in present-day Japan. In this article I will analyze the historical process that produced the present ritual form and its meaning, and during which consumption has become an integral part of the ritual pattern.⁴ I will investigate the effects that urban space and evolving urban lifestyle have had on the ritual. Phenomena such as commercialization and the ever-changing consumer lifestyle will be examined in relation to the alterations that occurred within the ritual during the discussed era. The individual actor in my description will appear not strictly as an observer of a ritual but also as a modern consumer.

It has been argued that the pervasive character of the market in modern industrial societies exercise a strong impact on rituals.⁵ In the case of childhood rites in Japan, the commodification of childrearing (Creighton 1994; Kondō 1999) and the effects of the media have been listed among the main factors that influence today's ritual occasions celebrated by the Japanese family (Shintani et al. 2003; Ishii 2009). Also, several studies noted that in recent decades contemporary Western as well as non-Western industrialized societies have witnessed a revival of ritualism.⁶ In a survey conducted within a Japanese childrearing circle in the early 2000s, Shintani et al found that young mothers observe rituals connected to children in a higher number than the generation of grandmothers used to do several decades earlier (Shintani et al. 2003). The authors argue that the revival and popularity of rituals are mainly due to the effects that commodification of childrearing and magazine reading have had on mothers in contemporary Japan (ibid 30). Discussions concerning the effects of the market on rituals often directly or indirectly imply that commercialization somehow contaminates and undermines the 'authentic' value or the essence of ritual occasions. The emergence of consumption, in particular conspicuous consumption, in the context of a ritual is often perceived by social commentators and critics as a threat. This threatening nature of

⁴ The present study is based on the research that I have undertaken for my doctoral dissertation.

⁵ For examples in the Western context see the studies by Schmidt 1995 and by Pleck 2000 among others. For case studies in the Japanese context see Edwards 1989; Goldstein-Gidoni 1997; Ishii 2009.

⁶ For an in-depth discussion see Moore and Myerhoff 1977; Boissevain 1992; Berghaus 1998 and Grimes 2002.

consumption, or even the mere presence of advertisements, is seen as a threat to the ‘sacredness’ of ritual, as if consumption would have the potential to trivialize and somehow to contaminate the experience (Belk et al. 1989: 24).

I argue that consumption represents a meaningful act within the celebration and that its presence in the ritual practice has its legitimacy. Accordingly, I propose to view commercialization together with consumption as two aspects of an interactive process in which the ritual’s meaning is created between observers-consumers on one end and the market on the other end. An analysis of this process can clarify some of the pertinent questions of the role rituals have in highly urbanized modern societies. This can further elucidate the various aspects of creating the ritual experience in the urban space as well as the role of consumption practices within this act.

Methodology

While traditional rites of passage in rural settings have a rich literature stemming from folklore studies in Japan,⁷ the subject of contemporary forms of rites of passage is an understudied theme in the scholarly literature.⁸ For the history of the ritual in urban environments, I undertook an analysis of print media in the form of an extensive survey of articles of major newspapers in Tokyo covering the period from the end of the 19th century to the present. This section of data proved very useful since virtually no research had been done on the urban development of the ritual during this particular period.⁹ I also examined articles in periodicals and for more recent data I turned to online sources (newspaper database, webpages of commercial activities, blogs etc.). In Japan it is principally the media that produces opinion polls and surveys on popular observances such as Shichigosan. The results of these surveys are then published and used to inform readers on changing trends and customs regarding celebration manners. Additionally, I examined publicity material and

⁷ See among others Yanagida 1935 1949; Ōtō 1968; Yagi 2001; Miyata 2007a, 2007b.

⁸ Exceptions to this are represented by studies on weddings and funerals and other works on local rural versions of rites of passage. In English language see for example see Edwards 1989; Goldstein-Gidoni 1997; Robert Smith’s *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (1974); Hikaru Suzuki’s *The Price of Death: The Funeral Industry in Contemporary Japan* (2001).

⁹ Exceptions to this are represented by the studies of Kenji Ishii and Yūko Taguchi (Ishii 2009; Taguchi 2011).

websites of photo studios, rental shops, clothing retail shops, restaurants, entertainment parks, hotels, travel agencies and gift shops, all actively involved in the celebration of the ritual.

Another important part of my data comes from field trips in 2009 and 2010 during which I interviewed employees of institutions involved in the organization of Shichigosan. These were semi-guided interviews with priests and employees of two major shrines in Tokyo (Meiji and Hie shrines), and with employees of photo, beauty and rental studios. Unstructured interviews were done with families that experienced Shichigosan first-hand, as well as with families planning to perform the ritual in the near future.

Historical origins of Shichigosan

Even though exact data on observance rates are not available, indirect data suggests that Shichigosan is among the four most popular rituals observed by contemporary Japanese families.¹⁰ Families with small children dedicate great care and time to the preparation of the event. The ritual has a significant presence in magazines, on the Internet, in advertisements of several business activities, as well as in shop windows and shelves. While the ritual has numerous local versions with their own distinct path of development, in this paper I will focus on the urban context, with an emphasis on the Tokyo area. By doing so, I will pay less attention to other aspects such as the continuity of traditional patterns in non-urban areas of Japan. Shichigosan has its predecessors in various ritual observances that were associated in the past to certain ages seen as milestones in the child's life. Accordingly, the ritual is conventionally categorized in the literature under the heading, rites of passage. The category of 'rites of passage' has been first described as such by the French scholar, Arnold van Gennep in his seminal work published in 1909, *The Rites of Passage* (van Gennep 1960). The term labels rituals that mark important thresholds or transitions in human life which are often perceived by the community as moments of crisis. A number of theorists built on and further developed van Gennep's approach.¹¹ Among the most influential, Victor Turner drew attention to the liminal and transcendental aspects of the transition and broadened the applicability of van Gennep's theory to modern societies (Turner 1969).

Any social form is necessarily conditioned by socio-cultural factors of the given period. Past, pre-urban patterns of Shichigosan were determined by the traditional, close-knit

¹⁰ These data come from surveys conducted by Japanese governmental, academic and other private institutions on observance rates of various traditional and modern celebrations.

¹¹ For an overview of authors and theories see for example Bell 2009.

community life typical to rural Japan until the end of the 19th century. Customs and ritual observances were informed largely by a cosmology based on the transition of the human soul. Later when folklore research undertook the work of studying the spiritual and material world of the Japanese village, it placed the rituals into the interpretative framework defined by this cosmology. Accordingly, rites of passage were explained as assuming the role of safeguarding the human soul during the phases of its transition between the earth and the spirit world of the afterlife. The transition periods between two stages, in particular those divided by the death or birth line, were perceived as unsafe. In this perspective, early childhood rites of passage were intended to symbolically strengthen the bonds of the child's soul to the human community during a period when these bonds were perceived as still lacking stability and firmness (Onozawa 1999; Itabashi 2007). Another important role of these rites was to establish a connection to the local tutelary deity (*ujigami*) by integrating the child as a new member into the parishioner community (Ōtō 1983; Suzuki 1998).

While this cosmology might have continued to inform ritual practice until quite recently, new meanings and functions started to appear in relation to Shichigosan in the urban environment of Tokyo of the 18th century. Functions such as the integration into the local community, both with regards to a social as well as spiritual dimension, began to gradually diminish in the urban form of the ritual. The focus of the ritual shifted from the community to the family, a trend that can be observed in the evolution of other traditional rituals, too.¹² In the case of Shichigosan, the great variety of ritual patterns and names that characterized single areas of Japan, have gradually undergone unification. The particular socio-economic conditions and the politics adopted by the period's political authority, the Tokugawa clan (1603-1867) brought about an unprecedented urbanization in Japan (Kornhauser 1976; Francks 2009). This development produced an urban culture which gave rise to numerous customs still found in present-day Japan. Many of the characteristics that the ritual assumed in this particular historical period remained salient features of its contemporary pattern: emphasis on display of assets (among them one's dress and accessories), aesthetic and fashion awareness, and visiting a popular shrine. Generally, in the urban setting of the capital Edo (old name of Tokyo), focus was placed on the display of economic status since it was through economic means that social status came to be expressed by urban dwellers. The political context of the period deprived a large group of urbanites, especially merchants, of

¹² Similar changes affected the ritual culture in other industrialized societies. See for example the historical account of North American festivities in Schmidt 1995 and Pleck 2000.

factual political power and thus, the display of economic assets became an important instrument to enhance status (Lindsey 2007). As a result, events that provided occasions for public display grew in importance. Public festivals such as fairs became popular and the emerging urban pattern of Shichigosan fit well in this context. The ritual form began to include a showy procession of family members (and often servants) that accompanied the child to the shrine. The shrine to be visited transitioned from the tutelary shrine of the family to the town's famous Shinto shrine, where the effect of public visibility was enhanced. In brief, the flourishing urban merchant society of the 18th and 19th centuries gave its peculiar imprint to the celebration, and the form that came into being would soon spread in the following century to the rest of Japan.

Affirmation of the urban pattern

After the political changes of 1868, Japan underwent large-scale industrialization and modernization.¹³ Industrial growth, wider access to goods, and the development of advertizing industry all contributed to the popularization of the urbanized form of Shichigosan. Its commercialization proceeded hand in hand with the developing media, publicity and textile industries. Up until World War II, the urban pattern of Shichigosan was mainly limited to Tokyo, but within two decades it spread to every part of the country. Newspaper articles reporting on the ritual during this period elucidate the development of Shichigosan's form and meaning within the urban context.

The two dailies I analyzed, *Yomiuri Shinbun* and *Asahi Shinbun*, acquired a large readership not only in Tokyo but also in other parts of Japan soon after their first publications in the 1870s. Reflecting urban society and its lifestyle, they exercised a strong impact and helped shape the everyday views and life of people throughout the country. The topics that were covered with greatest frequency regarding Shichigosan included: commentaries and advice on practical matters such as the choice of adequate festive clothing, preparation of the festive meal; explanation of the historical origins of the custom; reports on the actual observance (appearing mostly on the day following the 15th of November, the official date of celebration) and others. Photos featuring families and children at Shichigosan published

¹³ In 1855 Japan was forced by foreign authorities to reopen its borders and to end its policy of seclusion. This resulted in the fall of the Tokugawa clan and the restoration of the imperial rule which officially starts in 1868. An extensive modernization and industrialization started afterwards and this brought about enormous changes in the political and social structure of the country.

alongside articles rose in number during the 1920s and 1930s as the result of improving photographic technology.

It is not possible to discuss in detail all results of this analysis, therefore I limit myself to highlight some of the most important outcomes. In general, it can be established that while in the first two decades (1880s and 1890s) an average of one-two article per year concerning Shichigosan appeared in the two dailies, starting from the 1900s this number grew to six per year. Similar trends can be discerned from advertisements which grew in number during the 1920s-1930s, reaching a peak of 16-19 adverts on goods related to the celebration of Shichigosan in 1934-1936. Whereas in 18th century Tokyo the ritual was mostly observed by well-standing merchant and samurai families, the ritual now enjoyed a growing popularity among all segments of the Tokyo population, which can be demonstrated by the slowly increasing media coverage of the event.

This development must be viewed against the background of the general socio-economic changes of the period. The turn of the 20th century marked the beginning of industrial mass production in Japan. Goods became increasingly available to a wider sphere of the population. Large department stores, such as Mitsukoshi, were established and they were soon regarded as symbols of the modern lifestyle (Tipton 2008).¹⁴ Latest trends in fashion and new technological innovations regarding housework were all prominently displayed in department stores, which greatly influenced the consuming public. The importance of festive attire in the celebration of Shichigosan was exploited by the textile industry and retail sector. As living standards rose and mass-produced goods became cheaper, more families were able to purchase new festive clothing for both mother and child.

The 1920s and 1930s are sometimes described as the beginning of hedonistic consumption in Japan, which means that consumption started not only to fulfill needs but also to provide pleasure and recreation (Clammer 1997). The first advertisements for the Shichigosan festive dress appeared in newspapers as early as the 1910s-1920s. Some of the major department stores launched special Shichigosan sales of festive outfits and accessories and these sales were advertised far in advance of the official date of the celebration. The most important department store, Mitsukoshi, built a whole marketing strategy on childrearing issues and as part of this initiative set up thematic exhibitions on childrearing items. Jones argues that these exhibitions can be seen as the first examples of modern marketing and as

¹⁴ On the role of department stores in the social life of the Japanese see among others the studies of Creighton 1992 and Francks 2009.

platforms to introduce the public into the material culture of modernity (Jones 2010:97). Generally speaking, the child and childrearing began to grow in importance for the marketplace and the celebration of Shichigosan is viewed as an important milestone within this development.

During the interwar period the word ‘fashion’ (*ryūkō*) started to appear with more frequency in articles reporting on trends in the Shichigosan dress style. Shichigosan dress in this period meant principally the Japanese kimono, although, the impact of Western culture on Japanese clothing habits grew in this time. It was in the interwar years that the notion of *preparing for* the celebration of Shichigosan first emerged. While earlier articles commenting on the celebration appeared mostly on the day following the 15th of November, now advertisements and articles targeting Shichigosan observers started to be published much earlier, days or even weeks prior to the official date. Today, the preparative phase, during which the family members plan all that is needed for the celebration, is emphasized both by actor-observers and the commercial sector. A thorough and timely preparation, from collecting information to purchasing the desired services and goods, is thought to be decisive for the successful outcome of the ritual event.

The emergence of commercial photography in the 1930s is another major factor. Advertisements of photo studios targeting families planning the Shichigosan ritual began to appear in newspapers as early as 1937. The most innovative photo studios started to offer bundled Shichigosan services, which included photography shoots combined with beauty salon and dress assistance, establishing a pattern that would later spread throughout the country. The popularization of these services was interrupted by the war, but afterwards in the 1960s and 1970s, photographs and services provided by professional studios became an integral part of the celebration.

The proliferation of services for Shichigosan

The diffusion of the urban pattern of Shichigosan throughout the country in the postwar decades was fueled by rapid urbanization as well as standardization of a lifestyle divided between the urban and rural areas in Japan. The processes of social transformation, initiated in the prewar period and interrupted by the Second World War, soon restarted after the end of the war. The standards of living raised steadily and urban lifestyles spread quickly throughout the country. The dissemination of this particular lifestyle was amplified by the development of mass media, which was a prevalently urban-dominated media (Clammer 1997). The 1960s

also marked the era when Japanese capitalism entered the stage of mass consumption and the production-oriented economy gradually transformed into full-blown consumer capitalism (Vogel 1963). Consumption gradually became a salient feature of urban life. Francks's study on the history of consumption in Japan shows that among the factors that made this quick transformation possible was that consumption had played an important role in Japan's economy during the previous two centuries (Francks 2009).

The rapid and intense changes also affected celebration patterns, especially in urban areas. Changes in housing conditions, in the family structure and economic situation of the population as a whole all influenced the way important events in an individual's life were perceived and celebrated. The value system of the Japanese, particularly regarding the family, underwent a significant transformation. The size of the average Japanese family shrank and the lifestyle changed completely with respect to the traditional extended family model typical to pre-war rural settings. The 1960s-1970s witnessed the rise of the commercial service sector which, according to Marilyn Ivy, was closely linked to the trend that saw culture as something to be received passively, i.e. in the form of services (Ivy 1993:252). It was in this period that new services were introduced also to the Shichigosan celebration. The professional photographic service, the rental of the festive dress, professional assistance with dressing and beauty service have become standard parts of the Shichigosan packs offered by several commercial agents.¹⁵



Image 1: Showing the kimono for three years old girls; available for rent at a rental studio in a department store

¹⁵ The traditional Japanese outfit, the kimono was by this time relegated to the ceremonial use. Today most mothers do not feel familiar with this garment and they usually need a help when putting it on.

The rising popularity of photo studios changed the entire celebration. The studio session, during which highly stylized photos are produced by professionals, has since been detached from the rest of the celebration, becoming an event in its own right. The production and preparation of the photo requires a significant time investment. The clothing is selected, the child is dressed, then adorned with make-up and other accessories, with his/her hair arranged by a professional hair dresser. It is a lengthy procedure and therefore it is advisable, if not necessary, to arrange this session well in advance — usually taking place on a different day from the one of the shrine visit and the festive family meal.¹⁶

The power photographs can have on the way memories are preserved has been noted in previous literature (Sontag 1979; Bordieau 1990). Photographs emerge as a tangible link that connects the family's present and past. In Shichigosan, the highly stylized photos add to the value of the celebration. The family album is often the place where distant relatives, grandparents, cousins make their appearance in the life of the family. Sontag also points to the fact that family albums are often the only place where the family still appears as an extended family (Sontag 1979:8-9). In contemporary Japan the diminishing number of extended families increase the symbolic importance of photo albums for the family members. The Shichigosan photo of the child is often sent by mail (or email) to relatives that could not partake in the celebration. Accordingly, the photo adopts the function to reestablish or/and reinforce kin relations. In brief, today the photo occupies a central place in the symbolic construction of the ritual's meaning. It is the object through which the family can create its own imagery and reaffirm its identity as a unit. Its significance is highlighted by the stylized and elaborate professional photographs, which on the other hand, also reflect specific aesthetic values characteristic to Japanese culture.

As for tendencies regarding expenditure levels related to the celebration, according to a survey targeting families observing Shichigosan undertaken by a professional female school, in 1977 the majority of families spent sums not exceeding 100 000 Yen.¹⁷ Although, it is important to note that the percentage of those who spent more than this figure reached

¹⁶ Today, more than 80% of families turn to professional studios for their Shichigosan photographs (source: surveys of the Mikihouse website, 2010 and of the magazine *COMO*, 2010, September).

¹⁷ 250 mothers were asked questions related mostly to their children's festive dress, its style, price and way of acquisition (purchase, rental, inheriting) (*Shūkan Yomiuri* 1977, December 3).

almost 40%.¹⁸ Income levels had considerably risen by this time but this sum can still be considered surprisingly high in the 1970s.¹⁹ In 1980, major department stores in Osaka and Tokyo reached a peak in their sales of Shichigosan-related items.²⁰ In the department store of Daimaru in Tokyo, the profits from the Shichigosan sale arrived at 100 million Yen in total, which was two thirds more than the sale figures of the previous year. From the early 1980s, all major department stores were installing special corners for the exhibition of Shichigosan outfits. The income pouring into photo studios during the month of Shichigosan (November) often helped balance poor sales figures from the rest of the year.²¹ The emergence of convenient packages combining services of shrines and photo studios offered increased affordability to many families happy to celebrate in an appropriate way but without the necessity of exaggerated spending.

The effects of changing views on child and family structure

In the postwar period, the market's development around Shichigosan was evolving in close connection to the rise of the market revolving around the child in general. This development was due to the changes that occurred in views regarding children. Children have traditionally been assigned high value in Japan (Hendry 1986: 34). On one hand, children were valued as labor force for their contribution to the household's economic activities, essential in the traditional agricultural way of life. On the other hand, children were also seen as potential successors of the family, which was an extended-type of household (so called *ie*) typical to pre-war Japan (Iijima 1991). The beginning of the 20th century, however, saw a shift in values attributed to children. Jones argues in his study that it was in this period that a modern concept of childhood emerged which placed the child into the center of the family's world (Jones 2010: 125). The child was transformed into the central figure of the modern family ideal and this altered patterns of childrearing in a significant way.

¹⁸ The expenditure was calculated from the sum spent for the festive dress of the child. 17% of families spent between 100 000 and 150 000 Yen for the festive dress, and 23% spent over 200 000 Yen.

¹⁹ In 1977 a town employee earned around 280 000 Yen.

²⁰ Weekly *Shūkan Gendai* 1980, November 20.

²¹ Information by the Japanese Association of Photograph Culture, quoted in the weekly *Shūkan Gendai* (1980, November 11).

In the decades after World War II, the child's schooling garnered increasing importance in the families' value system (Dore 1958). By the end of the 1960s, costs related to the education of children, and to childrearing in general, came to occupy a large share of family budgets (White 1987; Tsuru 2005). The rising costs of childrearing started to influence birth rate levels since families felt they were not able to provide financially for more than one-two children (Yoshizumi 1995: 4).²² On the other hand, the growing affluence of average Japanese families, the declining birth rate and the spread of consumer life brought about new patterns of indulgence. Spending on the child has become socially accepted as well as desired. A number of terms invented by the media highlights this phenomenon, such as the expression, 'five-pocket child' (sometimes called also 'six-pocket') which describes the child – one with few siblings in the family – as spoiled with gifts and affection by all adults of the wider family (parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles) (Creighton 1994).²³

In association with this development, the child's 'consumer value' increased (Kondō 1999). Expenditure levels of goods and services related to childrearing grew substantially in the 1980s. This was the period when the effects of the declining birth rate began to be perceived. Between 1981 and 1999, the average annual expenditure on a child within the family doubled (growing from 164,000 Yen to 378,000 Yen) whereas the birth rate fell from 0.89 (in 1981) to 0.54 (in 1999).²⁴ The children's market has since become one of the most lucrative (Creighton 1994). As a result, the number of magazines and services linked to childrearing grew enormously. By the 2000s, these magazines have become the main source of information on childrearing issues for women who – due to the atomization of the family – lacked the network of female relatives that used to provide information on childrearing in the past (Shintani et al. 2003: 30-33).

²² The total fertility has never risen above 2.0 since 1973, and it has continuously decreased since then. In 2010, it arrived at 1.3 (Source: www.mhlw.go.jp, access: 2011, January 20).

²³ Another example is the term *ichiji gōkashugi* that could be translated as 'luxurious one-child-ism'. The phenomenon is comparable to the situation in China where the one-child policy of the government, launched to control population growth, brought about the so called 'Little Emperor' syndrome referring to excessive forms of indulgence with which Chinese children are treated by family.

²⁴ General Affair Department, Sōmuchō, Survey on household economy (source: www.sumitomotrust.co.jp, accessed 2011, October 10).

The social phenomena described above are reflected in trends regarding the celebration of Shichigosan. Magazines, print and online, play an active role in the dissemination of information on the celebration. They promote Shichigosan as a major event in the life of the child and family. Personal accounts of families with celebration experience from preceding years, advice from experts for fashion and etiquette specialists as well as reports on new services and products are regularly published. In this way they provide an important source of information for those who are planning the event. Magazines play out a two-fold function: First, they introduce new services, goods and commercial opportunities, thus playing an important role in the promotion of new trends. Second, by publishing a large number of personal accounts of individual families (these accounts are only formally edited), the editors offer a platform where mothers — the main organizers of the event — can share their experience of the celebration. On the other hand, with continuously decreasing or stagnating birth rates, the market needs to compete for children in lesser numbers and accordingly, there is a perceived competitiveness in the market.

This trend has affected also religious institutions involved in the celebration of the Shichigosan ritual. As already mentioned above, the religious institutions traditionally involved in the celebration are Shinto shrines and to a much lesser degree, Buddhist temples, the two principal religious institutions in Japan. While Shichigosan traditionally belongs to the domain of Shinto, there are several Buddhist temples that are actively involved in the celebration.²⁵ This especially occurs in temples which have a reputation of safeguarding fertility related events.²⁶ After the separation of religion from the state defined by the 1947 Constitution, all religious institutions in Japan needed to cover their financial needs independently and therefore they needed to seek support in alternative ways. The number of worshippers thus became crucial as their contributions in the form of offerings and fees paid for the rites represented a major income source for these institutions (Nelson 1997).²⁷ Accordingly, major shrines and temples adopted diverse and multi-fold strategies in their

²⁵ In the Japanese religious context single ritual events are not always strictly appropriated by one or another religion.

²⁶ One such example is Nakayama-dera in the Kansai region, described in the study by Reader and Tanabe, a Buddhist temple that capitalizes greatly from Shichigosan (Reader and Tanabe 1998:206-207).

²⁷ A significant number of rites (wedding rite, Shichigosan, baby's first shrine visit) are offered and conducted by Shinto and Buddhist priests for the worshippers for a fee.

endeavor to attract more visitors.²⁸ Shichigosan occupies an important place in these efforts. In the 1980s when the drop in child births brought about a decline in the number of visitors for Shichigosan observance, many shrines decided to set up their own Shichigosan service packages. Today, major shrines throughout the country offer special Shichigosan plans that are not dissimilar from those provided by commercial institutions such as photo studios or rental shops. The shrine visit continues to play an integral role in the Shichigosan celebration, although the other complementary services included in these packages (rental of dress, professional photo service) enhance the attractiveness of the shrine in the eyes of the observer-families, and simultaneously enhance the shrine's income. Nonetheless, it is important to underline that the role of the shrines (and temples) are not primarily as service providers, but as institutions that represent a physical and symbolical structure that is recognizable for most Japanese. On one hand, these institutions are associated with cultural traditions and hence, represent continuity with the past. On the other hand, they offer a symbolic framework to petition for spiritual guidance for the wellbeing of offspring. This instrument is traditionally regarded and perceived by most Japanese, more or less consciously, as sufficiently effective and acceptable.



Image 2: Assistant in the dress rental shop at the Meiji Shrine (Tokyo) welcoming families. Viewing and selecting children's costumes for the approaching Shichigosan celebration.

²⁸ The involvement of religious institutions in commercial activities has never been seen as something improper in Japan. Both Buddhism and Shinto, historically catered for several this worldly needs of the population (see on this theme also Reader and Tanabe 1998).

Diversification and individualization of celebration patterns

The latest developments in Shichigosan celebration patterns could be best characterized by the term ‘diversification’. New types of services and goods continue to be invented by market actors in order to satisfy clients’ needs. Photo studios, department stores, hotels, rental shops together with major shrines and temples promote their own Shichigosan sets which include complex set of services for more affordable prices. Publicity leaflets for these packages often arrive directly at the homes of families with small children. In the recent decade, along with standard service packs, extravagant options began to appear as well. Vacations to Hawaii, photographing in a studio imitating the atmosphere of Hollywood, celebrations in amusement parks (such as Disneyland) are but few examples of the excessive options available to be combined with the celebration of Shichigosan.

The development towards a multiplicity of celebration options and a diversification of services is congruent with ongoing changes taking place in contemporary Japanese society. Needs, desires, lifestyle and values are becoming more diverse and less conformed in Japan today. Plurality is acknowledged as one of the salient characteristics of modern Japanese family life. The market is reacting to this demand by reflecting the desire of individuals as well as individual families to differentiate themselves. The variety of celebration options for Shichigosan means that none of the existing patterns are labeled as the only acceptable or proper. Socially accepted patterns of Shichigosan today make it possible to accommodate the needs of particular families and offer space for the expression of individuality in the form of personal preferences.

Women’s role in the ritual must be addressed, as well. Mothers are the principal organizers and promoters of the Shichigosan celebration. The factors underlying this development are manifold. The first is connected to the place that Japanese women occupy in the modern family. Another includes the increasing importance of the preparative and planning phase of the Shichigosan celebration over the last few decades. In the course of the 20th century, the division of labor in Japanese families gave Japanese women the control over the household as well as childrearing.²⁹ Decisions over the daily running of household, childrearing and education fell to women and it is their preferences and demands that represent the main motivating force for most of consumption that takes place within the family (Kuraishi 1990; Clammer 1997). The implications of these developments can be

²⁹ For a more detailed discussion of this subject see Hendry 1986; Imamura 1987; Lock 1988 and White 2002.

observed in the celebration pattern of Shichigosan. Today, the performance of Shichigosan requires a number of goods and services purchased on the market (dress, accessories, family meal, photo and beauty assistance etc.). Organizing and selecting options between the available services and goods requires a sufficient amount of research and a corresponding period of planning. The aim, as declared by most mothers, is to organize a highly successful celebration; one that is memorable and pleasant to all family members. In order to do so, mothers must become skilled organizers and also 'informed consumers'. Indeed, magazines and web sites all emphasize the importance of early preparation, underlining that the secret of a successful Shichigosan is an early start to planning. Mothers are encouraged to set up detailed schedules and they are guided by samples of calendars provided by magazines where lists of things to do, to decide, and to prepare, are inserted into tables divided by months and weeks.

Today Japanese women hold a central role in the construction of family life not solely on the physical level, but also on the symbolical level (Skov and Moeran 1995). Celebrations such as Shichigosan, connected to the first years of the child's life, acquire importance as milestones of the most intense phase of the childrearing period. These are the years when the family as a unit is affirmed and which represent the most tiresome period in mothers' lives. The celebration contributes to the symbolical construction of the family as an emotional entity. Moreover, for mothers it can represent an occasion when the fruits of the mother's labor performed thus far can be rendered visible and potentially rewarded.

Conclusion

Rituals, even those claimed to have roots in the distant past, are never static events as they reflect changes in the social as well as economic context of the examined culture. Ritual, as any social phenomenon, needs to be congruent with the everyday life of its actors in order to be capable of fulfilling the needs of individuals and therefore it cannot be excluded from the stream of changes taking place within society. It has to interact in an ongoing process with its social reality. It is undisputable that the contemporary urban pattern of Shichigosan diverges in many aspects from the old rural forms. In the pre-modern society, the form of a ritual observance and its meaning were largely defined by the value system and cosmology of the traditionally organized society as well as by social class belonging. Customs and rules by which to abide were strictly delineated for all its members. With regard to the situation in present-day Japan, Ishii argues that these rules are missing and consequently, individuals find

themselves lost in the multiplicity of possible interpretations which are offered mainly by the marketplace (Ishii 2009: 190-203). I suggest, however, that a more constructive perspective should be considered when analyzing contemporary conditions.

Roots of many of the salient features of Shichigosan that characterize its present form can be found in the 18th century urban setting of Tokyo. The pattern that developed in that period offered sufficient space for the expression of the emerging urban culture. In the subsequent decades and centuries, when an elaborated consumer culture gradually developed in Japan, the urban pattern underwent further expansion. The impact of the marketplace increased and this affected ritual culture in general. However, this impact cannot be seen as occurring in a one-way process. Consumption is not solely an economic behavior, for it is embedded in the social, religious, and historical context of the given culture (Sahlins 1972; Douglas and Isherwood 1984; Miller 1987).³⁰ The innovative activity of the market is often a response to emerging needs from the side of the consumer, while at other times it can even precede them and make previously unimagined goods and services desirable. However, in each case the introduction and institution of new customs by the market is conditioned by the acceptance of a wide segment of the individual members of society. This acceptance is determined by cultural factors and must be congruent with existing values.

In the case of Shichigosan, its postwar development was encouraged by social phenomena such as the transforming structure of the Japanese family, changing views on children, declining birth rates along with changes in the overall lifestyle that brought the Japanese family to seek new ways of identity affirmation, unity and harmony. Celebrations such as Shichigosan can be excellent instruments by which these aims are at least partly achieved. One of the most important functions of family rituals lies in their ability to contribute to a symbolic constitution as well as reconfirmation of values to which the family wishes to adhere. Besides, the case of Shichigosan shows us that consumption practices can be viewed as an integral part in the process through which 'ritual experience' is created. Due to the variety of choices for goods, services and celebration patterns available to the observers, consumption becomes an interactive process between consumer-observer and marketplace/media. Consumption, with its variability, diversity and plurality can thus be interpreted as providing a platform where the creative and innovative part of molding the

³⁰ More recent studies indicate that consumption and consumer behavior have a ritual dimension too and hence its symbolic aspects need to be taken into account (Rook 1985; Belk et al 1989).

ritual experience by the actor-observer can take place. While diversification of options to celebrate a ritual appears principally in the form of products and services made available and/or invented by the marketplace, consumption patterns act as a vehicle through which to express individual choices and personal preferences. Single families are thus enabled to interpret a personalized method to celebrate, thus rendering Shichigosan congruent with the needs of the modern individual as well as giving space to reconsider or reaffirm ideas about family, values, and aesthetic standards.

Finally, the study of a ritual can be useful and constructive in a number of ways. It can be regarded as a platform where the dynamics of social life in a particular cultural context can be observed. In the course of my work, Shichigosan unfolded as a shared platform on which basic social values, views on children and family life, as well as personal preferences emerged through expression. Whereas the commercial activities of the involved institutions profit from the event, it is in the families' hand that the ritual's meaning is created and shaped. Shichigosan today represents a valid and efficient instrument to which the Japanese family can turn to for a symbolic expression as well as an affirmation of its identity and image as a family. The celebration can be effectively used to express values and associated imagery in a manner that harmonizes with the priorities of contemporary Japanese society.

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Cultural Reverberations among Fukushima Radiations: Institutional vs Emotional Versions of the Nuclear Accident.

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For centuries, Japanese culture has attracted the interest of foreign scholars of different disciplines, who were intrigued by several aspects that appeared to them of difficult understanding. One feature that has been of particular concern, mainly among anthropologists, is the overt contradiction between some forms of thought, values and customs. The management of the Fukushima nuclear crisis has offered the world yet another example of this contradiction. On the one hand, Japan has been able to recover from the natural disaster with a quickness and firmness of ground-level responses that seems unprecedented. On the other hand, the slowness and lack of preparation in dealing with the nuclear accident have raised concern across the world. In this article I show that cultural explanations have been used to justify this discrepancy and to attribute the inability to manage the crisis to regulatory and organizational forces. Cultural analyses have been politicized to allow both rhetoric of justification and one of accusation. I analyze some Japanese sources that explain this contradiction from the standpoint of the official report of the Fukushima case and of an unofficial, independent blog.

Keywords: Japan, anthropology of organizations, nuclear accident, Fukushima

One point on which scholars, anthropologists and other social scientists, and observers of Japan have often found agreement is the coexistence, and in many cases the juxtaposition, of different and conflicting sets of cultural responses; a fact that became obvious since the first ‘westerners’ visited the country in the late XV century. These ‘unaware ethnographers’ were Catholic missionaries mainly from Spain, Italy and Portugal, who planned to expand their proselytism to what at the time was named Cipangu. Reading some of the early accounts of these religious personalities, one finds intriguing semi-ethnographic descriptions of the Japanese population. The Japanese were depicted as extremely courteous, sincere and gentle people, who in the eyes of these enthusiastic proselytizing agents could, much better than any other populations encountered until then in the ‘Indian territories’, be liable to true conversion (Tamburello 1998). This enthusiasm started to gradually cool down when the European priests got to know better the local population and some of them witnessed directly social acts such as some of their barbarous forms of punishment for apparently futile crimes (such as theft of vegetables at the marketplace), or their absolute lack of emotion when witnessing or participating in cruel events, such as executions or ritual hara-kiri (Cooper 1995). This discovery of a contradictory set of ‘cultural features’ came to the fore quite soon, as in 1593 all missionaries were forcibly expelled out of the country and what came infamously known as the Christians’ hunt produced several hundreds of martyrs, mainly converted Japanese, a small group of which are still celebrated on the 6th of February in the Catholic calendar.

Proceeding in history, Japan continued to astonish the world when coming out of a 260-years- long isolation, in which commercial contacts were maintained only with China and Holland, the country was quick to modernize and gain a world role in politics, after winning wars with China (1895) and Russia (1905). Japanese culture was a pleasant mystery, and numerous European intellectuals at the turn of the XX century avidly sought to collect pieces of Japanese arts and handicrafts, to study Shinto, Bushido, the tea ceremony, Zen Buddhism, calligraphy, ukiyoe painting and the many other expressions of 'high culture' that Japan had to offer to the world. Then, after two decades of intense and high-speed modernization in which Japan had industrialized quickly its mainly agrarian economy and had established modern prototypes of work unions and socialist movements, the reality of things turned ungraspable again. The Manchurian accidents, followed by the escalations of violence in South-east Asia and China and by Pearl Harbor, again taught the world how incomprehensible a country Japan was.

The war period was not only one of devastation and horrendous crimes, it was the time in which North-American anthropologists started to be actively engaged in understanding cultural patterns through the culture and personality approach (Gorer 1943). Japan was on the agenda, and a group of scholars frantically struggled to explain the explainable, often leaving out the unexplainable. The Second World War produced one of the most celebrated masterpieces of scholarship and knowledge on 'Japanese culture', the book by Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, which was published in the aftermath of the conflict (Benedict 1946). Benedict's book is itself half a mystery, similarly to the traits of Japanese culture it depicted. Ruth Benedict did ethnographic fieldwork outside Japan; she interviewed mainly war prisoners in North American camps and Japanese people who had migrated to the US before the war. As she did not speak the language, she was who to a Malinowskian follower would simply not be a qualified ethnographer. Nonetheless, Benedict's book has been celebrated as one of the best-ever anthropological works on Japan. Her book has enjoyed 15 editions in Japan, selling over 1.5 million copies there; thus making it the best-selling anthropology book in Japan. The question here is not how Benedict could write such a book without coming into contact with Japanese culture in Japan, but why her work was so well received in Japan. The answer may not be, as some analysts have argued (Hendry 2012) that Japanese people have found in the book a number of social and cultural features that they are not able to express self-reflectively, or that the book is simply so convincingly well-written. In a rare joint interview, Ruth Benedict dialogued with Yanagita

Kunio, the father of Japanese folklore and, allegedly, of the Japanese anthropological school. In the course of the interview, Yanagita humbly remarked that a well-trained and sensitive western anthropologist could sometime grasp more than what common Japanese would normally do. However, this does not mean that the complexity of Japanese culture can become understandable, since it is partly obscure even to its people. This is the issue which will be addressed by this article, how culture can become essentialized to justify practices and ideas that not only to external but also indigenous observers find difficult to explain.

On March 11, 2011 (one month after the National Foundation Day, February 11) Japan was hit by one of the most violent natural catastrophes of the last thirty years. Following a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and a 14 meters tall tsunami, the territory around Fukushima was hit with a violence that could have been perhaps foreseen but not expected. Fukushima happened to be the place where four of the most problematic nuclear reactors in the country were located, and the disaster spread further like an oil stain. Sixteen months after the event, the overall figures on the casualties directly related to the disaster and on the number of evacuated people (over 300,000) are not yet certain. What in the first instance looked as a serious accident, though not even comparable to Chernobyl, gradually revealed its true magnitude as, for instance, the area to be evacuated was extended from a 3 to a 20 km radius and the meltdown of two reactors turned into three hydrogen explosions.

In recovering from this disaster, Japan has been giving the world another conflicting message. It has surely astonished for its promptness to stand up again, for the hard-working nature of its people and their common efforts to restart life in its traditionally poorest region, the Tohoku. The Japanese message has also been one of concerted action, of an extremely well organized collective answer to the hardships and the sorrow that followed 3/11. It is doubtful whether another, perhaps Western European, country would have been able to do the same. However, Japan has also given another, less high-sounding but inherently serious, message; that is, one of the top three world economic powers has been unable to manage a nuclear disaster of this entity. Following the explanations to this failure provided by two Japanese sources, here I will argue that cultural explanations are very powerful tools that can be used by different actors and with different motivations to confuse and obfuscate reality; or, as Yanagita wisely noted, to render social actors unaware of the cultural foundations of their own practices.

Cultural Reverberations over Radioactive Threats

On 9 July 2012 the Financial Times published a short and cautious article under the section Global Insight. The article was titled, 'Culture blame games are no way to prevent future crises' and took inspiration from the official report on the Fukushima crisis issued by the National Diet of Japan in July 2012. The article commented on the summary produced in English by the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission led by Kurokawa Kiyoshi which is divided in three sections: conclusion, description of the events, and future recommendations. The main point of the Financial Times article was that Japan had offered a dangerous lesson to policy makers from different countries by concluding that cultural issues are mainly responsible for the failure in dealing effectively and promptly with the Fukushima nuclear crisis. How this message was conveyed is not adequately clear from this article but can be extrapolated from the report itself. In what follows I will first analyze the dialogic style and content of the report in the section which deals with the cultural features of Japan, looking both at the English summary and at the full report in Japanese. Then, I will compare the style and contents of the report with those of an unofficial Japanese blog dealing with this crisis that I shall call Daiwa.

The executive summary in English of the Fukushima report offers to its readers what anthropologists may term a culturalistic, yet extremely clear message. The nuclear crisis and its inefficient management, it is suggested, have been produced by a concomitance of cultural factors that have caused 'a disaster Made in Japan'. The summary states: 'Its fundamental causes are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience, our reluctance to question authority, our devotion to 'sticking with the program', our groupism and our insularity' (Official Report 2012: 9). This statement contains all the cultural patterns that Ruth Benedict had included and developed in her *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*; it does so with such devotion that one might wonder whether its author actually re-read a copy of Benedict's book before writing it.

The model introduced by Benedict, and later developed by other famous anthropologists such as Chie Nakane (1972, 1977), Lebra Takie (1974), De Vos (1985), psychologist Doi Takeo (1977, 1985) and more recently challenged by Befu Harumi (1980), Dorinne Kondo (1990) and Joy Hendry (1989, 2012), is called relational model or verticalism of Japanese society. According to this model, Japanese society is structured on a vertical framework in which authority (the chrysanthemum, or the emperor, for Benedict) is not questioned, and is accepted in a hierarchical set of relationships through full obedience and

devotion (the sword). The model is, however, more complex than this: hierarchical societies need a strong degree of legitimacy to be enduring, and such legitimacy is achieved by introducing a set of tied and highly psychologically rewarding experiences with fellow people; those who constitute, according to Chie, the group and its place (*ba*). These relational experiences have been described in several ways, as sticky, as grounded on a peculiar combination of public (good and rewarding) and private (to be avoided) shame or as based on the idea of *amae*. According to Doi, *amae* is a particular emotional state to be found among Japanese people; a state that Benedict attributed to the development of the tight emotional dependence of children on their mothers, which helps to make people feel as part of a group by introducing a sophisticated, and to foreigners mostly invisible, emotional link through gestures, pauses of silence, blinks or simple body positioning. Hence, the extremely rich anthropological production on Japanese personality, culture and social structures have borne out all the main paradigms of the Made in Japan argument developed in the executive summary: the idea that final responsibility would lie in the cultural arrangements of the group, and the ideas of the verticalism of social structures and of the devotion to common conventions (Kuwayama 1999).

More evidence comes from the following words by Kurokawa: ‘At the time when Japan’s self confidence was soaring, a tightly-knit elite with enormous financial resources had diminished regard for anything “not invented here”’ (p.9). Rather than looking at the meaning of these words, it is worth considering its phrasing style: ‘tightly knit elite’, ‘self-confidence’ and ‘not invented here’ are extremely common cultural images that can be found in several works by anthropologists on Japan. They, again, tell us about a society in which confidence and satisfaction are build endogenously in small enclaves, and in which the relationship with the external world is, as the Shinto philosophy indicates, untrustworthy. However, this message is emphasized only in the Japanese text of the report. On page 16 the Commission concludes that ‘The accident was clearly “manmade”. We believe that the root causes were the organizational and regulatory systems that supported faulty rationales for decision and action, rather than issues relating to the competency of any specific individual’. It goes on to says that ‘the underlying issue is the social structure that results in “regulatory capture”, and the organizational, institutional and legal framework that allows individuals to justify their own actions, hide them when inconvenient, and leave no record in order to avoid responsibility’ (p. 21).

There are two analytical levels on which the citations given above need attention. The first concerns the stress on the apparent contradiction between a ‘manmade disaster’, in which human responsibility is clearly called for and the admission that ‘the competency of any specific individual’ is not at stake. This overt contradiction recalls that, well noted by scholars of Japan, between individual-centered empathy (*amae*) and the strong importance of group harmony (*wa*) and collective achievements. In the course of my ethnographic fieldwork in Mikazuki, a settlement founded in Tohoku in the immediate postwar period when Japan had to deal with the re-integration of a large number of repatriated families from the former Asian colonies, I tested the actual importance of collective achievement at ground level (Torsello 2002, 2009). Settlers were striving because they lacked two important assets: social networks within the local community (they were mostly repatriated families) and the shame of not being part of the territorial social texture. The first initial shortcoming was related to their condition of settlers and newcomers and could not be solved in the short term. The second was a product of their sense of being different; what anthropological literature on Japan has, perhaps unfortunately, defined ‘shame versus guilt culture’ (Lebra 1971 and for a general critique Creighton 1990). Mikazuki villagers sought to balance their lack of these two assets (respectively a social and a psychological condition) through consolidating what informants called *danketsu* (group cohesion). *Danketsu* became an easily transmittable and reproduced philosophy in the settlement, which under the generous provisions set by the Japanese Inner Colonization Plan (1946-1973) decided to invest in internal social harmonization mechanisms and collective economic achievements rather than shortening the gap with local society. These mechanisms included several agricultural cooperatives within the village (some of them sponsored through state aid programs), a number of village-level socio-cultural organizations, the institution of a village Shinto shrine and of a religious festival which, one of the few in the neighboring area, is still held and a shifting-term village leadership. Over time, the forced search for harmony has proved costly in the community; from an initial establishment of 45 households, today only 17 families remain and many (30%) do not own any farming land.

The second level concerns the image created by the ‘regulatory capture’ argument, describing the situation where a closely knit framework within which everything is allowed is contrasted with an outside space in which the degree of accountability dramatically collapses because it can not be controlled. This, again, mirrors some common cultural tropes, such as the *uchi/soto* (internal/external), and the *honne/tatemae* (what is genuinely believed vs. what

is manifested ad hoc) dichotomies, often quoted as features of Japanese society (Hendry 2012). These ideas have informed the so-called ‘vertical model’ of Japanese society in an often uncritical fashion (see for instance the critiques by Befu 1980, Kondo 1993, Shimizu and Levine 2001) that looks at the basic distinction between an inner and an outer sphere, one of familiarity versus one of estrangement, one of true feelings versus one of performance. However, also these categories have often been over-emphasized without paying adequate attention to power strategies and different forms of checks and balances. In the village that I have studied, the emotionally overloaded emphasis on group harmony was contrasted on a daily basis with real differences among families who owned and farmed the land and families who, in the course of the tough history of the community, had abandoned agriculture. In most cases, community-level decision making was in the hands of the former group, which attempted to justify its privileged position pointing out the frequent absence from the village of many non-farmers who were away on seasonal migration labor. In this case, it became evident to me that the ‘group’ and everything which was inner to it compared to the outer (local villages) community, had itself an outer sphere within; a sphere grounded on differences that were constructed on land property and on the pride of having endured farming throughout the hardships of decades of poverty.

The differences between the English and the Japanese versions of the report/summary are few but intriguing. First, the ‘Made in Japan’ argument is absent in the Japanese version. Second, in the Japanese version the ‘regulatory trap’ has a less ambiguous explanation; its origin is traced in the ‘complex intertwining between politics, bureaucracy and finance that has developed by following a common project of government’. Moreover, it is suggested that the consolidation of the ‘mindset’ which support Japanese conforming to the regulatory trap is to be searched in the ‘50 years of mono-party rule, the employment-for-life system, the age-based career upgrading and the recruitment system before university graduation’. The most accurate cultural explanation in the Japanese text is that ‘following rapid economic growth, confidence has gradually turned into pride and self-conceit [...] in the mission of the élite that linked the economic and political world, the primary objective has become the protection of the interests of the system’ rather than maintaining the safety of citizens or following international standards (p.5, my translation).

The Responsibility Trap

Some of the aforementioned cultural explanations are present in the Daiwa blog, an unofficial virtual space started two months after the disaster in which information, media sources and forum discussion on the Fukushima case are updated daily. The general tone of this blog is of overt opposition to both the government and Tepco (the nuclear energy company managing the Fukushima plant). In particular, in a number of blog entries the writer suggests a psychological and cultural explanation for local people's choice to stay in Fukushima instead of evacuating.

A blog dated 22/4/2012 develops what seems a cultural explanation to this question. According to the Japanese author, Japanese people would not accept the idea of having to move out of contaminated lands on the basis of a shared sense of 'responsibility'. Responsibility is, according to the author, built in two ways: by avoiding to 'hurt others and to hurt oneself' (blog 22/4/2012). Here, the meaning of responsibility is very close to that given in the Commission's report; it is linked to the value of 'not causing any conflict' (harmony). The blog entry adds that culture 'has a smooth and responsible face for outsiders, but inside [people] are in agony and self-tortured. The Japanese mind-set is just like that of a person afflicted by self-injurious behavior'. These two aspects, responsibility towards the outer world and self-abusive behavior in the inner world, would be extremely well balanced in the Japanese psychological mindset, causing the one to affect the other in a directly proportional relation.

The responsibility trap, which has a slightly more accentuated psychological impact than the above mentioned 'regulatory capture', has similar cultural origins. Here is how Daiwa, in another blog entry, titled 'Self-hypnosis model' (14/3/2012) introduces these origins. In a simple but insightful diagram, the blogger introduces a four-dimensional explanatory model of Japanese behavior, again focusing on why local people would not leave the contaminated areas. The four dimensions are called: 'bias to underestimate the radiation risk', 'financial problem', 'faith in penance' and 'group mind'. The first two are contingent explanations, related to the good standards of living conditions of the average Japanese who do not want to envision a different life-style (or the need for it) or who would simply attribute financial reasons to the decision to evacuate. The latter two are overtly cultural explanations. 'Group mind' is the same as that given in the English executive summary and it is, as I have mentioned above, one of the most famous anthropological paradigms with reference to Japanese society. 'Faith in penance' is described as 'a unique sense of value for the Japanese

[...] they draw an imaginary reward for the penance and torture themselves somehow'. Furthermore, 'To make their virtual reality more concrete, they stick to their traditional customs' and eventually 'they set an imaginary reward for their painful ceremony'. The 'Imaginary reward is to remove the radiation risk by training their body to be stronger against radiation or by persuading god or heaven to clean up the contaminated world.' Ceremonies are held 'to measure radiation on thousands of items in a supermarket'. They 'hold these kinds of ceremony like group enchantment'. In the end: 'Through the ceremony, they end up overestimating their communal activity', which is the same conclusion reached in the report; the overestimation of the organizational (group) priorities and goals leads to the underestimation of the risk or of the damage to public health. Again, this cultural explanation draws on issues of group behavior, self-penance, excessive ritualization in social acts (see Kuwayama 1999) and biased perception of public vs. private goals and domains.

Conclusion

Whether or not Yanagita's point on the complexity of providing an emic explanation of Japanese cultural patterns is relevant for this case is less important than pointing out why cultural(istic) explanations have been found to be extremely relevant, both by those 'defending' and by those attacking the management of the Fukushima crisis. Anthropologists have provided abundant worldwide demonstration of the risks involved in using culture as an overarching explanatory paradigm. Yet, the task of anthropologists is to detect how cultural features work, and how they are internalized and externalized in daily practices. Unfortunately, the Fukushima case is one in which thick descriptions of culture are turned into politicized means in order to blame or to essentialize the responsibility of Japan in ways that are extremely evocative, and at times rather convincing, but confusing. Can this help to explain why Benedict's book was so successful? I believe that the answer lies in the ways in which the nuclear accident has been portrayed: using cultural stigmatizations carries the obvious advantage of dispensing with requiring more insightful analyses of social and political responsibilities. This point calls for attention from anthropologists, who are in the uncomfortable position of studying and describing culture not only in order to contribute to scholarship and science, but to investigate the use that cultural paradigms may have in justifying planet-scale failures, such as the management of the Fukushima accident.

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DISCUSSIONS AND COMMENTS

On Classical Ethnography: A Comment Inspired by Leslie Bank's Home, Spaces, Street Styles

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As the anthropologists Eriksen and Low mention on the back cover of Leslie Bank's *Home, Spaces, Street Styles: Contesting Power and Identity in a South African City* (Pluto Press 2011), this book certainly exemplifies the significance of classical ethnography in urban anthropology. It offers a very deep and well documented ethnographic analysis, dealing with apartheid and post-apartheid South-Africa. It is classical in the sense that it prioritises fieldwork. Deep and wholesome, since it considers the conurbation of East London not only as the framework for participant observation in a changing environment, but also as a built (as a matter of fact, destroyed and reconstructed) environment in a broader sense, that is, composed of houses, hostels, shacks or shanty towns and even significant courtyards. The book should be identified as belonging to the general anthropological trend of *revisiting* classical fields of ethnography which has occupied many anthropologists in the aftermath of decolonization. Here Leslie Bank brings us back to East London, to revisit a famous series of ethnographies published in the 1950s by Philip and Iona Mayer (*Xhosa in Town*). Through the study of the transformation of these 'places', the author builds a map which can be read through different keys. Spatial, socio-economic and political interpretations add to the comprehension of the setting. However in the late 1960s Mayers came under criticism by a 'humanitarian' movement in urban anthropology which tended to focus on the social deficits rather than on the organization of space and life in the urban areas. Hence Bank's scope does not just add another ethnographical flash-back to a fashionable critical anthropology, but attempts to restore and empirically update the whole history of East London and, above all, its social life; as he points out 'it is a historical anthropology of urbanism in an "ordinary" South African city'(p. viii). This gives the reader a chance to evaluate the changes that occurred there at diverse historical moments throughout the

second half of the twentieth century. Quite importantly, Bank does not try, as too often is the case of iconoclasts, to discredit previous research in an anachronistic critique of the past generation of scholars. Instead, he aptly softens the opposition between two groups, identified by his predecessors, the traditional (rural) *Red* people and the modern *School* people to show the changes which are happening among them during the considered period of time.

The book starts with a very extensive presentation of the author's point of view and position towards the existing ethnographies of the place he chooses to study and more general theoretical positions in urban anthropology. Then Bank describes what he calls the 'political mood' in the city after the urban riots that took place in 1952 and discusses how these events and moods affected the urban landscape. The results were the erection of Duncan Village, a new township on which he focuses his attention, which took place throughout the rest of the century. Political measures to control better the place as well as the transfer of entire populations transformed the urban fabric as well as the former social and gender roles. Bank speaks of a feminist city going back to patriarchy. A full reversal of the situation occurred when, in the 1980s, young residents took control of the site and made what the author calls 'apartheid modernism' implode. As a result, the township turned into a slum under the new cultural style called 'the comrades', which was introduced by young men choosing to live in shacks. The analysis then addresses specific places and the changes that affected them. For example, Bank examines 'single-sex hostels' made into family housing, matrifocal households transformed into hetero-patriarchal township houses and backyard shacks occupied by migrants now being occupied by single women, showing how the old and new users make up the reputation of places.

And this is how the book ends: Duncan village has become a 'dishonoured urban locality'. It is hard to find clear causes for its decay: Bank speaks of 'fractured urbanism', sticking to his refusal of considering people as mere victims of macro factors but rather as agents of their lives. One can only applaud such an empirical and *emic* approach. However the reason Bank gives for introducing the concept of fractured urbanism is purely rhetorical and could be used to develop any argument, including 'a more complex understanding of the space of the post-apartheid township as socially compact, culturally complex and internally diverse' (p. 241). Regrettably, this kind of rhetoric is not infrequent in 'Home, spaces, street styles' — perhaps a mere sign of the times. Similarly, on a theoretical level, the discussion constantly complies with

the 'ethnographically correct' grid of post-structuralist concepts and methods, which makes it a bit too conventional.

Bosnia-Herzegovina: Connecting the Dots

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From afar, the European Union seems to be the place they all rush to get into. And that was the misconception I first came to Sarajevo with. But for those deciding Bosnia's future, the EU is much like heaven: everyone wants to go to heaven but doesn't want to die to get there. A flimsy analogy saying but one thing: the perks and privileges that come with European Union membership are favoured by all, not so much the painful reforms and social transformation demanded by the accession process. This may be a bitter pill to swallow for EU officials and enlargement enthusiasts alike. Realising that the Balkans are not longer passionately yearning for Europe, not willing to do whatever it takes to get there, is for many a malaise hard to whisk away. With last month's low turnout for Croatia EU referendum, this purely intellectual concept sported only in conference halls, gains more ground. It shows the carrot- and- stick approach the EU assertively used in the Balkans as obsolete. This is something the European Union has to get a grip on, as well as understanding that Balkan countries cannot be all dealt with in a similar fashion. The region is simply too complex, with local enmities and expedient political interests chipping away at an ever vagrant trans-regional consensus towards the EU. Out of all Balkan states, only Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo have yet to submit their EU membership application. If Kosovo is still a young state, highly contested internationally and on life support from Washington, the same can't be said about Bosnia-Herzegovina. Yet, Bosnia has shown little national consensus in pushing for reforms and furthering the process of EU integration.

Keywords: urban, civil society, Bosnia, Sarajevo

Early this year, as bitterly cold weather and snow was yet to sweep across much of the Balkans, I flew into the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina to attend a conference on the country's future and challenges of EU membership. Nothing uncanny, so far; rather, just another debate between students and specialists around the difficulties ahead. One might say a commonplace event in a country so bound to European institutions via the key role the EU special representative to Bosnia plays.

The conference started with the usual praising arguments, stressing the importance of becoming an EU member state and the expected benefits. Yet, as the debate rolled on and students began voicing their opinions, a different mindset slowly began to dawn. It shifted from an unabated consensus on the EU accession to a cautious, sceptical, less enthusiastic approach. It was new ground I was stepping on.

Misgivings over the EU Bid

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I imagine this as a bitter pill to swallow for EU officials and enlargement enthusiasts alike. Realising that the Balkans are not longer passionately yearning for Europe, not willing to do whatever it takes to get there, is for many a malaise hard to whisk away. With last month's low turnout for Croatia EU referendum, this purely intellectual concept sported only in conference halls, gains more ground. It shows the carrot- and- stick approach the EU assertively used in the Balkans as obsolete.

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The Status-quo

Again, for an onlooker such as myself the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina appears dire. Since the Dayton Agreement was signed, little has been done to prepare the country for peace. It simply appears that sixteen years have been wasted, and also has not prevented the country from disintegrating along ethnic lines. Meanwhile, people became disenchanted with what was supposed to be their unifying goal — EU and NATO accession, whilst politicians continue to foster ethnic tensions for electoral gains. Attesting to this lingering ethnic strife is the current political deadlock — Bosnia still has no government a year and a half after the last elections were held.

This current state of affairs has but two culprits: the International Community and Bosnia- Herzegovina itself.

The International Community

As in most post-war societies, the involvement of the International Community was instrumental in preventing further bloodshed and helping rebuild the country. What sets Bosnia a cut above other post-war societies is that sixteen years after the war ended an international envoy, called the High Representative, still holds powers above the local constitution, parliament and governments. This was possible because both the EU and the United States agreed upon a reconstruction strategy foregrounding the principles of multiculturalism, in order to maintain peace, ethnic communities should maintain their separateness and avoid negative interactions. Not only did the Constitution framed at Dayton legitimise the territorial divisions of Bosnia but created separate institutions for each of the three ethnic groups: Serbs, Croats and Bosnians. As expected, this made the country ungovernable, with only one exception: The High Representative for Bosnia, who still enjoys veto power, has the ability to amend all laws and to revoke any elected official if deemed necessary.

The western leaders who drew up the accords failed to insist on a mechanism to adapt *Dayton* to future developments on the ground in Bosnia. The Constitution left ethnic national groups too much room for blockades should they see their interests at risk. In other words, the existing constitution actually impedes the development of a culture of compromise.

It is this reality that has kept Bosnia in a limbo for almost two decades now, and looking back, sixteen years later, we realise how faulty this approach was to begin with. At that time it seemed the reasonable thing to do but this painful status-quo should not have lasted this long.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

A divided country may be by the fallout of Dayton, but Bosnia is equally responsible for fuelling this ethnic segregation. With the exception of the army, Bosnia keeps ethnic divisions a focus for any administrative and institutional organization. Serbs, Croats and Bosnians vote only for their own, as politicians foment ethnic nationalism and use religion as a primary tool in their electoral battles. Likewise, the infamous *two schools under one roof* system, which separates pupils based on their ethnicity, has seen little popular support for its removal. Sarajevo, blending in an

Ottoman past with a strong European heritage, was once dubbed the ‘Jerusalem of the Balkans’ for its religious and ethnic diversity. Today, out of its 550.000 inhabitants only 18.000 are ethnic Serbs. For all it counts, the only thing people of Bosnia, whatever their ethnicity, clearly agreed upon is that direct external intervention has to be reduced.

There’s no silver bullet for Bosnia’s problems. But the failure to spark a constitutional debate on the devolution of powers from the High Representative to the local level will hamstring the government in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and render it even more powerless than it is now. Also, the EU has to have a clearer policy toward Bosnia and stop sending mixed messages, as was the case when it allowed Serbs and Croats to travel without a visa but not Bosniaks.

Mistakes were made as it was hard to connect the dots looking forward. But now, looking back, they must be amended. The final decision is with the people of Bosnia. Only Bosnians can say if they are willing to take up the challenge, make difficult reforms and join the EU, or keep the status quo, which will only widen the existing gap between Bosnia and the rest of Europe, and in turn reduce the likelihood of a better life in the foreseeable future.

Visual Approaches to Urban Ethnography¹

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The visual tells about the city: its history, its social and spatial forms, and its characters. Ethnography helps us understand the meaning, identifying the processes. Visual language has in fact the potential to uncover meanings and representation that reflect an interesting micro perspective on phenomenon under study; a connection that, however, today it is still restrained by a mutual shyness. Both ethnographic photography and film may be the place where the work

¹ This commentary is part of my ongoing reflection on ethnographic experience and visual methodologies. Some of the issues addressed here were discussed during a workshop (co-authored with Jerome Krase) held in Buenos Aires during the last ISA Visual Sociology Thematic Group conference of August 2012.

of urban research encounters audio-visual skills and competences. The visual, in fact, provides a way for social scientists to explore various kinds of representations applied to the field of ethnographic research.

This commentary gives a snapshot on visual sociological methods, spatial semiotics, and visual culture to study the urban scene. Moreover, it would underline that we could treat observations and photographs as we do other information, such as interviews or demographic data which are specific to areas, neighbourhoods, streets, organizational boundaries and census tracts. We should note here that our snapshots attempt to be as close as we can get to what an ordinary person might see as they traverse a space. They are not attempts at artistic representation but are intended to document visual surveys. Indeed, visual sociology and attention to vernacular landscapes in the inner city allow us to see conflict, competition and dominance at a level not usually noticed and which can easily be related to the theories and descriptions of Lefebvre and Bourdieu.

As Krase (2012) states, explaining how urban spaces are used, contested and transformed by different social groups is a crucial task. It is suggested here that a visual approach to the study of gentrification in ethnic neighbourhoods could encourage a synthesis of old and new approaches to the pre- to post- modern urban scenes. This could also provide insights as to how visible cultural resources are commodified. Given that rapidly changing metropolitan landscapes are often the venues for sociological reconnaissance of globalization and de-industrialization, visual sociology can be a valuable adjunct to 'normal' urban research and reportage. For example, we can use photographic surveys in comparison with historical photographic archives to see and record how differing constructions of space and spatial practices in the landscape of new immigrants transform the city. We can photograph, film or video ethnic enclaves in order to both document and illustrate how particular spaces are changed by their new occupants. Of special interest might be the ways by which public areas are used. Visual methods make it easier to examine new constructions, as well as the alterations of existing spaces.

On Sunday February 10th, for instance, the Chinese New Year Parade with the ethnic spectacles of Chinese dragon dances, live musical performances and more took place in the so called Milan's Chinatown, in Paolo Sarpi street. I could not stay still in one place, so I took one chance to shoot some photographs of people interacting in the area. I am using this as an example of how the built environment may be used as an empirical source beginning from the

analysis of visual data. In this sense, my visual research concerns the visibility and reflection of the social relations and the everyday negotiation of prejudices and stereotypes in a contested urban space. We can study the Milan's Chinatown and its changes under the lens of gentrification, globalization and migration policies in Italy (Manzo 2012a, 2012b). As shown in the photograph below, during the Chinese parade in Milan I noticed a kind of blackboard full of different signs, articles and notes on a local Italian street florist.



Figure 1: A local Italian street florist in Paolo Sarpi street, Milan (Italy), February 10th 2012.
© Lidia K. C. Manzo

My attention was particularly attracted by a hand-written sign in Chinese. The florist explained to me that it was a notice for his Chinese customers. Since Valentine's Day was close, he thought to suggest to book flowers in advance. He said, 'They love blue roses, Chinese people are crazy for blue roses nowadays and they are very good customers, they always buy a minimum of eleven roses, not as the Italians (laugh)'. Signs like this seem to me to constitute a fascinating 'mix' of commercial advice and suggestions for any kind of customer, Italian as well as Chinese. Interestingly Italian anti-immigrant rhetoric sometimes doesn't match everyday negotiations of consumption practices and commercial interests.

As Mac Dougall (2006) points out, we should develop forms of ethnographic knowledge and explore areas of social experience for which the visual media have a demonstrated affinity; in particular the spatial, the temporal, the corporeal and the emotional. In this perspective, what role does the visual play in understanding how power structures operate at the micro level of

social relations? How do we visually build stereotypes? In the process of constructing reality, how can visual methods allow us to understand the social constructions of meaning? Or, again, is semiotics a way to understand different systems working in the construction of meaning?

Drawing up the legacy of documentary, fine art and social critique, the Visual applied in Urban Research is an interdisciplinary field of practice which develops a deeper dialogue on urban sense-making processes. By encouraging contributions from scholars around the world and promoting a discussion on this topic, *Urbanities* may contribute to develop answers to the above questions.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

The Art of Making a Living in Naples

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Italo Pardo (2012). Exercising Power without Authority: Powerful Elite Implode in Urban Italy, in Italo Pardo and Giuliana B. Prato (eds). *Anthropology in the City: Methodology and Theory*. Farnham: Ashgate: 53-78.

and

Jason Pine (2012), *The Art of Making Do in Naples*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

The volume *Anthropology in the City* has opened up a broad discussion on the methodological and theoretical status of what has become known as ‘urban anthropology’, a debate that necessarily includes a historical reflection on the development of anthropological research over the last decades. With more than half of the world’s population living in urban settings, anthropology has inevitably become in great part ‘anthropology in the city’. As the editors of this collection emphasize, ‘urban anthropology should be intended simply as (more or less classical) anthropological research carried out *in* urban areas’ (p. 8). After years marked by a too abstract and ideological debate in anthropology, we see again a clear commitment to ethnographic research. The novelty of urban anthropology rests not so much in conducting anthropological research in the city as in the relatively recent application of classical methods of social and cultural anthropology in western towns and cities.

When Italo Pardo started systematic field research in Naples in the 1980s, he had to deal with the mainstream opinion in anthropology, especially in British Social Anthropology, that the anthropological paradigm could not be applied in western urban settings. The holistic approach was simply considered inapplicable in the study of ‘complex societies’. Furthermore the hermeneutical objections to the anthropological study of western cities threatened to block any research project in this field.

Pardo had already worked on ‘belief and thought’ in Naples in the late 1970s and early 1980s before starting his long-term fieldwork among the *popolino*, which he carried out between 1984 and 1993. The results of this research have been published in numerous articles and in the monograph *Managing Existence in Naples: Morality, Action and Structure* (1996),

a study that formed the basis for further research projects, in particular Pardo's work on élite groups. Though centered on his project on the Naples élite, Pardo's contribution in the volume *Anthropology in the City* gives a good overview of his long experience of field research in the metropolitan area of Naples.

It seems natural to confront Pardo's research with a recently published ethnography by the American anthropologist Jason Pine. In *The Art of Making Do in Naples*, Pine introduces us to the Neapolitan underworld of the neo-melodica music scene, the murky ambience of wedding singers, boss-impresarios and pirate TV channels, one of the most particular social backgrounds of Naples where the so called formal, informal and illicit economic activities overlap.

Pardo and Pine both tried to understand how people in Naples manage their existence. They have investigated the grey zone between legal, semi-legal and illegal economic activities in comparable but different ways, paying attention to different aspects of the life among a heterogeneous population. Both of them have avoided separating artificially the social, cultural and economic dimensions of the city, and have tried to illustrate a complex reality with all its vagaries and contradictions. Both have contributed to overcome a simplistic characterization of the Neapolitan population as a backward society, demonstrating that the reality is much more complex; they use, however, different methods and a different terminology, not least because they belong to different anthropological traditions. Pardo is known as a British-trained scholar. Pine belongs to the young generation of American anthropologists who shun attribution to a particular scientific tradition.

Pardo and Pine describe in detail the beginning of their fieldwork and the long, systematic process of penetrating the territory. They tell us about their initial difficulties and their first successes in becoming acquainted with the residents. For both the contact with key informants was decisive. In their publications the identity of those persons is encrypted by code-names.

Pardo started his research with the conviction that in order to understand life in Naples it was imperative to study holistically the city's ordinary residents. He strongly challenged the stereotype of Naples' *popolino* as a backward lumpenproletariat, an image that had been shaped by generations of sociologists, historians, philosophers and novelists. After a first phase of preliminary study which had revealed a clear contrast between the social reality of the *popolino* and its representation in the literature, he started constructing the case-studies of significant individuals and situations and examining local people's networks in order to

come to terms with the complex economics of social exchange. Studying people's attempts to expand their personal resources and renegotiate their lives in a complex system, Pardo identified a 'strong continuous interaction' between material and non-material aspects of existence, in which the relationship between morality and (self-)interest is negotiated. Pardo valorizes alternative forms of economy, interpreting people's creative activities beyond formal employment and formal unemployment as expressions of an entrepreneurial spirit, and he refuses to classify these activities 'as colourful examples of an *arte di arrangiarsi* (art of living by one's wits)' (1996: 11).

Interestingly, Pine has chosen just this expression to title his book, but he has given it a different interpretation from that established in the literature on Naples. The word *arrangiarsi* (to make do) is sometimes used by ordinary residents of the Naples region to describe economic marginality. Sociologists have fixed and amplified this negative connotation. For this reason, Pardo regards it as inappropriate to use this expression in addressing the social reality of Naples and, moreover, considers it absolutely damaging. Pine, however, applies the expression in the broad sense in which its practitioners, whom he encountered in Naples, use it; that is, 'as affective-aesthetic sensibilities, as well as economic practices, that traverse open fields of potential where there are no essential margins' (p. 309). Thus, the 'art of making do' refers 'to the alertness, adaptability, and celerity that are awakened by a challenge' (p. 23). Basically, Pine and Pardo see the *popolino* in a similar way. They just diverge in the interpretation of the expression *arte di arrangiarsi*. Both are interested in highlighting the element of creativity in people's attempts to achieve self-determination and personal fulfillment. Pardo describes their 'strong motivation to act in ways that give them reason to feel that they are actively engaged in the negotiated achievement of [...] material *and* spiritual well-being' (1996: 11). In the difficult context of Naples, most 'manage to make a living, achieve an education and stay healthy' (2012: 60). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Pine describes their practices as 'nomadic', unfolding in an open space that is not 'mapped through (state-)regulated circulations and flows' (p. 310).

Pine began his research on the neo-melodica music scene in 1998. For months he 'frequented recording studios and TV stations, attended festivals, weddings, and baptisms, and visited the homes of composers, songwriters, managers, singers, and their fans, but it seemed [he] learned virtually nothing' (p. 16). People invited him to these events, because they were curious to get to know 'the American with the video camera'; at the same time, they kept him at a distance and set him on the wrong track by various means. Pine changed

his tactics and addressed people indirectly in various ways. He started to produce music videos that he offered for broadcast on pirate TV channels. He partnered with a recording studio and came in contact with a boss-impresario. In order to discover the role of the Camorra, he began to transform himself into a neo-melodico singer writing his own songs and looking for an impresario. He engaged in the experience of 'becoming-neo-melodico' until dangers seemed to accumulate, thwarting the process. Participant observation in the neo-melodica music scene, it emerged, meant entanglement in a problematic contact zone.

In his research, Pardo has covered the whole spectrum of people's activities, from the legal and semi-legal to the outright illegal, always emphasizing the fact that true criminals are a small minority and that Naples being so often associated with organized crime has been enormously damaging. As Pine was particularly interested in the neo-melodica music scene and its entanglements with organized crime, it was natural that he should focus on the nature and extent of illicit activities. Nevertheless, Pine has addressed all activities that inform the art of making do, from legal forms of favor exchange and semi-legal working activities to illicit forms of exchange and both murky and explicit entanglements with organized crime. To perform neo-melodica music does not mean to be a criminal, but many of the neo-melodica music singers have found working opportunities in circles dominated by organized crime affiliates. 'Singing neo-melodica music is one of the entrepreneurial arts of making do, and affiliating with a crime clan is an act of entrepreneurial excess. Between them are multiple and varying potential relations' (p. 62).

Among all arts, music probably has the greatest potential of affective binding. Indeed, Naples owes its fascination mainly to its extraordinary musical traditions. The great variety of Neapolitan musical styles and the capacity of Neapolitan artists to absorb elements from other traditions and create new styles is alluring. In the case of the neo-melodica music, the affective-aesthetic effects of music are used to create and reinforce identity. Neo-melodica singers are not appreciated so much for their musical qualities as for their ability to create affective-aesthetic atmospheres. They stage the lives of their fans while generating configurations of Neapolitan life toward which they and their fans orient their everyday experience. Using the language of the popular classes and melodramatic melodies, they tell stories that are typical of the poorer Neapolitan urban and suburban neighborhoods; stories of love and betrayal, and sometimes of fathers in jail or on the run.

Starting from the theoretical framework of performance studies and the Deleuzian theories of affect, Pine reconstructs in his ethnography environments and atmospheres,

avoiding the formulation of definitive results: 'Instead of telling sovereign truths, these stories perform truths in the transient affective-aesthetic time and space between speculation and unknowing. They invite contact with an atmosphere saturated with the intimacies, vulnerabilities, and indeterminacies of fieldwork' (p. 18).

Pine's book is written in a fluent style that in some passages achieve literary qualities. With his video camera he has filmed many events, but in some situations it was not appropriate to film or to write observations in his notebook. He could only count on his ability to reconstruct the 'film' in his mind when he was alone. This might seem a banality, for most anthropologists work in this way, but the results are really astonishing, considering the precise depictions that he gives of certain situations which surely could not have been filmed. He offers dense descriptions of his encounters with some of his 'partners' and informants in the scene. He paid much attention to the details of the outward appearance of the persons that he met, and to the interior decor of their houses. Pines' analysis of the psychology of some key situations convinces in as much as he succeeds in elucidating the inner logic of the dynamics of his conversations. To present his investigations, Pine experimented with alternative forms of documentation, sympathizing with Kathleen Stewart's cultural poesis: 'Instead of sorting things out and summing them up, I adopted a mode of attention that does not distinguish between theory, ethnographic practice, writing ethnography, and even reading ethnography' (p. 221).

Doing fieldwork in the neo-melodica music scene, like in many other contexts in Naples as testified by Pardo's work, means to work hard to get behind the masks of self-folklorization. With subtle irony people represent themselves as poor and oppressed Neapolitans, satisfying thereby the expectations of northern Italian and Europeans who desire a pre-modern 'Italian South' (Pine 2012: 216). The only way left to come to terms with people's tactics of mimesis was to participate in their performances and to practice the art of making do. Pine shot and edited music videos and commercials for pirate television first as an independent entrepreneur and then later under the direction of a boss-impresario, always in search for new clients who could connect him with crime boss-impresari who manage some of the major singers on the neo-melodica music scene. He did not hide his real identity, but people preferred to think of him as a journalist who wanted to find a scoop, and they accepted him because he represented for them 'a link to the potentials of publicity' (p. 167).

When Pardo returned to Naples to start his field research on élite groups he had to face once again the objections of traditional social anthropology. With this project he was

suspected to invade the field of competence of other disciplines like sociology or political science and the research methods of anthropology were considered to be inapplicable in this case. Participant observation and in-depth case studies, however, proved to be fundamental for an understanding of the élite's interests, moralities and behaviours and their relationship with the rest of the society. The combination of these field methods with the extensive study of documents from public and private archives allowed Pardo to produce an ethnography that clearly distinguishes itself from other studies of the élite.

In the early 1990s throughout Italy people's trust in the political system was broken by the great corruption scandal that has become known as *Tangentopoli*. The political tempest washed away the principal political parties, with the exception of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the neo-Fascists. In 1993, Antonio Bassolino won the election for mayor in Naples as candidate of the Democratic Party of the Left, one of the two successor parties of the PCI. Under his leadership, the 'ex'-Communists succeeded in staging a 'renaissance' in Naples by means of a superficial face-lift of the city. They successfully used public space to gain popular consensus and to consolidate their power. Shots of public ceremonies and events on the central Piazza Plebiscito document their popularity, at the beginning. As the years passed, these politicians did not keep their promises and residents' trust in politics faded away once again. Pardo interviewed traders, shopkeepers and craftsmen who had contributed to the urban renewal, whose efforts, however, had been ignored by those in power. Entrepreneurs widely agree today that in that period local administrators 'practiced a sanctimonious, ideologically biased and deeply self-serving style of government at the expense of the city and of its inhabitants' (2012: 69). Once in power, the new political élite worked hard at widening their power network, practicing clientelism. The 'consultancies' that had been granted to thousands of so-called experts and intellectuals caused great controversy. Naples' leftist rulers justified the superimposition of their political project on ordinary citizens on the basis of the stereotype of southern Italians as lazy and predisposed to illegality. Moreover, they used this argument to criminalize the entrepreneurs who had cooperated with the previous administration and to avoid paying for the work they had performed under government contract. As on other occasions these illegitimate procedures were legalized by *ad hoc* legislation. Pardo's final assessment of the political élite that had been in power in Naples for twenty-five years is withering: 'administrative weakness, bureaucratic inefficiency, expedient and selective policies and moral and criminal corruption alongside manipulation of the law, expedient interference in the process of legislation and

complex illegal practices' (2012: 73). Naples' leftist rulers have used the negative image of southerners to whitewash the shortcomings of their politics, and Pardo has demonstrated the disastrous consequences of resorting to this stereotype. On the other hand, a representation that claims to reflect the city in its complexity must also take into account that not all structural problems and social distortions can be ascribed to bad politics.

Pardo and Pine started from different viewpoints and focused on different aspects of Naples' many-faceted social reality. It would not be exact to say that they have obtained the same results, but there are interesting convergences. Through their fieldworks Pardo and Pine verified that the traditional categories with which work activities are generally analyzed were insufficient to understand the art of making a living in Naples and that a broader analytical framework was needed. The practices and sensibilities that Pine has observed transcend common categories such as 'formal' and 'informal' (p. 309). Boundaries are blurred between 'the formal and the informal, the legal and the illegal and the material and the non-material' (Pardo 2012: 58). Furthermore it has become problematic to associate unambiguously the 'formal' with modernity and the 'informal' with pre-modern attitudes. 'Rather than conceptualize the informal only in terms of what it lacks, implying that it is an archaism that vanishes with modernization, I follow continuities and interpenetrations across any figuration of the economy' (Pine 2012: 309). The distinction between the 'formal' and the 'informal' is dubious when it is applied in an abstract way, when it reduces a society's complexity. Pardo has illustrated the arbitrariness of such abstract categorization, inviting us 'to look beyond the formal categories of industrialism and the observable, material aspects of the Western concept of quality of life' (1996: 20).

However the research findings of Pardo and Pine might be evaluated, their fieldwork in the metropolitan area of Naples has once again demonstrated that ethnographic research in western urban settings with the holistic orientation of classical social and cultural anthropology is not only possible, but extremely productive, and that its results open interesting new perspectives in urban studies.

BOOK REVIEWS

Benjamin L. Read (2012), *Roots of the State: Neighborhood Organization and Social Networks in Beijing and Taipei*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Through a comparative approach, this text analyzes the role of state-sponsored neighborhood organizations in large cities in China and Taiwan. The author, however, also takes into consideration analogous phenomena studied by other experts in highly diverse cities in Asia's East and Southeast such as Jakarta and Singapore.

Benjamin Reid, who is an Assistant Professor in political science, has surprisingly made use of an empirical research approach that is very similar to the anthropological one in terms of *modus operandi*, since both in Beijing and Taipei he carried out a veritable fieldwork, gathering important ethnographical data that becomes very useful from an analytical point of view. This proves that this essentially anthropological strategy is likewise useful in case of a political science theme.

The book builds on a fundamental premise that is also its recurrent theoretical theme; i.e., that the separation of liberal origin between state and civil society, as conceived in the United States and to some extent in Europe, is practically nonexistent in the Asian societies studied by the

author. In Asian cities, from Beijing to Jakarta and from Taipei to Singapore, neighborhood organizations reveal a peculiar overlapping of state and civil society that may appear odd and even absurd to a Western observer. In European societies of liberal derivation and especially in North America, the state's presence in these grassroots urban organizations would be viewed as encumbering and awkward, if not unacceptable and illegitimate. In East and Southeast Asia, instead, the participation and intervention of a strong and at times repressive state is deemed legitimate to some extent, if not indeed expedient in the various urban contexts studied by the author. In his book, Read cogently illustrates how the grassroots administrative organizations succeed in networking at a local level, thus in everyday life, with the community's fabric of social relations.

Thus, this book represents an important critical response to those naïve, yet hegemonic forms of universalism often found in political visions and analyses by which even nowadays the American model of democracy, as Woodrow Wilson had envisioned, can and ought to be exported and possibly imposed on societies with highly different historical and political heritages.

At this point, we ought to take a closer look at the text's details highlighting Asian peculiarities in contrast with Western actuality's alleged fundamental difference. In the first place, in order to understand how and why the government-sponsored neighborhood organizations work, we need to take into account, as Read underscores, the specific social representations and perceptions that vary in relation to each society, but that especially in Beijing and Taiwan's case, studied empirically by the author, show many similarities as well as some differences.

Read observes that these organizations have both critics and advocates, but in general are appreciated as well as supported, albeit mildly and never enthusiastically. These stances stem from a cultural ideal grounded in the conception of a harmony and merging of state and society that with good reason can be called an *organic statism*. Those who collaborate with these district and neighborhood organizations are not overly content, but they accept them and cooperate with them for the sake of a harmonious model of society. With these organizations, the implicit paternalism is not an obstacle in everyday life, though it does not elicit any patent enthusiasm.

The socio-structural question linked to the above involves the peculiarity of relationships within and around the state and state-controlled district and neighborhood organizations. In the first place, Read points up that social relations between the inner circle of staff members, associates and ordinary neighborhood residents are not typically horizontal. Most times these asymmetries entail hierarchic and clientelist power relations. In fact, the leaders of the state and government-controlled organizations enjoy a certain amount of social prestige and charisma, also because they are able to provide important services to the individual residents to which the latter respond with counter-performances based on the principle of *balanced reciprocity*, in Marshall Sahlins's terminology. The resulting networks are characterized by highly personalized relationship systems that those Chinese concerned classify as forms of *guanxi* based on favor exchanges. The term *guanxi* immediately brings to mind the Russian phenomenon known as *blat*, which Alena Ledeneva in her book on this topic defined as *the economy of favors*, thereby giving the phenomenon a systemic, hence nearly generalized dimension. It is important to note that Reid rightly warns us against emphasizing the *guanxi* element in the cases he studied

since it occurs along with the neighborhood association members' and residents' interest in their neighborhood's common good. Therefore, aside from the undeniable forms of personal egoism, there's more. This way the author avoids an Orientalist view that would reinforce the conception of a virtuous *West* and a vitiated *Rest*.

Finally, one last important aspect examined in depth by the author and corroborated by the empirical data is well worth mentioning; namely, a critique of the so-called civil society studies. Because of their far too rigid and dichotomous conceptualizations, these studies tend to exclude the state and state-sponsored neighborhood and district organizations analyzed by Reid from that cluster of voluntary and non-governmental organizations, which, from an overly Western stance, are deemed as the essence of civil society. In fact, as the author cogently substantiates, many citizens are proud to serve the nation through the organizations analyzed in this study. The comparative analysis of neighborhood and district organizations in East and Southeast Asia indicates that, despite the state's at times rather intrusive presence, their members boost the sense of responsibility and trust as well as actual participation.

As these brief comments point up, this is a stimulating book with several innovative and original argumentations from both a theoretical and an empirical point of view. The author perceptively and cogently reviews some key concepts (such as civil society, for example) that are under debate not only in political science, but also in political anthropology. In terms of empirical research, instead, the author has chosen an approach that is very familiar to anthropologists; i.e., field research. In my opinion, the experience of immersing himself in two urban realities in East Asia is precisely what enabled him to reconsider in a legitimately critical manner those theoretical conceptions of Western origin that prove to be deceptive and misleading because of their eurocentrism.

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Matthews, Gordon, Gustavo Lins Ribeiro and Carlos Alba Vega (eds) (2012)
Globalization from Below: The World's Other Economy.
London and New York: Routledge.

This important book offers a state-of-the-art account of what Brazilian anthropologist Gustavo Lins Ribeiro, who contributes a magisterial closing analytical review of its findings, terms the 'non-hegemonic world system'. It offers an essential complementary perspective to

studies of transnational activist movements and localized 'grassroots' movements that could reasonably be described as 'resisting' aspects of contemporary neoliberal capitalist accumulation, either by refusing to collaborate or by actively seeking to pursue alternative economic models. This is a book about people who are, by and large, seeking to participate in a world economy in which neoliberal capitalist principles and global corporations are hegemonic, contributing in their own ways to the extension of neoliberal-style market society. Yet they can only be successful, if they are successful at all, by evading the costs associated with official rules and regulations on tariffs, trade, taxation, and intellectual property rights, exploiting the opportunities for appropriating value that exist within the interstices of dominant systems of production, exchange and consumption, and creating their own market niches by exploiting the gaps in regulatory regimes and corruptibility of those charged with their implementation. The book's twelve case studies include African traders who bring cheap mobile phones from Chinese factories back to their regions of origin, family businesses in Hong Kong that try to establish small manufacturing operations in China, Mexican and Filipina traders who take

used clothing over international borders, and an array of other purveyors of contraband, pirated and fake-branded products that enable lower-income groups some participation in globalized patterns of consumption. Even if much of this participation is inferior in quality to that enjoyed by the more affluent, the advance of copying technologies may, as Ribeiro observes in his closing remarks, progressively undermine the rents accruing to the owners of global 'superlogos' even as it contributes to 'the fetishized (re)production of social identities and of distinction' characteristic of the virtual age (p 233).

The contributors advance earlier debates about the 'informal' economy (with an enhanced attention to transnational processes that reflects patterns of urban development since the 1970s) as well as engaging more recent anthropological work on illegal and illicit economies. The analyses emphasise connections across the blurred boundaries between the economy documented by conventional statistics and the less readily quantifiable but pervasive activities that constitute globalization from below, using ethnographic research to offer a wealth of new insights. Alan and Josephine Smart show us, for example, how the days in which Hong Kong's petty investors could

prosper in Guangdong passed as the development that they helped to kick-start turned towards higher-tech products that required large-scale corporate investment, although the fortunes of the family that they studied revived its fortunes a little back in Hong Kong as a result of growing fears about the safety of foodstuffs produced on the mainland. Vera Telles writes on the ever more complex interconnections between the gamut of illegal activities ranging from drug trafficking to street trading that emerged in São Paulo as people sought to rebuild livelihoods in the wake of the loss of factory jobs and precarianization of work during the 1980s, emphasising ‘the games of power and negotiation’ that go on in the ‘folds of the legal and illegal’ (p. 98). Carlos Alba charts the emergence and proliferation of organizations that represent and control Mexico City’s armies of street pedlars. Both these analysts highlight the political dynamics of informal urban markets, which include clientelism linked to electoral processes as well as everyday processes of corruption and multiple levels of extortion, to which police, public functionaries, politicians and street trader organisations are equally central. Both Brazil and Mexico also offer us examples of the way that big national and transnational retail chains can engage

in illegal importing. As Alba points out, when registered companies are the origin of contraband sold by street traders, non-hegemonic globalization is in a symbiotic relationship with the hegemonic. As he and Gordon Matthews observe in their introduction, the book is about parallels as well as contrasts between these ‘levels’ of the contemporary world system, but what it does especially well is explore their articulations.

Although all the contributions rest on ethnographic foundations, the book is divided into two parts that reflect the methodological trade-offs between dealing adequately with questions of geographical and organizational scale and offering thicker ethnographic descriptions of how people navigate the fuzzy boundaries of the legal and illegal in everyday life and understand the ‘licit and illicit’ from their own subject positions in complex webs of relationships. Lynne Milgram notes, for example, that her Filipina clothing and cosmetics smugglers defend the social legitimacy of their business activity, its ‘licitness’, against the state’s political insistence on its illegality. In the only chapter that deals with a street market in the global North, Robert Shepherd offers a fascinating account of the tensions between the largely white vendors in an established Washington D.C. market

subject to increasing civic regulation as a 'neighbourhood' space, and immigrant vendors relocated to a parking lot across the street: the latter cheerfully insisted that they simply sought to make money, but did so by capitalizing on the performance of the ethnic identity that their customers (misguidedly) deemed indexical of the authenticity of what they sold, whilst the former sought to put themselves on the moral high ground in this battle of identity-(re)construction by presenting themselves as educators, artists and activists engaged in social projects of benefit to the global South.

The chapters vary in terms of the thickness of their ethnographic description, but all recognize the importance of historical contextualization. In an opening chapter that looks at recent reconstitution of the historical 'Silk Road', Olivier Pliez seeks to capture the broader organizational logic of the movement of garments between China and North Africa, something that could not easily be grasped simply by a localized study of any of the 'anchor points' of this network and may outlive recent geopolitical perturbations. The scale as well as historical depth of analysis is also ambitious in José Carlos Aguiar's use of commodity chain analysis to explore the roles of different actors and their transnational connections in the

development of the pirate CD market in Mexico, and Fernando Rabossi's account of the range of actors involved in the development of the 'bag trading' of the Paraguayan-Brazilian-Argentinian tri-border area. Both chapters enable us to understand the way that shifting patterns of state intervention and the international evolution of the capitalist economy shape the complex local articulations between the legal and illegal that emerge through a perspective that includes the processes of non-hegemonic globalization.

But as Gordon Matthews points out in his analysis of the coming together of traders from the most peripheral regions of the global South to buy the products of China's 'low-end manufacturing' in the hyper-neoliberal space of Chunking Mansions in Hong Kong, however much such 'small entrepreneurs of globalization from below' seem able to outwit agents of globalization from above striving to eradicate illegalities, we need to remember that fundamental inequalities are maintained in our present world by the fact that capital is free to move across borders but labour is not. Yang Yang's account of African traders in Guangzhou emphasises the while going to China may offer Africans new and better opportunities for personal advancement within the global economy, the hostility of the social

environment makes this a 'bittersweet' experience. Méliissa Gauthier's discussion of the impact of U.S. border securitization on Mexico's border-crossing 'ant traders' highlights a series of important further paradoxes. The livelihoods of these smugglers depend on the existence of international borders (so the open borders that Matthews advocates might not be advantageous to all participants in globalization from below). In the past, they could count on a combination of corruption and pragmatic 'flexibility' on the part of officials to maintain a border that operated in a way that made their smuggling viable. New technologies justified by the need to address the traffic in arms that fuels drug wars and the flow of narco-dollars seem to have had little impact on those problems but have made life more difficult for small-scale smugglers. Gauthier (p. 151) remains sceptical about the practical possibility of border security policies overwhelming the illicit networks 'which are culturally and socioeconomically part of the borderland economy' in the North, and are equally integral to Mexico's southern border with Guatemala, as Rebecca Galemba (2009) has shown. Yet it is clear that borders remain key sites of contention in the processes of both hegemonic and non-hegemonic globalization, and their

securitization may be another way of seeking to resolve the contradictions of Northern models of development by promoting 'adaptive self-reliance' in the global South. As Mark Duffield (2010) has pointed out, microcredit schemes are one such lever of 'adaptive self-reliance' and in another chapter of the present volume Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay uses microfinance provided by for-profit institutions as an example of how 'high-end globalization needs a quarantined low-end globalization to continuously provide for itself the conditions for its hegemony' (p. 183). His historically nuanced analysis of the evolving relationship between hawkers and shopping mall developments in Calcutta shows that synergistic relationships can be established with corporatized retailing giants, but also suggests that we need to see the deepened hegemony that may lie behind continuing co-existence, in terms of winning the consent of poorer citizens to urban redevelopment programs and incorporating more of them into the processes of accumulation associated with the construction of housing and extension of consumer credit.

This book does not include any case studies from Europe, and it remains to be seen how effective current efforts on the part of 'old' centres of accumulation to

‘quarantine’ low-end globalization on an international scale will prove as the weight of the global South in world capitalist accumulation continues to increase. But the subtle analyses offered here take us beyond polarized visions of the world as a slum or corporate sweatshop, on the one hand, and neoliberal fantasies of the poor lifting themselves up by the bootstraps of heroic entrepreneurialism, on the other, towards deeper, more critically nuanced, and ethnographically grounded understandings of the articulations of globalization from above and below.

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Xuefei Ren (2013), *Urban China (China Today)*.
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Impressively, shortly after publishing her first book *Building Globalization: Transnational Architecture Production in Urban China* (University of Chicago Press, 2011) which focused on

transnational architecture and its profound effect on the development of urban space, Xuefei Ren offers us another new perspective on urban spaces and urban society in a broader sense. She does so in her *Urban China (China Today)*. Among the great number of geographers, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists who are working on urban China, Ren is a pioneer who writes comprehensively about the history, present and development of China’s urbanization in governance, landscape, migration, inequality and cultural economy.

Drawing on the astonishing fact that in 2010 about 50 percent of the national population lived in urban areas — 129 Chinese cities had over 1 million residents, and another 110 cities had a population of between half a million and a million (p. xiii) — Ren tries to understand how China has become urbanized over a short period of time and what an urbanized China means for its citizens and for rest of the world. She urges that that a thorough understanding of urban transition in China can open paths for developing new urban theory and vocabularies (p. xvi). This useful book consists of 6 chapters covering the general urbanization of china cities. Each chapter presents an important analytical dimension on urbanization.

Chapter 1 starts by explaining the different model of economic development in China. Ren makes a courageous attempt to assess China's distinctiveness through a broad range of development theories, including 'neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics' or the 'Chinese ascent' under history-specific conditions and institutional innovations (p. 5). Citing historical and statistical data, Ren introduces the debate on the rise of China, looking at urban demographic shifts and at the historical evolution of the country's urban system. Ren then illustrates in Chapter 2 the changing governing structures and institutions, such as the Communist Party, *danwei*, *hukou*, community organization, government at different levels and non-state actors. Chapter 3 examines landscape changes, discussing a variety of settlement types found both at the center and on the periphery of cities.

In Chapter 4, writing about the 221 million internal migrants in the urban areas who, due to the *hukou* system, are not entitled by the same citizen rights as local residents, Ren argues that 'the new Chinese city has become a strategic site where citizen rights are being reformulated' (p. xv). Ren pays special attention to the formation of ViCs (Villages-in-the-City) and to the factory

labor regime, labour protests and state responses. In Chapter 5 she addresses social and spatial inequality and highlights the role of urban renewal in producing both wealth and poverty. Chapter 6 introduces the cultural industry, looking at examples of consumption and nightlife, and the art districts. The discussion shows how the urban cultural economy brings both freedom and disempowerment, and how the cultural industry has given rise to new forms of state control and intervention.

Methodologically, the book draws on quantitative and qualitative sources, the former originating mainly from the National Statistics Bureau of China, which is the only general and comprehensive dataset that outsider scientists can access. Unlike official literature that only pays attention to the 10-15 largest cities, Ren offers many examples from smaller cities, towns and villages in order to examine the regional variations that have emerged from her analysis of a massive amount of literature, newspapers, online sources and anthropological observations. Ren does not provide a detailed description of how she designed and implemented her research. Instead, she vividly reports the stories related to her own experience, which is innovative and, to some extent, pioneering. For instance, she tells us how her family

developed urban space from state owned apartments to four private properties located both in the north and south China (p. 65). Later, drawing vividly on the experience of an old friend, she explores the relationship between middle classes and cultural economy in Beijing (p. 172).

Theoretically, the central theme running through the book is 'the changing citizenship entailed in the urban process', and the various examples demonstrate how 'the Chinese city has become a strategic ground for reassembling citizen rights' (p. xix). However, despite her claim of a 'comprehensive' reading (p. xvii), Ren fails to mention other important dimensions of citizens' rights in urban society, such as religion, environmental pollution, political participation and civil society. This gap needs to be filled.

Moreover, the book does not offer a detailed analysis of all the dimensions under study, as it covers too many related topics. Readers might want to refer to the other readings on the topics treated in each chapter. To cite a few, one would think of works such as Chen et al's (2001), Bray's (2005) and Whyte's (2010).

The questions that it leaves unanswered quite apart, this book does succeed in raising the level of discourse about urban China. It is a very timely book which that offers most up-to-date

information. Notably, this is a book published in March 2013 that contains data updated to July 2012. As a general introduction of urbanization in China, it covers an interdisciplinary field ranging from geography to sociology, anthropology and political science. This is a must-read introductory book for all those who wish to get a broader view of China's cities and for those who may want to gain a deeper understanding of the different dimensions of urban life.

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COMPLETED DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

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Defended December 2010

Urban Firewalls: Place, Space and New Technologies in Figueres, Catalonia

Based on 15 months of fieldwork in the Catalan city of Figueres, Spain, this research investigates the social impact of new media in contemporary urban life. Focusing on local realities in response to global technologies, I ask: How do people situate websites, Facebook, email and mobile phones within a communicative framework that is continually evolving in crosscutting trajectories with other forms of paper, wired and wireless media? Are Web 2.0 and social media truly anything new? Is the Internet a social tool or an ego-centric, individualizing entity? Is it bounded by traditional categories of social stratification like class, age, ethnicity and geography, or does it efface and transgress them?

Central to this thesis is a detailed analysis of the cultural landscape of Figueres, a small town unwittingly thrust into multiculturalism in recent years and now grappling with immense challenges for social integration. Concentrating on the construction of human spaces (place-making) as a process which inevitably traverses online and offline life, I reveal how old and new boundaries and borders between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are installed, protected and/or contested, and how technology maps onto the urban environment. The metaphor *urban firewalls*, referring to insulated models of social interaction that have developed in Figueres, correlates symbolic fears and expectations of technology with actual spatial logics in the streets of the city.

The elusive placelessness of the web continues to cause profound practical and analytical issues within and beyond the social sciences. Through case studies of Catalan linguistic nationalism, communication patterns, the Internet, mobile phones, social networking sites and banal activism I seek to overcome these difficulties by applying a multifaceted ethnographic and theoretical approach that envisages new technologies as symbolically and literally tethered to the ground. Overall, I aim to advance anthropological research into the impact of new media by challenging assumptions of inevitable change, reflecting instead on practical and pragmatic choices in an ethnically diverse locality struggling against lingering ghosts of the past and escalating fears of the future.

Dr Francine Barone holds a PhD and BA Hons 1st in Social Anthropology from the University of Kent, where she is currently a Postdoctoral Research Associate. Dr Barone's work is primarily aimed at understanding people's everyday computing practices, interactions and activities on the Internet, through social media and via mobile devices. As an urban ethnographer, she emphasizes place and locality in her studies of technological change and the socio-cultural impacts of the digital age. Dr Barone's doctoral fieldwork (2007-9) explored the everyday use of new technologies in a Catalan city and provides the basis for her forthcoming book, Urban Firewalls. She is a founding member of the Open Anthropology Cooperative and blogs at Analog/Digital (<http://www.analogdigital.us>).

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Defended November 2010

Performing the Buraku: Narratives on Culture and Everyday Life in Contemporary Japan

The research on which this Doctoral Thesis was based drew on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Japan in the leather towns of Kinegawa (Tokyo) and Naniwa (Osaka) and with the Monkey Dance Company. The thesis examines representations of the 'buraku minority' issue by buraku networks and individuals. People labeled as 'burakumin' (hamlet people) are usually described as Japan's outcasts of the Edo period (1603-1868). They are engaged in special occupations (for example, leather industry, meat-packing, street entertainment and drum-making) and are compelled to live in separate areas, known as 'buraku'. Despite the abolition of the status system (1871) and the implementation of Dowa (assimilation) Special Measures (1969), the burakumin still experience forms of discrimination in terms of access to education and housing, discriminatory messages circulating on the web, as well as background investigations conducted by private agencies at times of employment and marriage. Through community and local grassroots initiatives, the buraku activists and people engaged with the issue negotiate their 'minority identity', appropriately nation-based, and common everyday language and images, and try to reposition the buraku in society. The research focus was on the leather industry and the monkey performance, comparing different social fields in which the issue is represented and exploring the resulting processes of transformation of social categorization and boundary-blurring.

Dr Flavia Cangià obtained her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, having previously obtained a Master in Sociology from the University of Rome 'La Sapienza'. She is currently a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies ISTC ('Migration' Project). Dr Cangià Research

interests include minority and indigenous issues, migration, ethnicity and identity politics, children and young people's participation in inter-ethnic relations.

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Defended December 2011

Ethnicity as a Capital: Construction and Mobilisation of Ethno-cultural Identity by Tatar Youth in Tatarstan (Russia) - (in German)

This study argues that the nation-building processes and identity politics in post-Soviet societies should not be understood as projects led by the state and local political and ethno-national elites alone. Strategies of 'identity management' can also be developed 'from below', as the example of Tatar youth scenes and movements in the city of Kazan shows. The empirical ethnographic material for this dissertation was collected during a one-year field research in 2007-2008 and, since then, periodically until 2010. The main methods were participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews with young people and adults involved in youth movements and scenes in the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the 83 federal subjects of the Russian Federation.

The dissertation focuses on two main aspects: First, it reflects on the boundary-making strategies of urban Tatar youth scenes that can be oriented against, for example, a perceived Russian hegemony, cultural globalisation or the rural Tatar folk culture. It investigates the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion drawing on different factors, such as language, religion and historical memory that underlie the construction of ethno-cultural collective identity. Second, the study explains how urban Tatar youth valorise and stage ethnicity in the public space, and how they mobilise their ethno-cultural identity in informal networks. In this context, ethnicity is conceptualised as a (social, cultural and symbolic) capital in the terms of Bourdieu; that is, how they are used by the Tatar youth scenes and movements in order to maintain boundaries and to gain performativity in the public space.

Dr Andrea Friedli is currently a post-doctoral teaching and research fellow at the Seminar of Social Anthropology, Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Fribourg/Freiburg, Switzerland. Dr Friedli is completing the publication of her doctoral dissertation (in German language), to appear in the series 'Freiburg Studies in Social Anthropology' with LIT Publishers.

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Mining Postsocialism: Work, Class and Ethnicity in an Estonian Mine

My thesis is a study of what happens to the working class in the context of postsocialism, neoliberalisation and deindustrialisation. I explore the changing work and lives of Russian-speaking miners in Estonia, showing what it means to be a miner in a situation in which the working class has been stripped of its glorified status and stable and affluent lifestyle, and has been stigmatised and orientalistised as Other. I argue that a consequence of neoliberal economy, entrepreneurialism and individualism is that ethnicity and class become overlapping categories and being Russian comes to mean being a worker. This has produced a particular set of practices, moralities and politics characterising the working class in contemporary Estonia, which is not only a result of its Soviet past and nostalgia, but also deeply embedded in the global economy following the 2008 economic crisis, and EU and national economic, security and ethnic policies.

Miners try to maintain their autonomy and dignity. Despite stricter control of miners' time and speeding up of the labour process, workers exercise control over the rhythm of work. The ideas of what it means to be a miner and ideals of a good society create a particular moral economy, demanding money and respect in return for sacrificing health and doing hard work. Increasing differences in consumption patterns are levelled with leisure activities such as drinking and sport that are available to all. New management practices such as outsourcing labour and performance reviews assist class formation processes that increase workers' precarity and the differentiation between workers and engineers in a previously relatively equal community. Despite this, management practices often have unexpected outcomes in everyday situations in which actors with different worldviews and ambitions meet. Miners' labour politics might not correspond to Western ideas of strong unionism, but show that trade unions can take different shapes depending on local context.

*Dr Eeva Kesküla defended her PhD at Goldsmiths, University of London at 2012. She has published articles about the changing workplace practices of Estonian miners in *European Review of History* and *Journal of Baltic Studies*. Currently she is a postdoctoral research fellow at Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in a research group *Industry and Inequality*. Her new project will concentrate on the changing work and lives of miners in Kazakhstan. Her research interests include anthropology of work and industry, class relations in postsocialism and economic anthropology.*

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Defended December 2012

Life in the Shadow of the 2012 Olympics: An Ethnography of the Host Borough of the London Games

On 6th July 2005 the London Olympic bidding committee won the right to host the 2012 Olympic Games. Some seven years later London's Olympic venues were built on time, Team GB accumulated an unprecedented medal haul and no significant security incidents occurred. These outcomes facilitated an understandable positive evaluation of the 2012 Games. It would be churlish not to be positive; Olympic venues when experienced by spectators during Games are *breathhtaking*. World records and Olympic contests are *exciting*. Olympic narratives that bond competitor and audience alike are *inclusive* and *unifying*. However, the prevalent belief that Olympic hosting provides unambiguous benefits to local communities is less sound. The evaluation of this assumption provides the focus for this inquiry, it follows French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu by considering that 'one cannot grasp the most profound logic of the social world unless one becomes immersed in the specificity of an empirical reality' (*The Field of Cultural Production*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993, p. 271). Accordingly, this research contrasted the rhetoric and reality of 2012 Olympic-delivery via an ethnographic inquiry in the Olympic borough of Newham. This location is defined as a '*non-place*' wherein the majority of the Olympic restructuring and events occurred. This research addresses Olympic-delivery issues of inclusion, exclusion, power relations, ideology and identity, in doing so it argues that the relatively short Olympic-delivery time-frame necessitated a divisive segregation between 'Olympic' and 'non-Olympic' Newham. Furthermore, it is argued that 2012 Olympic-delivery was orientated towards the needs and goals of Olympic migrants, of various description, rather than enhancing the lives of those living within a community that was rife with crime, poverty and deprivation. Consequently, this research considers that the Olympic milieu disseminated the capitalistic norms and values to global, national and local audiences. The outcome of such processes facilitated a re-negotiation of place-identity and place ownership within Newham that was orientated toward attracting a future affluent populace whilst concomitantly vilifying the pre-Games community. This research concludes that such attempts to re-mould Newham into a post-Olympic utopia where prosperous and educated families, to follow the Newham council strap line, 'live, work and stay' are based

upon the short-sighted assumption that creating an aesthetically pleasing entertainment location is tantamount to creating a desirable location for sustainable family life.

Dr Iain Lindsay is Visiting Lecturer and Research Fellow at Brunel University. His primary research focus surrounds the use of sport as a tool for socio-economic modification. To date his research has considered this broad topic in diverse inter-disciplinary themes primarily through ethnography. Dr Lindsay's primary research interests include mega-events, sport for international development, social movements, urban modification, gangs, youth cultures and subcultures, policing and security, urban cleansing and research methods.

RESEARCH REPORTS

Russification in the Bay of Kotor: Urbanization According to Standards of Russian Immigration

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This ethnographic research on Russian entrepreneurship and urbanization of the old city core was carried out in the Bay of Kotor (Montenegro) and addressed the growing interest of Russian people in business economics. Cross-cultural cooperation among different nationalities involved changing aspects of home culture and their differentiation in relation to the capital city, where such a culture is an integral part, and to the public image of the state. Therefore, my aim was to develop an understanding of the macro processes that mark the local context in which people operate according to different political interventions and public and private interests.

Montenegro and its coastal region (the Bay of Kotor) are characterized by weak industrial development, corruption, a tension between legal and illegal powers and blurred boundaries between the formal and the informal sector of the economy. In this environment, the new social and cultural context displays new forms of urban structure as a field for understanding strong relationship between authoritative locals and new entrepreneurs. In this new socio-economic arena, market urbanism may play a leading role in the process of reflective use of the public and private domains for technological, political and financial purposes. Newly formed neighborhoods, also known as Russian areas, have led to a new type of settlements — associated settlements which are often related to the local proactive promotion of economic development by the local authorities.



Image 1: Typical Russian Settlements

In this sense, the Bay of Kotor has entrepreneurial potential, conditional to the development of institutional and organizational incentives for innovation, whereby entrepreneurship can be equated with investment; that is, obtaining capital to be invested in existing enterprises or in the establishment of new businesses (Knox 1995). Beyond these cultural and political tensions, it would be reasonable to say that in a number of cases ‘entrepreneurs must have known that they were dealing with corrupt rulers, bureaucratic buck-passing and legal wrangling that brings out much that can go wrong in the relationship between bureaucracy and politics in contemporary democratic society’ (Pardo 2009: 105). In other words, lack of sanction from state institutions produces new political connections and networks that act as mechanisms for the ‘legal’ adaptation of new settlements and of the settlers involved in the reproduction of the local social and economic life. For example, a law passed in the early 1990s forbids the sale of land to foreigners, with the exception of completed residential or commercial buildings. Bearing in mind such legislation, new entrepreneurs started businesses in association with local investors (citizens of the state) who were interested in buying or selling land. The issue of land transactions has changed with the ‘explosion of the real-estate market’ in Montenegro in 2001, when a new law granted foreigners who are legal owners of firms or land the same access to the land market as enjoyed by the citizens of the state. This raises issues of legal and political responsibility, particularly in relation to the way in which the actions of those who rule and make laws affects the situation on the ground.

The significance of people’s actions brings out an atmosphere of urban regime, making particularly useful urban anthropological research in an attempt to understand the connections between entrepreneurship, the local context and the politics of business. Proving to be a useful tool for investigating two leading groups — that is, the members of local government and the owners of private businesses — the empirical research addresses the development of an efficient system of city government which became part of an effective partnership between private and public areas. These changes have opened up new directions in making of public policies an instrument of power in shaping the urban market; but they have also proved to be a mechanism for promoting efficiency and effectiveness. In this line, these policies can be seen as political phenomena (see Shore and Wright 1997) and modern forms of governance in contemporary society.

In the light of contested political spaces, urban anthropology today highlights a dynamic field of competition (for ‘symbolic capital’; see Bourdieu 1977) between local

people in charge of governance and new entrepreneurs. This process of competition entails the understanding of market urbanism and urban regime as fields for ‘identification’, ‘formulation’, ‘implementation’ of (urban) public politics that intervene at social, political, economic, cultural and personal level.

Key words: urbanization, urban identity, entrepreneurship, ethnic business, Russians, Bay of Kotor

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IRAM: An Innovative Research Center about Digital Issues and Contemporary Society

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IRAM (International Rhône-Alpes Media) is an international training and research centre focusing on new media and intelligence tools. It is a digital platform created by the Rhône-Alpes region and the University of Saint-Etienne. It develops cross-disciplinary research which focuses on the digital dimension of the public domain and its articulation with contemporary issues. IRAM is a space endowed with high technological equipment and a newspaper workroom called Newsplex. This space allows one to publish information in

several media (paper, Web, phones and Touchpad) and to access equipment facilities such as tactile tables, broadcasting studios, multimedia tablets, Smartphones etc. IRAM brings together several players in the digital field. This academic centre aims at developing original research in numerous fields such as communication anthropology, new heritage practices (such as 'Museolab' and 'Fablab'), social networks studies, digital imaginary and trans-media.

The public area and digital dimensions are among the major issues of today's society, marked by profound changes brought about by the omnipresence of Information and Communication Technologies. Our links to the surrounding world are thus modified. The strong presence of digital technology in urban areas alters the very structure of places as well as our perception of public areas.

This research addresses not only the modalities of change in the social sphere but also the way in which our perceptions are modified. As regards the digital dimension, perceptions are now to be redefined or at least questioned. Perceptions are characterized by unrest which distorts our relationship to reality and to the other. The idea is to set up these 'new communicative configurations' in an urban space that is connected to digital technology. In other words, this research focuses, for example, on these sensitive types of communications within the research framework at the IRAM.

These issues have led us to establish links between disciplines of the Social and Human Sciences, but also with Art, Communication and Technical Sciences of Information. My research is at the crossroads of various theoretical and disciplinary fields. This combination allows us to question the digital transition in our contemporary society. IRAM's research is transversal in order to produce the sensitive conditions of a singular exploration of the digital dimension in contemporary society.

Keywords: IRAM, digital platform, communication anthropology; urban society; imaginary cities; sensitive relationships; digital research; urban unrest.

CONFERENCE REPORT

Relocating Borders: a comparative approach Berlin 11–13 January 2013

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The conference, organised by EastBordNet, was one of the final outputs of the COST Action IS0803 Project and became a significant scientific event of the beginning of 2013. Although the most inspirational stimuli were probably found there by experts from the field of social anthropology, a whole range of topics for consideration were raised there also for the fields of sociology, social geography, architecture, urban planning, development studies and other disciplines. The conference was already the second such large gathering organised by EastBordNet and the COST project, which was begun in 2009 and entered its closing phase in 2013. The conference contextualised the project's central theme, the Eastern Periphery of Europe, presented its results and demonstrated that within its framework productive new theoretical concepts and working ties were formed allowing further research projects of the eastern borders of the European Union, of internal and external migrations in relation to the European Union and of wider developmental scenarios including urbanisation, globalisation and the relations of Europe and the Third World.

In the course of the existence of the project, much has changed in the European and global contexts. Since 2009, when the project was started, the migration situation in Europe has modified and also the view of Europe in the context of world development is different. The dichotomy of Europe and the Third World has taken on new meanings; the borders between the European Union and its neighbours can hardly be simply conceptualised as the borders of the developed and developing world now.

Contemporary European and global affairs were reflected also in the scenario of the conference. The organisers of the conference used global events for the evaluation of the theoretical bases of the topic of borders, for work on its anchoring in overall social-science discourse and for placement of the individual pieces of knowledge into the widest possible context of global events. They also strategically selected Berlin as the place of the conference; not only for the reason that as a city in the centre of Europe it was easily

accessible for the European attendees, who were the massive predominance, but also for the reason that it is the direct personification of the transformational processes taking place in Europe. A city, which was divided by a border wall until 1989 and so significantly marked by the consequences of ethnic and political intolerance, is now, as the centre of one of the wealthiest states of Europe, undergoing a deep transformation. As expected, some of the most distinctive monuments of contemporary architecture and urban planning of Europe are created here, but against expectations despite the wealth and technical advancement of Germany cranes have stuck out in all directions for decades already and despite the constant construction commotion the urban infrastructure, which was neglected for several decades, is changing only slowly and ponderously.

The conference was opened by Sarah Green, leader of the Eastern Periphery of Europe project with a lecture called *Relocating Borders: Locations so far and Visualising Borderlands*. Her introductory lecture not only presented the entire project and opened the individual topics of the conference, but also outlined the prospects of research for the future. Through her talk, Sarah Green made it clear that the project should not end with the conference, that it was her intention to develop the research network further and expand the knowledge base by further research events.

The individual panel discussions followed the introductory lecture. Approximately fifty panel sessions took place over the three days of the conference. Each panel discussion had ca 90 minutes available and 4 – 6 contributors were proposed for each of them. Not all of the panels were fully blocked with contributors, so at some there were fewer contributors, sometimes only two of them, but it can be stated that the panel discussions for the most part maintained a high level. Usually, eight panel discussions took place in parallel, so those interested could select thematically closely related questions and draw a maximum of stimuli. On each day of the conference, there were moreover further joint keynote lectures and also topical joint panel discussions and round tables. Of the joint events, it is necessary to highlight especially the successful keynote lecture by T. H. Eriksen and particularly the keynote by Saskia Sassen, which was placed at the conclusion of discussions on Sunday in the late afternoon. At the end of the conference, when such large gatherings usually fall apart and the participants leave early, Saskia Sassen was able to fill the main conference hall and keep the audience's attention with a riveting lecture until the moment when it was necessary to thank the organisers and vacate the premises.

Besides the keynote lectures, the special panel discussion on the renewal of Berlin and its contemporary development and the lecture, or interview with the architect Daniel Libeskind on his Berlin architectural implementations can be considered as highly inspirational.

Considering its size in the environs of Humboldt University, the conference was very well managed in terms of organisation. The credit for that mainly belongs to the main organiser Sarah Green, but also her assistant Darien Rosentals and the local organiser Rozita Dimova. It can be considered especially significant that within its framework there were opportunities of presentations and strengthening contacts with similar networks and organisations, which participated in joint round tables, and that there was a contextualisation of the topics of the eastern borders into the global developmental paradigms.

The conference emphasised a whole range of topics. It was often clear from the individual contributions that the borders between states are a visualisation of a large number of phenomena, but these phenomena play out on the entirety of large territories, which surround the borders. Observing events on the site of the demarcation helps reveal striking phenomena, but their significances require knowledge of a whole range of contexts associated with the economy and social behaviour of large groups of people in the interior. The study of borders thus leads again to wide multidisciplinary perspectives encompassing events in the entire society.

The conference confirmed the knowledge on the diversity and difficult to grasp nature of the various types of borders using comparable social-science instruments. Many demarcations have nothing in common with state borders. What is ever more important in the globalised world are borders leading across states and demarcating individuals and groups determined by ethnic, language, professional, income, confessional or other means. These notional borders are becoming ever more important in comparison with state borders, while states are losing significance not only in the area of economic relations, but also in power relations, which are concentrating ever more distinctly outside of state structures. A study of borders that do not form boundaries of states allows the discovery of the real actors, who influence the money flows, lifestyle and economic behaviour of people across continents. One the large topics opened by the conference is also question of the relationship between the social behaviour of people and its materialisation or visualisation. The topic of borders shows how little social sciences know as yet about regularities of this relationship.

The conference demonstrated that in comparison with 1976, when the Association for Borderlands Studies was founded as a reaction to the research of the specificities particularly on the borders of Mexico and the USA, the topic of borders has substantially expanded and is now studied all over the world. Borders are now perceived rather as a part of processes and not as a static phenomenon. The topic of borders today helps overcome methodological nationalism and is instrumental in understanding the phenomena that not only form the borders but also overcome them. The conference in Berlin indicated that research of this type is currently highly dynamic and is moving forward methodologically also research perspectives in the area of urban anthropology.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Forthcoming Conferences

17th IUAES World Congress, *Evolving Humanities, Emerging Worlds*, Manchester, UK,
5-10 August 2013

Nine Panels are convened under the auspices of the Commission on Urban Anthropology:

LD05 - Urbanization and reproductive health - **Convenor: Pramathes Dasmahapatra**

LD10 - Menopausal woman and assisted reproduction: rights to access of ART in an ethical context - **Convenor: Benrithung Murry**

MMM05 - Commodifying urban poverty, social exclusion, and marginalisation: spatial and social consequences - **Convenors: Eveline Dürr and Rivke Jaffe**

PE04 - Enquiring into the urban form through governing practices and social organisation - **Convenors: Marc Morell and Corine Vedrine**

PE05 - Sustainable development and urbanization: socio-economic aspects - **Convenor: Amlan Ray**

PE07 - Modern urban utopias and sustainable cities - **Convenors: Michel Rautenberg and Marie Hocquet**

PE14 - The urban poor and their struggle for survival: search for an alternative in livelihood - **Convenor: Sumita Chaudhuri**

SE02 - Ethnic-religious segregation: the preservation of memory or the preservation of conflict - **Convenors: Marcello Mollica and James Dingley**

WMW03 - Art and anthropology: common grounds - **Convenor: Danila Mayer**

For further details visit:
<http://www.iuaes2013.org>

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