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THE CASE OF BOLOGNA

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Niccolò Cuppini

University of Bologna

niccolo.cuppini2@unibo.it

ABSTRACT

The paper presents a theoretical fresco of the contemporary city, starting from the case study of Bologna. The hypothesis that guides the investigation is that today we are confronting with a new phenomenon, the globalized city: a common urban matrix that shapes and at the same time is shaped by almost every city. The article is organized as a sort of cartography. It proposes a grid of events, of theoretical glances and of social subjects, to produce an urban rhapsody through which to distill some suggestions about research prospects on contemporary urban scenarios.

During the last years new forms of social mobilization have emerged in Bologna, and they are taken here as a lens through which to put light on the crisis of the neoliberal city and on the new emerging urban dynamics. Since 2012 a cycle of struggles in Bologna's logistics sector, a new form of mobilization, has shown a specific tension that could be generalized as a friction between the globalized city and the planetary urbanization. A second example is the occupation, in October 2014, of an abandoned building by hundreds people to realize a collective house. This action has enlightened a completely new social composition and the watermark of a new urban texture.

The paper also reflects on the relationship between social movements and the city's transformations. On one hand the economic and the city planning shifting configurations of the city seem to produce different forms of resistance. On the other hand social struggles often produce anticipations on city developments. Finally, it is presented a reflexion about the concepts of "de-gendered city", the city as aporia and the city as a battlefield.

KEYWORDS: city crisis, social movements, logistics, cartography, flows/borders

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1. INTRODUCTION

My aim is to propose an overview of the transformations of Bologna, linking together its economic and its city planning aspects among with the new forms of social mobilization that are emerging. I will elaborate on that from both a theoretical and an empirical level. Secondly, this paper is intended to propose an insight within the process of transformation from an historical "compact" city towards a "super-diverse" city, trying to mix the global urban phenomena and the local dynamics (or how the first 'hits the ground'). To do that I adopt the point of view of the new forms of social mobilization emerged in last years and I focus on how they interact within and against the economic and city planning driven transformations of the city. Finally, I discuss and propose some hypothesis about what does it mean to look at the contemporary urbanization as a place and a way of social and political action.

My aim is to explore these themes through a sort of cartography. The overlappings between the social mobilization and the urban transformations will be exhibited through the lenses of the spatial practices that the former use in order to ingrain their presence in the city. That is to say: what is the specific "territorial effect" that social movements are having in Bologna? I will try to expand on that representing a before/after scheme implemented and represented through maps and "cognitive projections" of the city's space. Finally, I will propose a discussion about the "right to the city" concept: is it still relevant for social movements, at a time when the very concept of the city itself seems vanishing? Secondly: what does the Bologna's mobilization tells us about the interaction between the administrative-institutional forms, the social movements and the transformations of the city? I proceed like in a movie editing, collecting some snapshots, some theoretical sparks, the brief description of some social subjects and of some recent transformations of the city... An urban rhapsody through which to distill some ongoing lines of research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical hypothesis that sustains this paper is that the city is becoming (again) a political locus. In fact, the entire project of Modernity has been to evacuate politics from the city, in favour of the State as the only legitimate subject to do it. This is clear since Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan frontispiece (Hobbes, 1651). There, the enormous body of the Sovereign is composed by the multitude of the citizens, and it dominates on an empty city. The *civitas* is separate from the *urbs* (cfr. Farinelli, 2003). However, many vectors of transformations are nowadays at play in a patchworks of ways that redefine the political field. New subjects are emerging, and the city is one of them, as a specific political pole. I am not proposing here a contrast between the State and the city, as if the latter would be about to substitute the former. Rather, conceiving politics through the city is an alternative glance to grasp our contemporary world and to bring to light many social subject that are usually darken by the political lenses of the State. In other words, "seeing like a city" (see Magnusson, 2011) is a strategy of research that enables us to develop new concepts and to trace a new scenario of the contemporary world.

There is a second theoretical input that I need to add. My idea is that contemporary cities are harbouring a new "political matter" that is still obscure. To investigate this dimension there are two lines of reflection. On one hand it is necessary to reconnect the two aspects of the city that have been disconnected in the last centuries. To put it better: *urbs* and *civitas*, the morphology and the social aspects, the continuum of roads, buildings, infrastructures and the dense heterogeneity of the urban inhabitants, this two characters of the city should

be read as intertwined moments, as a specific dialectic that constitutes the city. On the other hand during the last 50 years there have been enormous transformations in what the city is. When Henri Lefebre in 1967 wrote *Le droit a la ville* he was talking about the profound modifications of his city, Paris. The right to the city was «a cry and a demand» in respect to the intertwined dynamics of the expulsions of the poor and the working class people from the city centre and the becoming of the latter as a business district. The 19th century metropolis, the Paris Capital of the Nineteenth Century (Benjamin, 1999), was dying. Lefebvre had somehow anticipated the Saskia Sassen's (1991) elaboration on global cities, actually a new geography of centres and peripheries where a network of business districts of major cities (like New York, London and Tokyo) produce and establish globalization processes. However today we assist to a step beyond this panorama. The moving forward of globalization has progressively absorbed almost every city, so that we can nowadays talk about the globalized city (Moulaert, Rodriguez, Swyngedouw, 2005) as a common paradigm that innervates the global urban dynamics, or the planetary urbanization in Neil Brenner's worlds (2013).

3. SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

Starting from this theoretical background, a new phenomena allowed me to test it on an empirical field. Since 2010, with a climax in 2013, a significant mobilization in the Northern Italy logistics sector has been played by an unprecedented workers composition. Most of them were migrants organized within a rank and file union. Pickets, strikes, demonstrations and other different forms of struggle have disturbed many logistics firms and the whole process of goods distribution and circulation (Cuppini, Frapporti, Pirone, 2015; Cuppini and Pallavicini, 2015). This cycle of struggle has shown a sort of territorial cartography, very different from the one which we can expect. If we trace and conncet the dense tangle of points where strikes erupted, it is possible to see a map that defines a territorial organization that radically exceeds the traditional administrative boundaries and the old productive framework. It is possible to draw a second map, dedicated to where this workers live. My research shows that they are distributed all around the cities, without any possible reference to the traditional organization of territory: there are no more working class neighbourhood nor clear boundaries between city and countryside (Cuppini, 2016). This new maps enlightened by this logistics struggles helps us to understand something more about contemporary urban dynamics. Far away from the clear geographies of the Fordist city (or the factory-town, see Alquati, 1975), the contemporary "supply chain capitalism" (Tsing, 2009) is producing a proliferation of zones (Easterling, 2014) and logistics cities (Cowen, 2014) that are deeply reshaping the entire urban field. Through the adoption of logistics as a lens, as an entry point for analysing contemporary territories, it is possible to grasp the role of global flows and infrastructures (see Khanna, 2016), but also the proliferation of new borders (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2013). This mobilization of territories and the interrelated territorialization of mobilities (Brighenti, 2014) is a good measure of the transformation of the urban texture, confirming Saskia Sassen's hypothesis about cities as contemporary frontier zones (2015).

This logistics struggles played a significant role in the Emilia Romagna region, particularly in Bologna. In fact, this struggles worked as a backbone to connect different processes of social struggle and organization that have tried to "compose themselves" within a common framework of action, called "Bologna meticcia" ("Bologna mestiza"). They have organized many demonstrations, protests, housing occupations, mutuality networks, pickets, cultural and social activities. Despite the deep heterogeneity of practices and of social condition

(and also about where their space of action is – centres/peripheries), this kind of new social mobilization is playing a relevant role in the city, deeply influencing the public debate and obtaining/realizing some of their claims. Since 2013 some "traditional" and some "new" experiences of social mobilization are emerging and mixing together in Bologna. It is possible to identify five main axes and subjects of these innovative forms of collective action:

. activists organized within the so called "centri sociali". Centri sociali are occupied spaces (most of them were abandoned factories) of self-organization that develop cultural, artistic and political activities. They are somehow the legacy of the social movements of the Seventies, but there have been in the last decades many different generation of that kind of spaces. During last years has emerged a trend to a more political attitude of these subjects, that leads to an increasing involvement of them activists into city's struggles and mobilizations (see Mudu, 2004);

. political collectives from high schools and universities. Even if Bologna has a long story of students' activism, it is a newness the encounter between high school and university students. Bologna has tens of thousand of off-site students, historically more engaged in political activism, whereas the younger Bologna's students have a weak tradition in political organization. However during the 2010's movement against a reform of the educational system there was an encounter between this two social subjects, and still nowadays there are many common activities between them;

. many workers of the Bologna's logistics sector, mostly migrants, organized in a rank and file union. As said before, the cycle of logistics struggles had a peak of intensity in 2013, and Bologna was one of the epicentre. During a huge struggle against Granarolo (a corporation of milk distribution), named by the local newspapers as "Cappuccino strike", many students and centri sociali activists supported the strike. This relationship established a network of solidarity that continues nowadays;

. a movement of homeless and people under threat of eviction. The 2007-2008's global crisis had significant consequences on Bologna. The city has a story of left administrations (it is not a case that still nowadays it is remembered as "red Bologna", see Harvey 2012), that implies many investments in welfare services, in public housing, and a significant attention to inclusive city plannings. However, the economic crisis and the austerity politics of the national governments, along with a transformed political culture of the parties of the left, have produced a sudden growth of poor people in the city. The housing question has become increasingly important, because of the thousands of evictions every year above all. To confront to this situation many activists are organizing a social movement that blocks the evictions and occupies houses with the homeless people;

. an informal network of many experiences of self-organization about urban gardens, popular canteens, critical food consumption and markets of independent producers. This is an heterogeneous galaxy of experiences that gravitates around many social centres but also has its own forms and places of activity. Based on an ecological awareness, but also with the aim to build up alternative forms of food production and consumption, in the last two years these networks have been particularly engaged in sustaining Bologna's social movements.

4. NEW GEOGRAPHIES OF THE CITY

During the last year and a half these different subject tried to construct a common frame of action and mobilization. Under the label "Bologna meticcia" (conceived as a sort of collective brand), many demonstrations and actions have been organized. I think there is a close relationship between this phenomena and the contemporary transformations of the city, which can be labelled and seen along the long term process "from a Fordist to a Neoliberal city, to the crisis of the Neoliberal city". There are some relevant aspects that have to be considered about this changing situation: the economic crisis, that has had a significant impact on the city; an important administrative change: Bologna in 2015 has formally become a "metropolitan city", passing from four hundred thousand to one million inhabitants; the process of "internationalization" of the city, shaped and promoted by a public-private partnership; the notable changing in the social composition (migration) and in the productive fabric of the city of the last twenty years; new forms of museumification (historical city centre) and gentrification (surrounding outskirts) that goes together with vectors of urban sprawl and the implementation of many new infrastructures of connectivity.

What is particularly significant is the relationship between the city's transformations and the struggles. It is possible to describe this connection as a double movement. On one hand the changing configurations of the economic and the city planning of the city seem to produce different forms of resistance. On the other hand social struggles often produce anticipations on city developments. So, there is a complex game between this two layers. Just to give a concrete example: On October the 4th, 2014, a huge building is occupied by almost three hundred people. It was the offices of the Telecom multinational corporation. Its owners are placed in Germany and it has been empty for almost ten years. It becomes the house for dozens families, that "auto-recover" the offices transforming them into apartments. The new collective house is in Bolognina – an historical working class neighbourhood. Originally built up thanks to the railway station, the district grew as an industrial and popular area until the Eighties. The decline of the Fordist mode of production has deeply reshaped it - both socially and morphologically. Many factories closed, and in 1989 was erected the Interporto: a big logistics hub few kilometres far from Bolognina. Nowadays the neighbourhood is experiencing a gentrification process, symbolized by the new high speed train station and the new headquarters of the municipality.

Since 2012 a wave of strikes has run over the Interporto. During the strikes, that involved many migrant workers, the housing question emerged. On October the 28th, 2013, an abandoned office near the station was occupied by many activists as a space of self organization about the housing problems (named Social Log – Logistics of Struggles). Here is where the 2014's occupation is organized, involving logistics workers, homeless and people under threat of eviction. The (Ex)Telecom building is in front of the new Municipality Headquarters, and it is inhabited by people from sixteen different nationalities and by one hundred children, hosting a self organized farmers market, an urban garden and many other activities. It will be evicted on the 21st October, 2015, after fourteenth hours of resistance. I use the Ex-Telecom experience as a "perspective" through which I propose a multi-layered cartography of the autonomous experiences of the city, with the aim to sketch out a processual geography able to link together the history of the neighbourhood, its physical transformation, and the social and infrastructural networks that shape, connect and redefine it.

5. THE CITY AS AN APORIA AND A BATTLEFIELD

My hypothesis is that, starting from this specific case study, it is possible to show how a new paradigm is emerging within this interaction - one which at the same time links the transnational dimension of logistics and migration to the territorial dynamics of local identities, the historical institutional configuration and the encounter/clash between different conceptions of politics. Rather than a goal to achieve (a right to), the city (Bologna) emerges as the odds at stake and as a plexus of different projects of the city itself.

On the one hand many scholars talk about a new centrality of cities as strategic actors, and a broad proliferation of new names is proposed: informational city (Castells, 1989), postmetropolis (Soja, 2000), infinite city (Solnit, 2010), just to mention some of the most known. On the other hand, lots of interventions appeal to the nowadays residuality of the concept: someone talks about the end of the city (Benevolo, 2011), or describing it as evanescent, fading, obsolete (Gandy, 2011), sometimes focusing on the "urban" as a possible source to new conceptualizations (Brenner, 2013). If city is now everywhere (Bonomi, Abruzzese 2004), if everything is urbanized (Brenner, Schmid 2013), cities are nothing and nowhere. But at the same time they are constantly reaffirmed on a global scale. This means that reflecting on these dynamics means to think a paradox, which I try to grasp by testing a methodology based on the dialectic opposition and encounter of the two poles sketched before. I think that to keep open, to shake and screech this field of theoretical tension, could be a really productive exercise. So, again, the resurgence of the city on one hand, the dissolving of it into a planetary urbanization on the other hand. This is the productive aporia.

If urbanization "*contains two dialectically intertwined moments – concentration and extension*" (Brenner 2013: 102), I propose to look at city and urban as if they have always been juxtaposed *and* conflicting ideas: one (*Polis*-city) represents the concentration, the research of a form; the other (*Urbs*, urbanization, which I look as an iridescent, fickle, kaleidoscopic, and extremely heterogeneous process) it is composed of an imbrication of digital and non digital, global and local, and a continually shifting assemblage of territories, authorities, rights (Sassen 2006). Urbanization is arranged in polycentrics and multiscalars forms and represents the extension, the shapelessness of the city. Attempting to interpret these phenomena, I am building the category of *de-gendered* city as a political lens through which to look at the contemporary assemblage of these dynamics. Schiera (2004) talks about the de-generation of the State suggesting, with a biological metaphor, that it is shifting to another condition, almost a new gender. I try to test this idea, transposing it on the city. Effectively the political paradigm built on the city is now *de-gendered*, i.e. it seems it is passing literally to another gender. My hypothesis is that the *de-gendered* city is going to reappear as the place in which political forms are shaped. This idea can be practiced only in sequence, through a functional and no more topographical recognition of its constant laying of new borders (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2013). A model that exceeds the idea of the city but by moving within it. Albeit there is still a lack of tools to grasp this transformations, my hypothesis is that a new political shape(less) is becoming in the global urban fabric. An urbanized fabric that is debording territoriality (Sassen, 2013). This ongoing degeneration, this processual city, has an ambivalent constitution: it produces, and it is at the same time the product, of a social conflict. So, it needs a dialectical matrix for analyze it.

Bologna seems to be a good example of a globalized city, where global phenomena (logistics, gentrification, museumification, sprawl etc...) circulate and interact with local dynamics. The urban texture is the unstable result of a tension field, where different forces

interact and conflict among each others. Within this scenario, the city is a battlefield (Isin, 2002): increasing interconnections and the costant construction of new borders; global urban phenomena and the specific local legacy; migrations and an old legacy of social subjects; the friction between old urban configurations and a new geography of centres and peripheries; the relationship between social movements and the transformations of the city; the tension between urbs and civitas. All these factors, taken into account in this paper, point at a new emerging urban matter that needs to be framed and enquired.

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