

# INTRODUCTION: URBAN CHALLENGES, CULTURAL STRATEGIES, SOCIAL VALUES

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Culture, society and the economy are rapidly changing. Such a radical move from the manufacturing paradigm to some unknown order may prove unexpected and somewhat challenging: for more than two centuries we have all been trained and convinced that the golden age had been attained forever with a few solid certainties such as representative democracy, dimensional happiness, valuable finance, granted peace.

A more careful exploration could reveal some uncomfortable discoveries. Inequalities have grown, democracies are often tired and not sufficiently fed only by the electoral rites; towns have expanded in uncontrolled way generating symmetrical phenomena such as gentrification and social exclusion; finance is crushing the real economy and urbanity; culture itself has been drained into a list of unique objects devoted either to individual possession or to mass tourism. It is time to draw a different map of the city.

Although the urban fabric has always been the cradle for creativity, production of contents, fertilization of know-how and visionary intuitions, elaboration and exchange of ideas, the last centuries seem to have solidified urban dynamics, gradually losing the opportunity to encourage and facilitate the emersion of new social and cultural horizons: the economy and its financial orbit did not admit exceptions, and ended up eliciting pro-active resilience, creative subversion, shared dissent.

A weakened paradigm should not be substituted by a different (but similarly rigid) order. What contemporary society desires is a smooth, permeable, versatile and flexible urban backbone where flows of ideas, contents and experiences can reciprocally fertilize, space can be inclusive, time can be managed. The city of the years to come can generate value out of a moving community and its cultural hybridations, philosophical complexities, shared actions and institutional participation.

This book focuses upon (some of) the many issues arising from the change occurring in our time, and the related need to reshape urban life, overcoming the comfortable framework where functional and symbolic dynamics are driven by the dominating economic and the financial paradigm with its fallout of new inequalities, social rigidities, uneven care. In many respects the convergence towards big cities not only spoiled many small and medium towns but also altered the rhythms of ordinary urban life.

Crafted and drafted by an interdisciplinary group of scholars, academics, and professionals active in various areas, this book combines experiences and visions of different generations, in the awareness – often made invisible by frequent intergenerational conflicts – that new cultural maps require pluralism and eclecticism, rather than simply rejecting the existing framework in favour of a new hierarchical grid. Over-regulation, symbolic implications, and institutional neglect can only elicit subversive reactions.

The centrality of cities should therefore be regained through new awareness: the rich and often controversial interaction of the analogic and digital dimensions started to generate a counter-flow of professionals going back to smaller and smoother towns, or even moving as digital nomads, the *clerici vagantes* 2.0. In such a framework the ability to redefine urban trails, human networks and social chains proves crucial for each town to effectively respond to the complex need for an eloquent representation of the self.

Art becomes essential not only in providing the urban infrastructure with a powerful language, but also to define the poles for social aggregation, where the formal identity generated by public art is fed

by the evolutionary identity of a multicultural community. The value of public art as a powerful tool for urban strategies is focused upon from different perspectives by *Irene Litardi and Lavinia Pastore* (urban management), *Valeria Morea* (public economics), and *Tom Rankin* (architecture). This implies new responsibilities for municipal administrators who need to orientate regulation and public action to material and symbolic dynamics whose trend is partially unpredictable.

Meanwhile, on the background, triggered by basic needs and sophisticated desires new forms of participation in social processes are being crafted, and at the same time the interests of some developers exploit the uncertainties on estate rules and constraints, as *Clarissa Pelino* emphasizes, analyzing the recent contradictions of Mumbai. Exercises of inclusion and integration aim at crafting lively communities; lost jobs and local traditions are being revived or recycled, as in the Riace experience examined by *Domenica Moscato*; tourism faces the gradually growing trade-off between passive masses and versatile voyagers in a wider spectrum of territorial storytelling, as highlighted by *Ottavio Amaro and Marina Tornatora*, and of technological options, as explored by *Arthur Clay and Monika Rut*.

Within such a complex framework in motion there is no neat answer. “Art, Economics and the City” puts forth some of the questions that can allow us to focus upon the present picture and possibly to work from the perspective of various disciplines in order for consistent, effective and sustainable trails to be started. The thesis – and the working hypothesis for forthcoming research – is that it is time for art to move from the ivory towers in which it has complacently been isolated.

This challenge requires a sharper view of the eloquence of the arts and culture as symptoms and cascades of social evolution and turbulence; this can be made possible by projects and policies being grounded on the basis of the existing practices as the *mise-en-scène* of needs and desires, whose dynamics are examined by *Lia Fassari* from the sociological perspective; the geography of art, with its unconventional orientations, is tackled by *Federica Antonucci* through the options of de-accessioning and re-location.

In such a way the urban palimpsest can be redrawn, as suggested by *Lidia Errante* in her analysis, due to the proliferation of oriented practices. Urban commons emerge as a response to neglect and dis-possession, driven by the desire to claim back urban resources and social cohesion, care and shared responsibility, within the complex, and often conflictual, framework discussed by *Verena Lenna and Michele Trimarchi*.

The book focuses upon these issues, offering technical and critical analyses of a major stage of transition, characterized by ambiguities and contradictions, but also by the sharp potential towards the reclamation of art as a natural part of our *modus vivendi*. It is a complex phenomenon, whose horizons will contribute to shape the society in the next years. Awareness and knowledge are hence strongly needed in order for the diffused fear and mistrust to be offset by constructive views and responsible actions.

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