

Visible spaces, migrants' practices and the role of planning policies. A case study from Rome

Maria Grazia Montella, Marie Curie ESR INTEGRIM, Migrinter Lab – Université de Poitiers/ PhD student, PDTA Department – Università Sapienza di Roma

mariagrazia.montella@uniroma1.it

Keywords: multicultural planning, migrants practices, ethnic markets

Abstract

A visible space is a space presenting multifaceted characters due to the different uses to which it is subjected by the city users. The paper argues that the misunderstanding of the visibility of those places moulded by migrants practices generates a distortion into the planning policy-making process, being the cause of the raising of conflicts for the use of these space. The visibility of the space is a concept coming from the derridean definition of hospitality applied on planning and urban studies. If the non-conditional hospitality means a total welcoming of the migrant regardless of the need to call off the cultural difference, so the non-conditional visibility means the creation of spaces in which the display of culturally different spatial devices are the standard. The application of this non-conditional visibility is actually a relevant challenge for planners. The role of planning in most European cities is perceived as "socially value free" by both the planners and the policy-makers. This leads towards a distortion over the creation or the management of some spaces inside the city that are concretely multicultural but treated as they weren't. Generally speaking these spaces are often the most visible and shared places in the city: squares, streets, markets. The paper takes as case study a multicultural market in Rome where migrants' practices point out the lack of suitable policies able to foster the feeling of integration and belonging. In this case the visibility becomes a kind of invisibility threatening and sometimes hindering a real sharing of the area inside and outside the market. Indeed it involves a progressive transformation of the hosting neighbourhood into a marginal and interstitial space, hideout for the poorest and deprived migrant population in the city.

Introduction

This paper presents the outcomes of a fieldwork research on the Nuovo Mercato Esquilino in Rome and reflects on the implications of the planning policies in the process of making invisible the multicultural nature of this space and its neighbourhoods. Through a technical deny of the multicultural feature of the area surrounding the market, planning policies excluded themselves from the discourse on the management of this space giving way for mere economics regulation policies to take the helm.

The Esquilino market was, until 13 years ago, in the center of the neighbourhood. It was an historical market, active since the Unity of Italy and home of a flourishing trade with merchants from all over the Lazio region. The first plan for its redevelopment and relocation, due to the lack of sanitation standards suitable for the food trade, dates from the 1900s to the 1980s where it was already highlighted the need to separate the market space from the square, because it became impossible to use it after the opening hours of the market. From 1986 up to 1993 different plans included a relocation of the market and the development of certain brownfield sites near the major square Piazza Vittorio Emanuele. However, only in October 2001 the municipality was able to actually move the market from the square area to the two former barracks targeted to this aim. Unusable flooring, traffic jams, the underground car park still under construction and the prices of the management of the banks increased exponentially, the market was the target of protests of residents and traders, and over 40 benches were forced to close. Nowadays, after 15 years from the relocation, the market has established its own way of functioning, trying to open up to Italian people as well as to immigrants. The turnover of the owners or the managers of the banks is extremely visible making Esquilino market the most multicultural market of the whole city. Since 2001 the Economic Department of the Rome Municipality replaced the Planning Department for the management of the market while the latter still holds the hot potato of accessibility and viability related to the presence of the market in the neighbourhood area. Furthermore an additional beautification program is now targeting the major square and some nearby streets. Its aim is to make the square a meeting point for all the residents of the area regardless of their origins while pointing out the importance of the collective responsiveness towards the policy-making process. Indeed a committee

Visible spaces, migrants' practices and the role of planning policies. A case study from Rome

The Integrim-Scribani 2016 Conference "International Migration, Integration and Social Justice" University of Deusto, Bilbao 6-8 July 2016

composed by about two hundreds of residents in the neighbourhood is trying to collaborate with policy-makers in order to take part in the modification of the area.

1. The non-conditional visibility and the challenge for planners

Jacques Derrida explains in his *De l'hospitalité* that the Stranger is the person who asks the first question and to whom We ask the first question. Thanks to this sentence we can start a reflection about the question that new-coming immigrants would ask to policy makers. It can be thought as a request for a trespassing of the conception of tolerance towards a fruitful production of new spatial orders that can include multiple ways of using the space as well as the presence of multiple culturally diverse standards of management and audit. This is actually the non-conditional visibility: a condition that implies a total compliance of even different spatial norms and regulations that can happen only through a process of technical molding of the truly culturally different universal criteria (Belli & De Leo, 2011).

Even if planning policies define themselves as socially value free, they are instead overflowing with geographical, ethnic and cultural values that serve as the basis for the construction of norms and regulation. Indeed the space is probably the most visible field in which this values show themselves transforming the territory of the city into a battlefield for collective and individual affirmation of cultural rights. Very often the negotiation is not so easy to pursue between the counterparts that fight on the razor's edge of cultural definitions and the will to respect the traditional lifestyles. Many examples arose all around the world sometimes justifying the stiffness of planning procedures (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2013), sometimes showing how a different approach can be the solution to some of these conflicts (Qadeer, 2011). We argue that a multicultural planning approach can actually be the very turning point for our case study, namely Esquilino market in Rome.

Before exploring the case study, it is fair to still linger on some features of the multicultural planning and how these features match with our understanding of a non-conditional visibility.

2. The essential features of the multicultural planning approach

First of all it is of the utmost importance to define why and how multiculturalism intertwines with urban planning and which are the foremost effects that this process produces.

Visible spaces, migrants' practices and the role of planning policies. A case study from Rome

The Integrim-Scribani 2016 Conference "International Migration, Integration and Social Justice" University of Deusto, Bilbao 6-8 July 2016

It is a matter of fact that contemporary cities all around the world are becoming more and more multicultural due to the enormous flows of people going in and out the national borders. Not only people in search of a better job or life conditions but also travelers, entrepreneurs and all those who are affected by the globalization of tastes, markets, and economy. Nowadays multiculturalism is permeating every aspect of urban life (at least in the biggest cities in the world), changing the way of life of an increasing number of human beings. In practice this means that the bigger is the city the wider is the effect, but it can also imply that in every metropolis, no matter how many ethnicities it hosts, there are always more culturally diverse spaces with particular and unique features. This consequence could make the management of these spaces more and more difficult for urban planners. In fact the latter are often defining themselves as technicians meaning that they do not have to deal with cultural problems that can arise from the clash of different communities living in a determined space. Usually they perceive their work as "social value free" (Zhuang, 2013) implicitly asserting that they do not manage the cultural diversity while planning or managing a space even if it is clearly multicultural. Nevertheless they perfectly know the actual condition of the cities in which they work and practically they often pursued their objectives through bargain and compromises, even if they try to mask them labelling as "practical needs". It is fair to say that planning practices are in fact endorsed by an historical background, specific cultural practices and established conventions.

The second major feature of urban planning is the promotion of people's integration in the city through an egalitarian approach founded on a property-centered point of view that is not more suitable for contemporary urban societies. "Multiculturalism requires that planning instruments be both sensitive to and responsive to the social needs of particular communities and therefore calls all the more people-centered approaches." (Qadeer, 1997) Here Qadeer touches the issue of the spatial clustering of commercial activities or residential areas in the city, stating that if these concentrations are the results of a freedom of choice they can be sustained. Otherwise if they are formed through discriminatory practices or segregation intents "they should be recognized as prejudicial to the public interest" (ibidem). In fact here even the unitary conception of public interest is under examination. It is not more an utopic thought to say that there are a multiplicity of public interests that should affect the making of policies for the construction and management of urban spaces.

The third pivotal element of the multicultural planning approach is that it is related both to residential patterns and to the construction of social space. The latter is probably the most interesting aspect as it deals with at least three foremost concerns of planning theory: the spatial justice, the right to the city and the power of space. The relation between the phisicity and territoriality of the city, the resources settled in some space, and the population who inhabit these space generates the demand for a more just redistribution of these potentialities among the citizens. Thus the right to the city as a concept and as a request has almost spread everywhere and it takes the shape of renewed forms of urban mouvements demanding for participation in planning process. This two are deeply connected with the dynamics of power that show themselves in the space through the form of everyday practices and costumary habits. By and large it is worth saying that the forebears of the today multicultural planning approach have been the ghettos policies, the zoning policies, and the two vague of social mix planning, the keynesian social liberalism and the neoliberalism since the early 80s¹.

To finally sum up and going back to the aim of the discussion, on the one hand multiculturalism affects urban planning practices by putting them under the light of social values and multiple public interests. On the other hand multiculturalism operates in the sense that it underlines the cultural bias in the perceived universalistic planning criteria and it kicks out from the discourse the presumption of urban planners to be mere technical practitioners.

3. The misunderstanding of the multicultural visibility in the case of Nuovo Mercato Esquilino

Markets, in multiethnic cities, are collective spaces beyond the mere economic dimension. They are one of the most relation-intensive places in the neighborhood. Furthermore, they are one of the firsts jobs that immigrants can obtain thanks to their networks of friends and relatives (FIERI-Camera di Commercio di Torino, 2010). In particular they present two major characteristics. Firstly, in such markets, in a space familiar both to the immigrant and to the national, the meeting passes through the mechanisms of mutual recognition between them. The choice of the market as a working place for the immigrant brings with it the inclusion of

¹ This distinction is made by the authors of "Planning in the multicultural city: celebrating diversity or reinforcing difference?" p.16

Visible spaces, migrants' practices and the role of planning policies. A case study from Rome

The Integrim-Scribani 2016 Conference "International Migration, Integration and Social Justice" University of Deusto, Bilbao 6-8 July 2016

the Other in a customary setting for the National. This feature makes possible the observation of the first step of integration embodied in the primary relationship between the customer and the seller, even before the regulation of their status operated by the law. Secondly, markets show the peculiar characteristics of being composed of some standard procedures and some informal ones, occurrences and actions to which people get accustomed in their everyday life so that in the end they do not even are aware of (Abolafia, 1998; Watson, 2006). Furthermore multiethnic markets are usually situated in some particular areas in the city, often in the first outskirts and in some cases in the deprived area of the centre. This latter is the case for the Nuovo Mercato Esquilino located in a central but half-deprived neighborhood in the centre of Rome. In fact Esquilino district is basically divided in two parts, a first one adjoining with the central station a sort of *no-man's land* home for chinese businesses bordering on illegal, homeless and jobless immigrant people and a second one perfectly gentrified, meeting point for artists, hypsters and young cultivated people. The dividing point is the major square, home for the market from its very first beginning until the relocation in 2001. It is worth saying that the gentrification of the area and the relocation of the market were contemporary with the starting of the beautification project for the neighbourhood in the early 2000.

These features allow to analyze the direct and indirect effects of policies in the real life and behaviors between the immigrants and the national population.

New or somehow illegal work practices, self-organized forms for taking care of children, remarkable efforts in boosting the work environment, are some specific evidences of insurgent practices (Holston, 1998) noticed in the Nuovo Mercato Esquilino in Rome. We argue that these practices are a direct response to some gap into the management policies of the market and in general of the city. A sort of tailor-made exit option within a formal context (the market) made for meeting different needs that otherwise will be not satisfied. The lack (or the chronic shortage) of public structures for the care of children, the difficulties in getting a job through the legal ways, the lack of concern for the work conditions in the market are the principal causes of the birth of those insurgent practices in the market. Indeed they are insurgent in the very unique way following what James Holston means by insurgencies: "*Practices through which people problematize projects of city planning, development, law, and government. Practices that work against established conditions of inequality and provide alternatives for including citizens and distributing rights*" (Holston, 1998)

Visible spaces, migrants' practices and the role of planning policies. A case study from Rome

The Integrim-Scribani 2016 Conference "International Migration, Integration and Social Justice" University of Deusto, Bilbao 6-8 July 2016

However not all of them are positive examples but somehow they show the weakness and sometimes the failure of policies when national or local governments decided to rationalize, restrict and underestimate the role of the space in the integration policies. In fact, the neglected part of the policies is the power of diversion (Olivier de Sardan, 2008) that those subjected to certain policies exert as an option strategy. Furthermore these dynamics reveal some problems entangled in the planning policies that are usually hidden or misunderstood, that can be listed as follows:

- An almost total underestimation of the importance of cultural differences and above all of the fact that they are not fixed in a time or in a space instead adjustable, changeable and mixable;
- Immigrants bring with them a huge amount of different practices and some of them could be seen as illegal or could be in contrast with the customary and formal understanding of a space. The European technical concept of a "secure space" is an example.
- Unawareness of the asymmetrical local power relations² and their consequences on the everyday life and on the relation with the policies themselves. This includes the overcoming of the concept of a single public interest for a wider view of several public interests, sometimes struggling against each others;
- The fear of more forward-looking policies that need an upturning of the fixed idea of national identity³;
- Underestimation of the potentiality of the multicultural planning in managing some key issues involving the space of the market as a public and accessible space⁴.

The misunderstanding and the underestimation of these points produce a concrete spatial drawing of the market area in which the different subjects involved play its role individually instead of cooperating with others. The different interests clash against each other producing, at a spatial level, room for interstitial practices and way of living outside the common code of conduct. This so-created space become home for

² i.e. different and simultaneous forms of belonging in different communities (Bengali and trader, Muslim and woman, brotherhood and economic interest, etc..)

³ Even more now with the rise of the national belonging due to the binomial new wave of refugees and the terrorist attacks.

⁴ This is particularly true in the case of Rome but not for the whole Italy as the case of Turin's multi-ethnic market of Porta Palazzo demonstrated.

Visible spaces, migrants' practices and the role of planning policies. A case study from Rome

The Integrim-Scribani 2016 Conference "International Migration, Integration and Social Justice" University of Deusto, Bilbao 6-8 July 2016

illegal traffics, business and social disorders. Instead of being represented as a clash of multiple interests that could be managed if understood and treated well, it is seen as the result of a lack of security and iron hand towards the "newcomers". Thus, instead of involving major attention on the multicultural feature of the conflict and enhancing a social resolution through new planning strategies, it remains locked into the label of security issue to be treated through a reinforced presence of the military and policemen.

These points lead to the very overriding question: can the urban planning be involved in the managing of the multicultural space as could have been the case of Nuovo Mercato Esquilino? The declined power of the urban planning department in the municipality of Rome is maybe a sign of the will to fold the hand or simply an acknowledgement of the scarce expertise that urban planners have in managing multicultural issues.

In the analysis of the documents produced on the subject by the Municipality of Rome it is clear that the market's space is divided into an inner and an outsider space. While the former is managed from the department of commerce, the latter is ruled from the department of planning concerning the viability, accessibility and the licenses for the occupation of public land. In fact the possible multiethnic nature of these spaces is not mentioned anywhere and as a consequence the necessity to manage them as multiethnic are not taken into account. Even if a discourse on the multiethnicity is largely due in such big city as Rome, it is eventually almost never officially tackled. In this context it comes to addition the will of a part of the resident population to *normalize* their neighborhood, in the sense that they strongly want to clean it⁵, rationalise it and try to hide as much as possible the acting presence of the immigrants. Otherwise other residents are trying to catch this multiethnic feature to enhance the potential of the area. It is worth noticing that these are often the gentrified residents of the other side of the neighborhood that are scarcely concerned by the real multiethnicity and its inconvenients. Furthermore they are the same people who joined the participatory committee dealing with the neighbourhood beautification project.

Considering all these issues, it is undeniable that a reflection about the constitution of a multidisciplinary body of professionals able to tackle the issues and to negotiate with different targets of population is an important

⁵ It is a claim about the waste produced by a range of several activities in the market area: the market itself, the movable stalls all around the major square, the leftover of food outside the ethnic shops and the market, the garbage of the homeless people.

asset in the management of such spaces. Here the very own role of Italian urban planning is at stake, its reconfiguration when dealing with the integration of different populations in the city is urgent.

4. A chance for the non-conditional visibility: planning in the face of multiethnicity

The Italian case of Nuovo Mercato Esquilino highlights some crucial issues that can represent the starting point for a concrete reflection on the possibility that the non-conditional visibility could give to such spaces. The international literature offers many examples of how to deal with multicultural issues in urban planning and even if a real comparison with Italian practices and policies is hardly feasible, it is still fruitful to underline some of their conclusions to better understand that it is possible for urban planning to solve core multicultural questions. In her analysis of the ethnic retail areas of Toronto, Z. C. Zhuang argues that the major problem for planners when dealing with multiethnic commerce is that "the urban planning is for land use but not for land users" and again that for planners "being culturally neutral is important because they do not want to discriminate any group of people" (Zhuang, 2013). These affirmations lead to the conclusion that urban planning rules are conflicting with the multicultural nature of some areas in the contemporary city and planners "lack legitimate authority and policy backing" to face the issues related to cultural differences. It is true that neither in Canada nor in Italy there is any specific planning policy for the ethnic retail implying serious difficulties for planners when addressing these realities. Once again Leonie Sandercock suggests a way to face and overcome the problem through a shift from the multiculturalism to the interculturalism⁶ "establishing political community rather than ethno-cultural identity as the basis for a sense of belonging in multicultural societies" (Sandercock, 2011). If it is true in theory, it is very hard to adopt this suggestion when it comes to daily practices. Establishing a political community is a second step to take once a primary form of integration is already existing and this is the foremost concern in the case of the Italian cities and of Rome in particular. Therefore the major question remains: how to deal with cultural differences in the space avoiding discrimination in one sense or another? To this regard, the non-conditional visibility represents a possible response that requires enough bravery to be put in place. In the case of Nuovo Mercato Esquilino it could be framed as follows:

⁶ In this regard see also (Meer & Modood, 2011)

Visible spaces, migrants' practices and the role of planning policies. A case study from Rome

The Integrim-Scribani 2016 Conference "International Migration, Integration and Social Justice" University of Deusto, Bilbao 6-8 July 2016

- the opening of a child-care service for market workers and the neighborhood's deprived families. It could be placed inside the market in a separate place⁷;
- the promotion of a market's permanent committee of market traders, foreign and national traders outside the market and officers from the planning and the economic departments in order to enhance the turistic role of the area through the disposition of several visual devices featuring the multicultural nature of the area;
- an increased visibility of the neighborhood through the expression of its several souls with festivals, exhibitions and cultural events open to everybody in the city. These could be included into the city tours and the city guides⁸.

Critics could argue that an application of the non-conditional visibility may produce a sense of loss of identity for the national people living in the area. In fact that is false for multiple reasons. First of all national people resident in the area are interested by the multicultural wave since the 2000 if not before so they are, in a sense, accustomed to it. They are aware of the multiple identities of the area and even if they may not accept them at least they tolerate them, in a way or another, if they still want to live in there. Besides the non-conditional visibility means that there will be multiple point of reference so even the Italian population will be able to display their cultural features through, for example, a more peculiar way of advertise the restaurants and the bars, caring much more about the exterior of the shops and of course through the Italian festivals and particular holidays. Last but not least indoubtably each part of the city has a stronger presence of at most two foreign cultures at once and the public spaces are place naturally made for the encounter with the others to which even the Italian population in the district is already accustomed to.

Finally, it should be clear to the planners that nowadays their job could not be socially value free as they perceive it. They are not more mere technicians dealing with technic issues in the city, indeed they need to know that they act as "political agents" in someway. The solution released for the public and the commercial spaces in the city do really contribute to the social integration of the different communities living in that city.

⁷ Nuovo Mercato Esquilino is hosted in a very large building constituted by two blocks, former military barracks. Within the market there is already a one room clinic for the prevention of common diseases related to migration. It is run by a local association.

⁸ This procedure is at work in several European cities like Amsterdam, Barcelona, Turin.

Visible spaces, migrants' practices and the role of planning policies. A case study from Rome

The Integrim-Scribani 2016 Conference "International Migration, Integration and Social Justice" University of Deusto, Bilbao 6-8 July 2016

A wrong perception, a misunderstanding of interests, a lack of the bargaining power and room for manoeuvring could often destroy a long work of appeasement in some neighborhoods or, even worse, could implicate the failure of a project and consequents clashes between the different residents.

Bibliografia

Abolafia, M. Y., 1998. Markets as cultures: an ethnographic approach. *Sociological Review Monograph*, I(46), pp. 69-86.

Belli & De Leo, 2011. Per una visibilità incondizionata. Ospitalità, città e moschee. *CRIOS*, Issue 2, pp. 57-66.

Chiodelli, F. & Moroni, S., 2013. Città, spazi pubblici e pluralismo: una discussione critica delle ordinanze municipali. *Quaderni di Scienza Politica*, 7(1).

Davidoff, P., 1965. Advocacy and Pluralism in planning. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 31(4), pp. 331-338.

Fainstein, S. S., 2009. Spatial Justice and Planning. *Spatial Justice* <http://www.jssj.org>, Volume 1, pp. 1-11.

FIERI-Camera di Commercio di Torino, 2010. *L'integrazione in piazza. Commercianti stranieri e clientela multi-etnica nei mercati urbani*, Torino: FIERI.

Holston, J., 1998. Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship. In: L. Sandercock, a cura di *Making the invisible visible. A multicultural planning history*. Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 70-82.

Meer, N. & Modood, T., 2011. How does Interculturalism contrast with Multiculturalism. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 2(33), pp. 175-196.

Olivier de Sardan, J.-P., 2008. *Antropologia e sviluppo*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore.

Qadeer, M., 2011. The practice of multicultural planning in American and Canadian Cities. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 20(1), pp. 132-156.

Qadeer, M. A., 1997. Pluralistic planning for multicultural cities. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 63(4), pp. 481-495.

Roma, C. C. C. d., 2006, verbale n.9 seduta pubblica del 6 febbraio 2006. *Deliberazione n.36 Estratto dal verbale delle deliberazioni del Consiglio Comunale*. Roma: s.n.

Roma, C. C. d., 2006 Verbale n.9 seduta pubblica del 6 febbraio . *Deliberazione n.35 Estratto dal verbale delle deliberazioni del Consiglio Comunale*. Roma: s.n.

Roma, C. d., 2006. *Regolamento delle attività commerciali sulle aree pubbliche*. Roma: s.n.

Roma, C. d., 2011. *52a proposta (dec.g.c.del 4 maggio 2011 n.44)*. Roma: s.n.

Sandercock, L., 2004. *Verso Cosmopolis. Città multiculturali e pianificazione urbana*. Bari: Dedalo.

Visible spaces, migrants' practices and the role of planning policies. A case study from Rome

The Integrim-Scribani 2016 Conference "International Migration, Integration and Social Justice" University of Deusto, Bilbao 6-8 July 2016

Sandercock, L., 2011. Commentary: where do theories come from?. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 20(1), pp. 157-159.

Scarpelli, F., 2009. *Il rione incompiuto. Antropologia urbana dell'Esquilino*. Roma: CISU.

Simonica, A., 2009. Il destino di una piazza fra condominio e mondo. In: F. Scarpelli, a cura di *Il rione incompiuto. Antropologia urbana dell'Esquilino*. Roma: CISU, pp. 9-25.

Watson, S., 2006. *Markets as sites for social interaction. Spaces of diversity*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Zhuang, Z. C., 2013. Rethinking multicultural planning: an empirical study of ethnic retailing. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 22(2), pp. 90-116.