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EDITORIAL

A generic and standardized temporariness

This issue hosts papers written by the authors who have answered to the call for a long-term reflection about the urban transformations inspired by a “temporary” perspective, taken on by new and less new professionals “of the urban”, who work within independent or institutional contexts.

The collected experiences are discussed within the framework of the so-called Temporary Urbanism, which at different scales and in different contexts works as a process or a tactical and temporary action which is here deeply explored to understand their duration, their features, their consequences in relationship with the more classic and “slow” urban projects. Although their different consistency, these experiences crush the dimensions of time and space into the dimension of micro or macro events.

Each case study is profoundly different from the others, yet in each of them it is possible to read a paradigmatic meaning that allows us to grasp links and data that in some way can nourish a critical discussion on their deep meanings and their implications on the future of cities.

In the first paper, Luca Gulli and Ambra Migliorisi describe an experience of temporary use of a former railway area in Bologna, framing it in the procedures stated by the new regional urban planning law, and highlighting how, conversely, the experience shows a deregulation process which starts from the institutionalization of the temporary as a tool for urban transformation.

This process can be also understood by the case-studies described in the following papers, which somehow highlight further attributes of it, although focused in different contexts, in Brazil and in Australia. Bárbara Brena and Rafaela Lino Izeli describe the temporary, first spontaneous then institutionalized, occupation of Avenida Paulista in São Paulo; the authors

highlight the conflicting attributes coming from the institutionalization of a tactical action for the occupation of city parklets, especially linked to the progressive involvement of new actors, as private entrepreneurship, in the transformations of a public space.

Analogously, Quentin Stevens presents how a series of pop-up parklets in parking areas in Perth, even if conceived to take space for public use, are somehow harbingers of a neoliberal urban development, driven by the progressive institutionalization of this “liberation” of the public space, which also makes the local movements themselves becoming an instrument of exploitation of community resources, as the social capital and the material work.

Valentina Bonello and Claudia Faraone describe “Studio CityGate II”, a temporary use project in a former factory in Brussels, promoted by the public actor: the experience emerges as a win-win strategy among owners and potential users, which in practice contributes to build images (and imaginaries) of a livable urban space (attractive for investments) while it is actually a fragmented urban context.

Public actor is also the leader of the “reinvention” of the Place des Fêtes in Paris, as Juliette Charron writes in her paper: public actor frames a bottom-up process by involving local collectives to manage the transformation, so to give to the transformation the symbolic meanings belonging to such actors, and asks them to use temporary urbanism tools to openly show how the project benefits from a participatory process.

In the last paper, Mara Ferreri, focusing on a design competition for temporary uses for urban voids in London, highlights how such kind of projects, after the 2008’s global financial crisis which also affected the urban development in many European cities, have become a widespread urban practice; the author puts into discussion the idea that such direct use could

(or not) truly be intrinsically emancipatory and alternative facing to existing social, economic and power relations, suggesting that instead it could be in the line of the neoliberal urban dynamics, commodifying the suspension in time and space of these spaces.

By reading this issue as a whole, some reflections seem to emerge for a critical discussion.

First of all, how the strategies for the urban transformation based on Temporary Urbanism show a sort of generality and normalization, both aesthetic and procedural, as the papers present, albeit they make reference to very different contexts and processes.

Furthermore, the temporary emerges as one of the attributes of the tools by which the public institutions manage the urban transformations in contemporary city. The experimentation of such tools – temporary uses, pop-up action, etc. – by public (and then private) actors are manifold: they range from the simulation at real scale of the public space design, to the occupation by agreements of a depreciated urban void, so to promote new uses (and imaginaries) while waiting for a new urban project, maybe at large scale. In this way, the areas where the urban voids are located, which are often peripheral and marginal areas, are thus filled by actions that make them visible and attractive for new investments. Public institutions carefully choose the local actors (citizens, movements) to involve in temporary actions, in order to use them to raise the land value with almost zero costs, since such not-illegal occupation avoid further abandonment and the depreciation of the areas, and the “innovative” actions by such “new” urban professionals – as the local actors are in practice – guarantee the public or private promoters’ visibility and promotion.

Filling these space-time gaps – “urban gaps” let’s say – by means of continuous actions reduces the different city temporalities to a single linear

rhythm, where any space has to be devoted to efficiency and profitability.

Beyond the symbolic-patrimonial implication of such temporary actions, we can further underline some other implications on urban economies. Especially in urban contexts where public institutions have lost their economic power, temporary interventions may act as a sort of catalyst for the market, because of the attribution of meanings and values they generate and the imaginaries they feed, even if they seem to be programmatically placed outside the market, since they often occur in disinvested places, so to generate several ambiguities (of process, of aims, of conception). In the same logic, the rhetoric of “simplification” behind the temporary has implemented an increasingly deregulation, perfectly coherent with neoliberal ideology, which unhinges a homogeneous urban development, to give place to short term actions, with an immediate media, social and therefore economic significance.

The bottom-up rhetoric behind the temporary contributes to the ambiguities noticed above, in a peculiar way concerning “who” makes the temporary. Local actors present themselves (or they are presented) as “heroic” because their actions take on an underlying occupying and subversive aesthetics coupled with a more “cool” and pacifying one, so to feed imaginaries still ambiguous; while new urban professionals born, promoting themselves due to their experiential skills instead professional and educational background, and profit from the processes of deregulation of such quick actions making cities, to build themselves as a bottom-up experts, useful for the public and private actors driving long-lasting urban transformations.

Putting into discussion the institutionalization of the temporary, the issue also suggests how this process provokes the commodification of temporary and tactical, which in their origin

belonged to strategies for subverting the programmed uses of a spaces and were conceived and featured as radical.

Finally, by critical understanding the different experiences presented in this issue, in the broader framework of the contemporary urban planning practices and tools, we can argue that this progressive muffling of the tactical potential in temporary (urban) actions is also attributable to a progressive subsumption of the tactical acts into a strategic dimension of the urban policies. It happens both due to a general weakness that such a strategic dimension shows nowadays, and also because the tactic urban actions provide in the short term significant media results (even if not always material), which can be used by public actors. We are actually witnessing our cities hosting an incessant sedimentation of site-specific short-term urban interventions, reified

by actions and practices, which are somehow sponsored as planned within urban strategies, despite the absence of any urban strategies.

As we stated, each case study points out a multifaceted and peculiar reality, linked to temporary urbanism and its various features, and contributes to a critical discussion of themselves, letting us to focus specific ambiguities. Moreover, the issue aims to give elements for a radical and broader debate about temporary urbanism, letting emerge how tactical and strategic are both fundamental attributes of the urban transformation procedures, but their overlapped uses show the inadequacy of tools and descriptive categories, and the need of working with the awareness of their differences in terms of tools, objectives and subjects.

A. de B. & C. M.