

Workshop 3 | Ritorno ai luoghi: metabolismi urbani e place-making

W 3.3 | FORME E MODI PER (RI)USARE IL PATRIMONIO

COSTRUITO, STORICO E CONTEMPORANEO

W 3.3 B |

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INTRODUZIONE

Corrado Zoppi e Maria Rita Gisotti

I temi della rigenerazione e riqualificazione della città e del territorio sono tra gli orizzonti di riflessione più praticati nell'attuale fase di declino demografico che caratterizza il contesto europeo e gran parte del mondo occidentale. Il terreno di lavoro di urbanisti e pianificatori diventa sempre più quello della restituzione di senso, struttura e funzioni al patrimonio costruito, alle diverse scale dell'osservazione e dell'intervento. Il workshop 3.3b, sollecitando gli urbanisti su questi temi, ha raccolto una risposta significativa, sia in termini numerici (quasi una trentina di contributi pervenuti), che di possibile declinazione degli argomenti. Sono emersi, infatti, quattro nuclei tematici riferibili alla riqualificazione dei centri storici, ai progetti di rigenerazione urbana, alle forme che l'azione pubblica assume nel campo del riuso e del recupero e alla ristrutturazione del patrimonio territoriale e paesaggistico alla scala d'area vasta e del periurbano. Se la maggior parte dei contributi è incentrata su casi di studio italiani, si segnala una presenza considerevole di riflessioni sulla "città globale", con un particolare interesse per alcuni paesi del Sud del mondo.

Quali le principali tracce di ricerca emerse? Un primo filone è, senz'altro, di carattere ontologico, teso a rispondere alla domanda (chiaramente leggibile nella filigrana di molti paper): di cosa parliamo quando parliamo di *patrimonio*, *permanenze*, *scarto*, *drosscape*? Prima ancora di esplorare le ipotesi progettuali, sembra indispensabile connotare, descrivere, conoscere, mappare, quantificare e classificare il patrimonio costruito esistente, ma anche le risorse immateriali che possono essere motori del cambiamento. Nel solco di questa ricerca,

trovano posto i temi della profondità storica come palinsesto di regole riattualizzabili per l'intervento contemporaneo e un'idea di progetto contestuale, sobrio, parsimonioso, che si radicalizza solo per proporre soluzioni estreme, non nel senso dell'aggiunta di nuovi manufatti, ma in quello della loro rimozione quando l'obsolescenza è irrecuperabile (si veda a questo proposito il contributo sull'opportunità della demolizione). In questo quadro concettuale, la riqualificazione dello spazio costruito si fonda sulla sua efficacia a contribuire ad un'idea di futuro urbano che, pur conferendo alle politiche del riuso una significativa aleatorietà, si connota per un'affascinante apertura, per la ricerca urbanistica, ad un universo di soluzioni da esplorare con spirito laico.

Un secondo tema trasversale alla gran parte dei contributi è il ruolo dello spazio pubblico nel definire il telaio su cui riorganizzare le forme dell'insediamento contemporaneo. Due le leve principali sulle quali i contributi suggeriscono di agire: il patrimonio delle aree a standard e della città pubblica ereditata dall'urbanistica della seconda metà del Novecento, e la trama degli spazi aperti che inframmezzano o bordano la città. I progetti proposti, specialmente da questo secondo insieme di contributi, si distinguono per un carattere volutamente aperto, incompiuto, che li approssima ai ben noti "terzi paesaggi" e "giardini in movimento" del progetto di paesaggio e del *landscape urbanism* contemporaneo. Il tema della dialettica tra ruolo giocato dalle pubbliche amministrazioni e dai soggetti del settore privato, profit e non profit, si configura come una questione aperta, soprattutto in relazione ai diversi contesti nazionali ed internazionali.

La terza traccia di ricerca riguarda il ruolo delle

pratiche e dei processi di autorganizzazione per la rigenerazione urbana, tipicamente presenti nei tessuti più marginali (centri storici in abbandono e periferie). Si tratta, probabilmente, della traccia più problematica, poiché interroga, senza evidentemente potere e volere fornire una risposta definitiva, il campo d'intersezione tra il mondo delle pratiche dal basso e l'azione pubblica istituzionale. Alla proliferazione delle esperienze sembra, talvolta, non corrispondere un'approfondita e sistematica presa in considerazione degli strumenti disciplinari propri dell'urbanistica, che appare, invece, quantomai auspicabile per lo sviluppo di progettualità efficaci e spazializzate. In gran parte dei contributi proposti, in termini diretti o indiretti, la questione dell'integrazione di saperi tecnici e sapere comune si configura come un profilo fondamentale per l'efficacia delle politiche urbane e molto promettente per il futuro della ricerca.

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Redeveloping urban fringe areas in south Mediterranean: the case of “grands projets” in Moroccan agglomerations

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Abstract

This paper develops the theme proposed in the workshop by concentrating on a specific category of built heritage, which is urban fringe areas of the agglomerations of South Mediterranean, with particular reference to Morocco. In these contexts, affected by strong and fast metropolisation process, intervention on urban fringes mostly match new big urbanisations that substitutes or, more rarely, complements pre-existing settlements with urban renewal intents. Often, these interventions are labelled as “grands projets” and they are produced by national neoliberal politics linked with global capitals that see in outskirts of the city especially investment occasions. This paper examines conditions that make grand projects possible in terms of public policies and planning tools and shows principals critical issues in terms of environment, urban morphology (creation of insular textures strongly decontextualized), social conditions (additional marginalisation of weakest population groups). Final remarks invite to reflect on an integrated and contextualised urban project notion as a working path for the construction of coherent new settlements that they are also more adequate to the Moroccan population's demand of city.

Keywords: urban regeneration, urban growth, outskirts and suburbs

1 | Urban fringe areas and metropolisation in Morocco

The treatment of urban fringe areas, a crucial issue in the contemporary debate on urban planning, can be addressed through different approaches, which can be summarised, by way of generalisation, as follows: 1. an action based on a subtle redevelopment of the existing heritage, even minor, and on the enhancement of the multifunctional role of open areas, aimed at limiting new land consumption as shown, in Italy, by more than one regulatory device (a vision, typical in post-metropolitan contexts, whose keywords are “mending”, “fabric re-stitching” or “urban acupuncture”); 2. a treatment of urban fringe areas through the cyclopean “redevelopment”/“regeneration” actions of “grands projets”, typical of many south Mediterranean cities, undergoing intense and rapid urban growth processes. This occurrence is particularly noticeable in the Maghreb countries, affected by the urbanising pressure from both the contemporary Africa and the Middle East countries.

In particular, Morocco has conquered an emerging position in this context, due to its geographical location as a bridge between Europe and Africa and between the Arab and Mediterranean world, as well as to the reform policy of the current monarch Mohamed VI, which since 2000 has promoted an ambitious plan to modernise the country (Chauffour, 2016: 19). If some results are encouraging especially at the social level – in terms of eradicating extreme poverty and increasing access to basic public services, first of all primary education (*ibidem*: xxv) – there are also contradictions and extensive areas of shade. Among the cornerstones of national policies, there is a strong incentive to the metropolisation of the country and the support of the so-called “value adding” cities such as Rabat, Marrakech, Casablanca, Fès (Royaume du Maroc, 2001: 29), which the Schéma National d'Aménagement du Territoire (SNAT) approved in 2001 intends to strengthen as the economic development poles, as well as places to address the serious social issues (unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, migratory flows). The national orientation is reflected in the regional master plans (the SRATs, still proposing simple guidelines being currently devoid of regulatory power) and finally in the Schémas d'Aménagement Urbain (SDAU) of the big cities and in the related implementation plans.

2 | The grand projects: history and regulatory framework

The action on urban fringe areas through “grands projets” is placed in such geo-political context. Raffaele Cattedra (2010) has defined a typological classification of such projects, many of which are located in one or more sites in the Casablanca conurbation. There are: tourist-recreational complexes (usually gathered

along the seaside or the riverside, like the Bou Regreg valley or Casa Marina projects); tertiary-commercial-residential poles (Sidi Maarouf district in Casablanca); technology parks (Casaneashore); multifunctional districts born from the recovery of abandoned sites (such as Casa Anfa in the site of the old Casablanca airport); large infrastructural complexes (the reference is above all to rail transport, but it seems appropriate to include in this category the gigantic international port of Tanger Med with the related offshore industrial zone called “Tanger Free Zone” and the financial district called “Tanger City Centre”); symbolic projects (the Grande Mosquée “Hassan II” in Casablanca, although chronologically antecedent); the “villes nouvelles” of Tamesna, Tamansourt, Chrafat and Lakhyata.

As highlighted by many authors (Souani, Verdeil, 2006; Barthel, 2008; Cattedra, 2010; Zemni, Bogaert, 2011; Semmoud et al., 2014; Bogaert, 2018), the genesis of “grands projets” is connected to the entrance on the Moroccan scene, starting roughly from the early 2000s, of large global capitals, with a relevant presence of the Arab Emirates who consider urban fringe as a privileged area for real estate and financial investment. In Morocco, these financial flows were intercepted by the State through the mediation of the royal family and its entourage, involved in forms of public-private partnerships even highly articulated and branched out. In this process, the stitches of public control on major urban transformations have been considerably loosen, by accepting the high degree of conditionality imposed by investors. Such conditionality has produced effects at the same time on tax (with exemptions, concessions, enlarged access to credit), on land purchase (often marked by highly opaque procedures) and on the very building process. In all of these three fields, a key role has been played by the brand “projet royal”, always marking preferential and extraordinary paths with respect to the usual procedures.

In terms of urban planning, the implementation of “grands projets” is connected to two devices:

- first, the derogation from the provisions of ordinary urban planning instruments. Data on derogation in Morocco are very significant in themselves. Officially introduced by the Ministry Decision no. 254/1999, and subsequently reinforced by other Decisions in 2001, 2003 and 2010, the institution of derogation is justified by the need to loosen a regulatory framework considered extremely rigid compared to the vitality of the economic and social ones. The rhetoric of a country moving towards modernisation and progress clearly pushes urban policies towards an unbalanced approach, tending to favour the project (the echoes of French policies focused on *urbanisme de projet* are clear and strong in this sense also) at the expenses of the plan. In the decade 2003-2013 the specific commission for derogations approved 58% of the submitted applications, just postponing the approval of another 11% (CESE, 2014). In the single agglomeration of Fes, a study carried out among 1999 and 2015 showed that almost all the areas concerned by development plans were affected by derogations (Royaume du Maroc, 2016: 435-436). Derogations also affected the green belt area provided for by the 1995 Master Plan, now completely eroded and replaced by urbanisation. Such data, although not exclusively referred to grands projets, also include most of this kind of actions, such as the Prestigia-Champs de Course, located on the site of the former racecourse of the Fès colonial ville nouvelle, accounting for the extent of their impact on urban change;
- second, and more recent, the “General Construction Regulations” approved by Decree 2-13-424/2013 and concerning the building plots identified by the national planning laws (Law 25/1990 and 12/1990). The regulation establishes the procedure for examining and authorising two types of actions, *petits projets* and *grands projets*. The latter include almost all public and private building, with the exclusion of individual dwellings and commercial or industrial buildings, as long as they are of modest extension. The examination procedure lasts no more than 19 days and does not include environmental impact assessments or any form of public debate. The inclusion of an extremely wide range of actions within a procedural chain of approval that is so rapid and scarcely detailed, witnesses the low level of preliminary assessment of the effects produced by such public actions. In terms of conflict of interest there are large grey areas: for example, the chairman of the city council has the power to invite for consultation people or bodies whose opinion is deemed useful, the designer can propose the project to the commission even on his own request, the supra-municipal body included in the evaluation commission is not the Region but the prefecture, representative of the central government at the provincial level.

3 | Criticalities and impacts of grands projets on urban fringe areas

The grands projets are among the most relevant types of action for the modelling of urban fringe areas, understood both as the suburbs of the Moroccan agglomerations and as areas affected by degradation/abandonment even though not peripheral. The Institut National d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme has carried out a study (INAU, 2011) on the critical issues related to the chain of grands projets (with particular reference to villes nouvelles and grands ensembles) highlighting the following points:

- a schedule of the whole project cycle which is just rough, limited to the project scale and never considering the context it belongs to, usually including only general financial estimates. There is no real feasibility study including environmental impact assessment as well as an in-depth analysis of the state of affairs. The “lightness” of the schedule allows adapting the project to the evolutions of the variables at stake;
- the problem of land purchase marked by slowness and opacity and often requiring direct intervention by the central government – almost always on behalf of the control room. Frequently, the very origin of the project is in the existence of a real estate opportunity. In the most critical cases, there is just a partial purchase of lots in the project area, coinciding with the beginning of works, followed by a purchase for subsequent “fragments” allowing the creation of a land reserve around the site. This is the most prejudicial case, since it implies that the project may vary according to the availability of lots detected time after time;
- an economic feasibility which is never rigorously verified, also as regards the allocation of costs for urbanisation works and marketing strategies, whose lack, together with other factors, gives rise to large shares of unsold. The two most common cases are: 1. a financial coverage previously established but continuously revised along the way; 2. a “soft” coverage, poorly specified, which allows continuous adjustments according to the market;
- the quality of the very urban/architectural project usually managed through direct assignment to individual architects and not to multidisciplinary teams. The contest, in the rare cases it is carried out, concerns only the buildings regardless of land project, infrastructure and urbanisation works. The executive design is normally entrusted to third parties having considerable leeway on the original project, even significantly modifying its contents. As for financial coverage, here too we can have two typical situations: a detailed project that is systematically transgressed and re-adjusted from time to time, or a poorly defined and flexible project that changes along the way;
- the projects implementation, which sees systematic delays in time schedule, lacks in implementing primary urbanisation networks, collective equipment and all the planned activities of a central character, with easily understandable effects, especially in the case of the predominantly residential sectors.

To go into the details of the morphological effects caused by grands projets on the Moroccan cities (Florin, Semmoud, 2014), what emerges is a recurrence of urban and architectural models often detached from the context (except for some vernacular references usually limited to finishes and decorations) and a language based on gigantism and hypermodernity. These urban projects are deliberately in sharp contrast with the rest of the city, expressing the will (of investors, property developers, and presumably potential buyers) to adhere to global housing and architectural models and, by this, to stand out also in social terms from a local context perceived as poor and limited. The use of models distant from the local settlement and architectural tradition also implies the use of construction techniques poorly mastered by local workers, which results in an extremely low-quality implementation, also aggravated by the use of materials far from precious, in spite of the messages of opulence and ostentation of wealth conveyed by advertising leaflets and illustrative renderings.

For Souami and Verdeil (2006), this way to build cities is implemented by globalised fragments within a logic which is insular, episodic and disconnected from an overall and long-term project that, even when available in urban plans, is systematically transgressed. Even the landscape treatment of the area – deemed as crucial at least in order to promote the action – in cases where it is made appears to be de-contextualized with respect to the historical matrices of landscape and the Islamic and Moroccan garden in particular. A further typical element of grands projets is the rhetoric of sustainability and eco-architecture, completely disregarded in the production and the ordinary management of artefacts. Finally, urban marketing is an essential condition for the existence of grands projets, as it conveys a “mirage urbain” intercepting desires and needs of a population that sees, not only in urbanisation but also in complying with alleged urban housing models within a globalised imaginary, a chance for accessing different and better living conditions.

At the social level, the conquest of outskirts through grands projets can induce, more or less rapidly, a further spatial marginalisation of the weaker sections of population that can lead to the creation of new informal/illegal settlements (Legros, 2010; Coslado, 2014). A paradoxical effect, since some of the grands projets (especially in the category of villes nouvelles) are just based on the rhetoric of redeveloping degraded urban fringe areas and dismantling the informal. This is what happened in the ville nouvelle of Tamansourt, built between 2004 and 2005 and remained largely uninhabited due to the lack of settlement just of those sections of the population to which it was destined; this due to a set of factors such as:

- the failure in implementing the economic and service activities that should have guaranteed the economic vitality of this new city with 30.000 people;
- the lack of public transport services connecting to the urban centre (Marrakech) which, added to the lack of real new employment opportunities in the new settlement, has made living in Tamansourt economically unsustainable for these families, also physically ripping off that network of solidarity and informal economies usually at the base of their livelihood;
- the considerable increase in the cost of living in such neighbourhoods due to the price regime applied by the few commercial activities available, usually consisting of large malls calibrated on a parallel – and extremely more expensive – economy compared to that of small neighbourhood shops;
- the disproportion between investments and purchasing potential of the users it was dedicated to, with a difficulty or impossibility in accessing the properties for the weakest segments.

4 | Final remarks

Grands projets are considered among the most influential tools in treating the urban fringe areas of Moroccan cities. Linked to the initiative of the royal family and their entourage – usually consistently acting as investors – they reflect a “personalization of urbanism” (Cattedra, 2010) and a strengthening of the decision-making role of central state, also present through of its decentralised bodies in the authorisation processes. Public action in the regulation of urban transformations appears marginalised, as confirmed also by the exorbitant recourse to derogations from municipal plans for the authorisation of grands projets and by the frequent invocations expressed by the national policy in favour of the urbanisme de projet as opposed to the formal one. To this picture it should be added a strong socio-cultural inertia with respect to the pressure exerted by strong powers, typical of unripe and “incomplete” democracies such as Morocco.

In this geo-political context, it is difficult to imagine a turnaround in government policies, given their extremely significant implications – and not only in economic terms – on a global scale. More specifically, at the morphological level, if the game of redevelopment or construction of urban fringe areas is played in the field of urban project, we could maybe work on the front of its contextuality, understood not only in terms of typological and architectural lexicon but, above all, as the ability to identify non-arbitrary or self-centred form of organisation of inhabited spaces. In this sense, a morphotypological approach to reading and designing places could help to focus attention on the recognition of the principles of coherence between human construction and space, between settlement and milieu ambiant at all scales, also giving a more adequate answer to the demand of city insistent and urgently formulated by the Moroccan population. Without falling into the naivety of a technocratic determinism, we cannot exclude that an urban project endowed with territorial intelligence may help identifying integrated paths to help solving the complex housing problems of the contemporary Moroccan urban fringe areas.

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