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28 November 2026

SINERGI
SOCIAL INTEGRATION THROUGH URBAN GROWTH STRATEGIES

SINERGI Project

Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies

The SINERGI Project (Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies) is a network of twinned cities that provides exchange of knowledge, experience and good practices of partner cities, Universities, civic organizations and social groups enabling better social integration through joint development of urban growth strategies. The project has enriched the sense of identity and mutual understanding between European citizens by bringing upfront problems and issues of urban life that are shared among them but also by sharing common values, history and culture in an open dialog.

The network provided a platform for creative and open debate between local authorities, academics, experts, civil activists and citizens from local communities about the problem of social integration in ever-growing cities. The SINERGI Book Two – "Inclusive/Exclusive Cities" provides the insight and exploration of the knowledge, practices, research and experience in facing the challenges of the contemporary cities. The purpose of this book is to provide a wide frame for the democratic tools that will enable citizens to exercise their right to the city, to provoke decision makers to create innovative policies and, through critical understanding of the relationships between the inclusive/exclusive city and the citizens, to create a better future for our cities.

Europe for Citizens

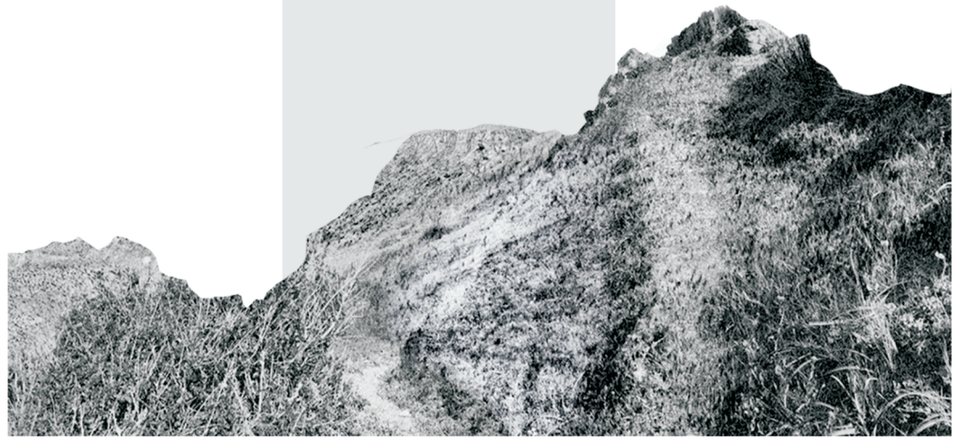
Ognen Marina
Alessandro Armando
(Eds.)

INCLUSIVE / EXCLUSIVE CITIES

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The network organized two seminars and two workshops as a platform for creative and open debate between local authorities, academics, experts, civil activists and citizens from local communities about the problem of social integration in ever-growing cities. The SINERGI Project Book One, “The Projects for an Inclusive City” and Book Two, “Inclusive/Exclusive Cities” are the result of the work and research within the SINERGI project. The purpose of the books is to provoke decision-makers and citizens to challenge their perception of the city and, through critical understanding of mutual cooperation and shared values, to create a sustainable and lasting network of cities and active citizens.

Inclusive Exclusive Cities

Edited by
Ognen Marina
Alessandro Armando

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Credits

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Inclusive/Exclusive Cities

Cities are complex systems of elaborated spatial and social relations. The challenges of the contemporary urban transformation have surpassed its economic aspect and emerge as a social, environmental, spatial and identity crisis sometimes having devastating effect on the social fabric of local communities and cities. The pressure of the financial crisis and outdated concepts and strategies of urban growth have caused the policies and politics of the urban growth and cities management to become exclusively matter of city administration, decision-makers and politicians. The questions of democracy and broader social inclusion in the scope of urban growth is mainly discussed and raised in the domain of the urban activism, within the academic debate or in marginalized and excluded groups of civic society. However, it reveals not only different ideas and tools how to provide the urban growth but also the tremendous difference in vision of the future of cities and urban imaginaries.

This condition has a direct implications on the process of cities development but also of governance and confinements of democratic potentialities in designing urban space that are only released with the broader inclusivity. Consequently, the emerging resistance to imposed spatial order made apparent the role of social and spatial inclusion in democratization processes and social relations in a society framed by its differences. Completely opposite to inclusive, transparent, participative planning for diversity, the process of creation of exclusive projects and spaces in cities encourages divisive tendencies and damages future prospects for open, connected and socially sustainable cities and societies. In spite of everything, these trends across the world provoked reawakening of public sphere and demonstrated that urban space is central to democratization processes. We can recognize strongest reactions in emerging every-day spatial practices with increased movement across newly marked social and cultural barriers and switching the border zone into contact zone. In this dazzling blend of financial crisis, challenged concepts of urbanity, dysfunctional policies and citizenship in crisis we can go through the social and economic contradictions and failures of the cities by innovating the urban policies and practices, aiming to enable a more inclusive, effective and socially responsible approach.

In order to understand the potential for joint effort for construction of better cities this book aims to develop a platform of knowledge and promote an informative debate about concepts, approaches and tools that are coherent with the complex nature of the cities and societies, but comprehensible and simple enough to be useful for institutions and citizens that are affected by the processes that are shaping cities. The questions that could be addressed and topics are: 1. Where and how could we identify and analyse the issues of social inclusion/exclusion in a transformation troubled cities and what can we learn from good and bad practices of social inclusion and/or exclusion? 2. Is there a new complexity of the relationship between cities and society, uncertainties, and questions to be addressed? What are the new approaches, tools and practices that will enhance democratization of urban development through better inclusiveness? 3. To what extent could urban disciplines be engaged with urban progress in terms of theory,

practice and education in an era with new social networks, new political policies, new digital tools and new forms of art and culture? 4. How cities can encourage urban inclusion at a time of intense social and cultural transformations, especially through design and urban planning? Moreover, to what extent are urban plans able to facilitate communication between citizens and institutions, society and the form of the cities?

The contributions to this volume show different perspectives and positions about inclusiveness, both in spatial urban practices and in the strategies of city governance. Thus, the answers to the previous questions cannot be reduced to a coherent set of statements. Nevertheless, some addresses seems to emerge from the debate.

Regarding the first and primary question – the issue of inclusion/exclusion– the main contradiction is to conceal the "right to the city" and the inclusiveness of the process with the effectiveness of the plan (Cabral). On the one hand the inclusive strategies lead in many cases to read the city as a fragmented entity and promote local development actions (as in the case of the "mosaic structure" in Bakalcev et al., whether the "micro-urbanism in Velevska et al.). On the other hand, the need to propose collective frames for urban space development and for unifying consensus should ask for a more institutional and general *top-down* discipline, which cannot avoid various forms of exclusion (Frassoldati). This kind of contradiction could reflect somehow different approaches, according to what François Lyotard called the two opposite models of society as a "functional whole" or "divided in two" (*The Postmodern Condition*, 1979). In the first approach, the balance within the urban system should start from the bottom, at the local level: since the equilibrium is possible, its composition will be incremental – but then it will unlikely extend to the entire system, being the effects stuck at a very small scale. Instead, the second approach considers conflict as an inevitable factor, thus it admits that the institutional conditions can limit conflicts, also through top-down interventions and accepting some forms of exclusion (from benefits, from decision-making involvement, etc.).

The second question is about the "new complexity" of the European (and world) cities: the structural conditions of urban systems (real estate market, connectivity, economic balance, political orders…) continue to change rapidly in the last years. This complexity can whether reflect dramatically into a parallel transformation of physical space (as evidently in Skopje as in Guangzhou) or it can be almost indifferent to the material urban development, which falls into a sleepy decline (such as in Turin, Zagreb and partly in Lisbon). The processes of exchange affecting the urban collective life – both the symbolic exchanges and the technical, economic, bureaucratic ones – acquired new topologies, becoming more dynamic and dislocated. The scholars are trying to describe and map this phenomenon: the new urban complexity produces innovation and opportunities for democratic development, but it also generates unpredicted forms of opacity. The real estate market gains power in combining information at the global level, while the planning instruments and the urban policies are stuck into a local perspective, being subjected to unrestrained conditions. The institutional

plans regulating land use, density, infrastructures into long-term actions and public contracts still reflect a set of urban paradigms, which are going to disappear rapidly. In the meanwhile, the cities continue to transform even without the help of public plans. In this divergence between the institutional capacity of regulation and the autonomous raising of unexpected forces, the innovation in planning instruments is urgent. Some experiences of local negotiation (as in Lisbon) or some proposals for re-thinking the planning process as a “rhizomatic nesting” or as a predictive and diverting tree have been presented and discussed during the SINERGI project, finding here some punctual proposal (Mantziaras, Frassoldati, Pensa et al.).

The third question is an interdisciplinary topic. Urban studies and technical knowledge about architecture, infrastructure, planning have never in many decades been so openly challenged as much as today. The social dimension of reality, mainly in its aspect of a global network, shows more and more its power on the material space of cities: the “total mobilization” (as the philosopher Maurizio Ferraris recently called it) affects habits, collective values, fluxes, borders, capital assets and geopolitical orders. The scale of the city becomes the sphere where new intersections among disciplines are experimented and where the challenges of humanities, engineering, economics are tackled and natural sciences can build new forms of alliance – as Panos Mantziaras recalls in his article, quoting Bernardo Secchi. Academics, professionals, public administrators have to renegotiate the limits of their competences: designers with planners, urban sociologists with economists, management engineers with political scientists, etc. The disciplines traditionally in charge of the technical aspects of urban transformation should rewrite their skills and move them into the socio-political dimension of the process, and vice versa. The disciplines focused on the development of the XXI century city can turn into a network of *sociotechnical* sciences.

The fourth and last question is about the discipline of architecture, in its most general sense: the architecture of the city in its spatial and temporal extension, from design to planning. It is the question regarding the possibility of achieving a new kind of urban projects, for both our present and future cities. A project of the city, taken as a public action of governance, can integrate many different dimensions of urban transformation: social interaction and public debate about values, symbols, etc., the technical and bureaucratic management, the economic and financial aspects of the process. The innovation of urban projects should move from the traditional tools towards a more flexible and self-generative set of instruments, preserving their value of public and institutional objects. To this extent, urban plans can promote social inclusion by broadening the implications of a process, and by developing their capacity of predicting deviations in the future. Design and urban planning can enlarge our societies, but only by integrating good promises with measurable effects. In other words, it is necessary for designers and planners to accept and consider plans and projects both as means for imagining a better future, and as instruments of power.

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