

Memories of places. Creativity and Reality through the travel experience

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# *CREATIVITY* and REALITY

THE ART OF BUILDING FUTURE CITIES

P R O C E E D I N G S



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International Conference on Architecture  
December 18-19 2019 | Rome

*CREATIVITY* and REALITY  
The art of building *future* cities

*edited by*

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*Director of Department of Architecture and Design, Sapienza University of Rome*

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*1st PARALLEL TABLES* *PT 1.1 | PT 1.2 | PT 1.3*

# DAY TWO | 19 december

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*Lecture*

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*Round Table*

speaker **Dina Nencini** *IconA Curator*

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speaker **Francesco Menegatti** *IconA Curator*

*Lectures*

**PIER VITTORIO AURELI** *(Dogma: Aureli + Tattara)*

**RAFFAELLA NERI** *Full Professor Politecnico of Milan*

*Final Round Table*

speakers **Alessandra Capanna** and **Dina Nencini** + *All Chairs of Parallel Tables*

*Closing Speech*

**Orazio Carpenzano** *Director of DIAP, Sapienza University of Rome*



*Abstract Selected:*  
**158 Authors**  
**121 Contributions**  
**51 Institutions**

*Abstract Received:*  
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**196 Contributions**  
**73 Institutions**

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*Luigi Savio*  
*Margagliotta*



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# Memories of places. Creativity and reality through the travel experience

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memories | travel | experience | places | architecture

## ABSTRACT

*The essay is part of the current doctoral thesis of the author:* *The travel experience and the idea of collecting places, customs, habits and architectural references through travel notebooks may be one of the oldest (and current) ways in which architects assume the reality of cities, their present-day needs, requirements and contexts. How to store memories of places? How can be useful instruments in the construction of contemporary cities? Beyond technological innovations, how do memories collected in travel notebooks contribute in the way in which cities are constructed within today's realities and particularities, without losing sight of its geographical, political, social and human context? In most urban places it is possible to recognize distinctive characteristics, and dynamics that inhabitants have established (eating sites, groceries, local businesses, emblematic spots), as well as the way to use collective and urban spaces. These urban transformations can constantly change and must be intertwined with people's reality, their formal/informal context, habits and customs, but agreed and shared interventions are necessary for a proper guideline of the boundaries encompassing the community. Urban spaces are continuously developed by inhabitants, so their function is not only construction of buildings or public spaces generically, but is based on particular people's needs, making collective spaces more accessible, proper and social: the reorganization of the barrio, as a living ecosystem. How are memories of places retrieve and re-interpreted in the comprehension of contemporary cities? An attempt to respond is through a comparative case study of two barrios: San Salvario (Torino, Italia), San Antonio (Cali, Colombia). The didactic travel is an opportunity to study how to capture, represent and transmit memories: travel notebooks are the medium by which places are gathered into memoirs. These memoirs are architectural ones, taken from public spaces, cultures and histories of the built environment, but also implies to learn and observe ethnographic, geographic, chromatic, pictorial, perceptual, and sensory phenomena. Collecting places in memories involves reflections and analysis of sites and cities. This paper argues that travel as a didactic experience and formative instrument, manages to transcend subjectivity. Besides creating awareness to appreciate architecture, cities and cultures, travel's role is its restitution, written or drawn, in the construction of a critical and pedagogical view of the city.*

The travel experience and the idea of collecting places, customs, habits and architectural references through travel notebooks may be one of the oldest (and current) ways in which architects assume the reality of cities, their present-day needs, requirements and contexts. How to store memories of places? How can be useful instruments in the construction of contemporary cities? Beyond technological innovations such as access to virtual maps, semi-dynamic images of routes and paths within the cities, panoramic and visual photographs of 360 degrees, among other facilities that over the last 30 years have had a strong impulse and development and are part of everyday life and even continue to evolve today, how do memories collected in travel notebooks contribute in the way in which cities are constructed within today's realities and particularities, without losing sight of its geographical, political, social and human context?

This contribution is part of an ongoing doctoral research, which aims to highlight the concept of the architect's first educational journey and its restitution in the architectural project and its learning, conceiving the travel notebooks as a fundamental instrument for this restitution, since it is indispensable in capturing and transmitting the experience of the travel. To make the collection of references in travel notebooks effective, it is important to travel with time and awareness. In an architectural journey, it is implicit to learn about and observe phenomena related to the places visited and their inhabitants. Specifically, this research focuses on studying and analyzing the notebooks of the first training journey made to Italy in 1949, by the Colombian architect Germán Samper (1924-2019)<sup>1</sup>. What did Germán Samper observe when he was drawing in his first training travel? Which urban-architectural issues did he take an interest in? He drew with regard to certain problems; what problem did the architect try to solve in his drawings of this first trip?

Through a process that has been called 'scientific anatomy of a learning travel', it seeks to understand how to capture the memoirs of the journey in notebooks and how they are later returned in the architectural project. This contribute proposes to expose the methodology of this 'scientific anatomy', which has been fundamental for the analysis and interpretation of the travel notebooks. Describing the methodology used, could help to glimpse also the possibility of applying it in other areas of analysis concerning current urban realities. How the process of analysis requires multiple observations of both the cities and the drawings and how this is reflected in the projects? This is a complex study involving comparisons of the drawing made with the realities of the cities, its transformations and the analysis of the carried-out projects. For instance, despite using the open space in his projects, there are resulting strategies coming from the influence of the cities he walked and drew. Stops, pauses, containment, orienting the path. Which problems interested him more? How many of these drawings correspond to the human-architectural scale and how many to the urban-city scale? According to his drawings, his interests are divided between the two scales, as are the inquiries that arise when he makes the drawings, and the problems that he then tries to solve in his projects. But to answer these questions, it was necessary to perform the above-mentioned 'scientific anatomy' of the travel notebooks, which consists of carefully examining each of them and classifying the drawings of the different cities. In first instance, it begins with a careful analysis by voices, which are divided into two fundamental data matrices: 'Page' and 'Drawing'. Both of the them can be linked together, because are built by specific columns that contain the most relevant information to get to the detailed essence of each drawing. Through a careful, exhaustive and detailed analysis, this database started to give the possible outcomes.

Of the two notebooks resulting from this first journey, only one with 159 pages and 226 drawings, has so far been studied through the scientific anatomy and based on that it has been possible to arrive at some first general results. An example of this result, is the following grid, which is still being tested, and that has been generated with the following title: 'Observations and Project Operations'.

It is essential to note that the meticulous study of each of the drawings that make up the notebooks of this first travel, involved a journey in itself, a careful learning of parts of the cities, of architectural and urban terms, of particularities and details. It is an occasion to put oneself in the eyes of another to see what he saw, to try to understand or at least hypothesize about what he was interested in capturing. On the other hand, it is an opportunity to follow almost in his footsteps in every

	OBSERVATION	INTENTION	TOOL	OPERATION	No. Drawings	Typology of drawings
OBSERVATIONS AND PROJECT OPERATIONS	OPEN – PUBLIC – COMMON – COLLECTIVE – SPACE OF THE CITY	CONTAINMENT	HORIZONTAL	LEVELS	No.	PLANTS SECTIONS PERSPECTIVES
				ROUTING	No.	PLANTS SECTIONS PERSPECTIVES

Fig. 1

Analysis grid



Fig. 2

San Salvario,  
Torino, Italia



Fig. 3

San Antonio, Cali,  
Colombia



Fig. 4

San Salvario,  
Torino, Italia



Fig. 5

San Antonio, Cali,  
Colombia

city on this journey, to understand that the drawings on the left side are always the result of forgetting something or of not having more space and not necessarily returning to places where he had already been. That they are more drawings than pages, since many times he has resorted to the strategy of making more drawings on the same page to get a better understanding of the object of interest (urban or architectural).

The accurate development of this 'scientific anatomy' has led to this result that represents the bridge between the drawings made in the notebooks of the first study travel, and the projects carried out several years later. It is fundamental to point out that this process and its results must be intervened transversally by external factors and specific particularities of the various current contexts, when relating the projects. This method has been significant in understanding, on the one hand, how it is possible that the memoirs (drawings and texts) collected in the first travel notebooks (1949) of the Colombian architect have been fundamental for his future projects (1965), applying projectual operations generated from careful observation and analytical drawing of references in a diametrically opposed context (Italy and Colombia) both in geography and climate, as well as in political, social and environmental conditions, among other issues. But also, on the other hand, the method has allowed the possibility of formulating hypotheses about how these same operations found in the analysis of travel notebooks, used in the opposite direction, can be applied in a parallel study between two diverse contemporary realities, with similarity of characteristics, but again in such different contexts: barrio San Salvario in Torino, Italy and barrio San Antonio in Cali, Colombia.

This last idea could be understood as a way of reinterpreting the architectural journey and the collecting of the memories of places, as well as their importance and vitality today, despite, as initially indicated, the possibilities that technology offers nowadays to travel through the intermediate virtuality, without moving. In spite of making things easier, it is definitely not the same thing, and to do it properly and responsibly, it is necessary to educate oneself; although in a different way than the instructions needed for the physical journey or for the educational travel through another's voyage. How are memories of places retrieve and re-interpreted in the comprehension of contemporary cities? An attempt to respond is through the comparative case study of the two barrios: San Salvario (Torino, Italia), San Antonio (Cali, Colombia). Thus the inverted process with the same grid can be applied in the observation to the understanding of the urban dynamics and developments in the neighborhoods that are proposed here to be reviewed in a first basic and parallel approach. Beyond just carrying out structured studies, this practice allows to produce analysis and knowledge within the everyday life. Once the importance of the travel notebook is introduced, it becomes an indispensable instrument of daily life of architects. It is precisely at this point that the link is made with the parallel between these two neighborhoods that are so distant and different, but so similar. San Salvario and San Antonio are two neighbourhoods that can be called 'traditional' because for each of the cities they represent a historical and significant area. In the case of San Salvario, the name of the neighbourhood, (where Roman and early medieval were found), derives from the small church (and its convent) of 1646, located in the current Via Nizza corner Corso Marconi, near Porta Nuova station, but the complex lost importance, among other things, with the foundation of the nearby parish of Saints Peter and Paul Apostles of Largo Saluzzo. The urban development around the church of San Salvario was documented by maps dating back to 1790, when an expansion of the city centre of Turin towards the south was already planned.

In Cali, the history of the creation of the neighborhood is also closely linked to the construction of the church of San Antonio, located at the top of the neighborhood's tutelary hill. In the days of the colony the first buildings began to be erected, but it was not until 1746 when the chapel was built on top of the hill, that people began to settle at the foot of the church and the hill. With very diverse geographies, contexts, architectures and public spaces, connections are possible to establish: they are limited by an urban green public space: a hill (Hill of San Antonio in Cali) and a park (Park of Valentino in Torino), as well as by a main road (Calle Quinta in Cali and Corso Vittorio Emmanuelle II in Torino) and both are adjacent to the main river of each city (Cali River and Po River), because of their historical character, both are required to

maintain their architectures (very different in each case) and this is another feature that makes them additionally unique. The two barrios have been home to both locals and immigrants, thus creating a multi diversity and multicultural atmosphere that, despite having gone through moments of decline in both cases, makes these two neighborhoods special and characteristic of this cities. Currently, both neighbourhoods host and are home to various cultural activities, artisan and craftwork, and tertiary services in general. A cultural scene and a lively nightlife have also developed, as well as pubs, cafes, bistros, restaurants and rotisseries. Nowadays, both barrios offer multiple possibilities for short, medium and long stay accommodation: hotels, hostels, residences, apartments, etc., and without a doubt, and without a doubt, both are currently preferred places by visitors and travellers. Guests are not only involved with their own peculiarities and curiosities, but they may also not feel like real tourists, allowing themselves to be integrated and become part of those charming and interesting daily dynamics, even if only for a short time.

Geographic and economic issues are present and must be understood in order to observe how a pre-established neighborhood begins to transform and develop in character and atmosphere by the inhabitants within the local space. In both urban places it is possible to recognize distinctive characteristics, and dynamics that inhabitants have established (eating sites, groceries, local businesses, emblematic spots), as well as the way to use collective and public spaces. In this regard, a possible conclusion would be that these urban realities can constantly change and must be intertwined with people's actuality, their formal/informal context, habits and customs, but agreed and shared interventions are necessary for a proper guideline of the boundaries encompassing the community. Urban spaces are continuously developed by inhabitants, so their function is not only construction of buildings or public spaces generically, but is based on particular people's needs, making collective spaces more accessible, proper and social: the reorganization of the barrio, as a living ecosystem.

The study journey and the travel notebooks become the possibility to understand more deeply the realities of the different cities today. The didactic travel is an opportunity to study how to capture, represent and transmit memories: travel notebooks are the medium by which places are gathered into memoirs. These memoirs are architectural ones, taken from public spaces, cultures and histories of the built environment, but also implies to learn and observe ethnographic, geographic, chromatic, pictorial, perceptual, and sensory phenomena. Collecting places in memories involves reflections and analysis of sites and cities. Considering the travel as a learning experience and the travel notebook as an instrument to transmit this experience, implies rigor and discipline.

This paper argues that travel as a didactic experience and formative instrument, manages to transcend subjectivity. Besides creating awareness to appreciate architecture, cities and cultures, travel's role is its restitution, written or drawn, in the architectural project, in its learning and in the construction of a critical and pedagogical vision of the city.

## *ENDNOTES*

<sup>1</sup> Germán Samper (1924-2019), Colombian modern architect, was one of the 22 Latin Americans who worked in Le Corbusier's atelier between 1932-1965 and the last still alive until May 2019.

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*The field of knowledge defined by the terms “creativity” and “reality” may be considered the permanent framework for a reflection on innovation and the transformation of architecture and cities. However, it should be noted that in current decades, creativity as the engine of human invention and reality as a response to human needs have had, as their dominant field of application, technological innovation rather than the development of new city images. In recent times architecture and world cities have been especially “designed” by neoliberal, global and urban policies following the realization of mega-events, shopping malls, gated communities, large scale facilities, urban villages, spectacular architectural objects, territorial infrastructure and immaterial networks.*

*Moreover, while the urban transformations of the European cities are still designed according to the tradition of the last two-centuries, the challenge to design within informal contexts emerged as an inevitable need to match and support the cultural and social identities of the enormous “informal” and “illegal” communities, to deal with inequalities and “expulsions”, to improve living conditions and make urban space more democratic, technological and dialogic. Within this framework of “Plural Urbanism” rethinking the concepts of Creativity and Reality can be an important contribution to the construction of an “open city” in which sympathetic imagination, realistic and bold innovation will still be considered the architect’s principal means and can still feed the art of building the future city and architecture according to its actual realities, needs, emergencies, for pursuing a widespread human wellbeing and tackling the forces hidden in the global changes.*



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