

(In)forms of empowerment. The role of the project in inclusive urban transformation processes

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Since the beginning of the third millennium, the rapid changes that contemporary societies are facing are radically transforming the perception and the structures of our cities. New topics seem to dictate the political agenda, suggesting alternative options to manage the emerging urban mutations.

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The crisis of the traditional real estate industry, propelled by the global finance system, is contributing to re-evaluate the theme of Public Space as a "space of encounter, sharing, experience and inclusivity", mapping the everyday life to discover unexpected Urbanities, through the application of innovative strategies and tools.

As an immediate consequence, new "forms" of cities are strongly brought to our attention: the "city of sharing", the "city of temporariness", the "city of Life between buildings", giving an unexpected impulse to incremental Urbanism of evolving cities.

In such a way, the very idea of the city is radically under discussion. We are then required to answer these numerous questions in order to define the scientific coordinates for the City of the 21st century.

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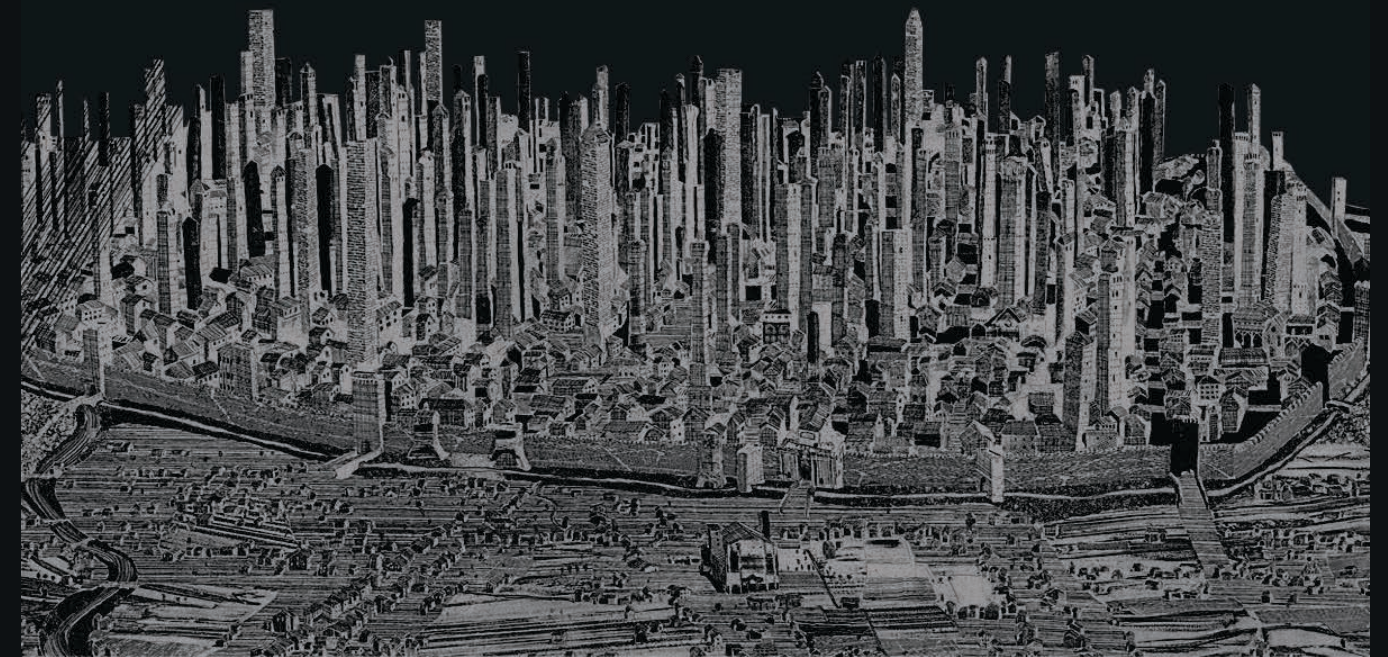
Marco Maretto, Nicola Marzot, Annarita Ferrante

MORPHOLOGY AND URBAN DESIGN

6th ISUFitaly International Conference | Bologna, 8-10 June 2022



Book of Proceedings



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MORPHOLOGY AND URBAN DESIGN

new strategies for a changing society

PROCEEDINGS

edited by

Marco Maretto, Nicola Marzot, Annarita Ferrante

with the collaboration of

Silvia Tagliazucchi, Francesco Scattino, Greta Pitanti

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Sixth ISUfItaly Conference Presentation

We open today the sixth conference organized by the Isufitaly Association, the Italian network of the International Seminar on Urban Form that we founded 38 years ago with the contribution of the English school of geographers which followed the scientific tradition of the researches of M.R.G Conzen (which had, in turn, roots in the tradition of German cultural geography) and the school of Italian architects referred to the studies of Gianfranco Caniggia and Saverio Muratori, with its roots in the studies on urban form conducted between the wars by innovators such as Gustavo Giovannoni, Arnaldo Foschini, Giovan Battista Milani.

From the beginning it seemed clear to all of us how useful the disciplinary differences and how fertile integration between the two groups were.

Geography is a fundamentally descriptive discipline. However, it was interpreted by the Conzenian school with great attention to the shape of the city, and after all the Muratorian school considered reading, in turn, intended as a critical study of the built reality, an integral part of the architectural design itself. Indeed it considered the very form of the territory as architecture. This explains why our Association, made up mainly of architects, had the project as the central object of our studies.

Isufitaly was founded much later, in March 2007, with the aim of promoting above all those studies in urban morphology having the architectural design as their goal.

In these sixteen years, during which I had the honour of being its president, the Association has grown a lot, gaining a significant role in the context of urban morphology scholars.

I think a good job has been done, despite few inevitable mistakes. Above all we remained consistently in our cultural area of interests, within the sphere of what can be rationally verifiable and didactically transmittable. This in a cultural context in which the disciplinary boundaries of the architectural design seemed increasingly uncertain. Today each of us knows well that beyond those boundaries other important questions arise, of different nature, linked to languages and meanings, to new investigation techniques, to perception and to the artistic component of our work. But we also know that it is crucial to preserve and develop in contemporary terms a nucleus of knowledge and methods which allows any aesthetic synthesis to be based on sharable foundations, as required by the civil responsibility of our work.

In this spirit, since its foundation, the Association has organized conferences and communicated its activities. As president, I have also considered vital the parallel activities in which the members of Isufitaly participate, such as the organization of meetings, university courses and publications.

It seems to me that, over time, even in these specific activities, our Association has earned the esteem of similar organizations which, in the wake of Isufitaly, have been founded all over the world.

It would take too long just to list the activities carried out by all of us in these years.

I will only mention the two most recent, linked to each other, which, I believe, have had particular success and international echo. The first arises from the idea of transforming Isufitaly, from a structure that only plays an aggregative role and disseminates the themes of urban morphology, into an active subject, which carries out research and manages its organization. The occasion was the Kaebup project, (Knowledge Alliance for Evidence-Based Urban Practices) coordinated by Nadia Karalambous of the University of Cyprus with the aim of studying the relationship between urban morphology and design. Unlike the other participating academic partners, who reorganized the research within the university structures, I chose to involve Isufitaly which was supposed to represent, symmetrically to other departments, the Italian referent in research management. It should have been a first experiment: other members could have brought other projects and funding, contributing, while their autonomy would be respected, to strengthening the scientific credibility of the Association.

As part of the research, some of us organized the ISSUM, International Summer School in Urban Morphology, which we will discuss in a future session in this conference. I think it could be a useful experiment not only for Isufitaly but also for all the Isuf regional networks and could have interesting developments.

As president of Isufitaly let me therefore say that the outgoing Isufitaly Board has not only taken care of the administrative aspect of the Association, but of an organic structural project that includes communication (conventions, conferences, website) research (participation in financed projects) and, finally, teaching (with the Summer School).

Let me also make a brief consideration on the future of Isufitaly.

As it should be, within Isufitaly the interests of each of us, our beliefs, even our own values, have differentiated, and are increasingly differentiating, over time. The reasons are several (scientific, professional, academic) and all valid, but we must not hide the fact that, for this reason, we are going through a phase of crisis completely new in the story of our common work.

Change, however, is the salt of any structure aimed at experimentation. If it is likely that this condition leads to difficulties in organizing common work, also implying a risk of losing our identity, it is also true that the differences that have arisen could constitute, if well used, not a reason for division, but a resource. And since I consider that my duty, under the new conditions, has been exhausted, I believe that whoever will take my place, will have to place this consideration at the centre of future projects.

A mention to the specificity of this conference.

This sixth Isufitaly meeting has a particular character for several reasons, all linked to the fact that it takes place in Bologna. For the

first time it is not organized within an architecture faculty but an engineering one, opening up, in my opinion, a new field of interests for Isufitaly. I recall that the Bologna Faculty of Engineering boasts an illustrious tradition in the field of urban studies, and that a well-known representative of it, Adolfo Dell'Acqua, participated in our first conferences proposing important reflections on the integration between morphology and design. This tradition continues today, in contemporary terms, with the work of Annarita Ferrante (co-chair of this conference) on the existing building heritage.

Bologna was also the seat of some of the most interesting urban experiments in Italy.

I recall, among others, the innovative ideas of Pier Luigi Cervellati on the function of the historic centre organically understood in the context of the entire urban and territorial organism.

Furthermore, Bologna has a particular interest for us as well for the tradition of studies and experiments on the relationship between governance and the city development process. Not surprisingly, the city has had, over time, administrations that have sometimes been an example of a virtuous management in the transformations of the building fabric.

For this reason, some of the central themes of the conference are precisely the problems of urban policy, governance, urban communities and public space as a laboratory for transformation.

Another relevant theme is that of the renewal of the analysis and design tools of the urban space, the study of new technologies dedicated to new environmental strategies.

Of course, ample space will be given to traditional themes of our conferences such as the reading and design of the existing city integrated with the ever-current theme of urban regeneration, I believe that the organizers of the conference and their collaborators have done a generous and intelligent job. I thank them all on behalf the Board of the Association and I wish everyone a good job for the next few days.

*Giuseppe Strappa
President of ISUFITALY*

Foreword

Since the beginning of the third millennium, the rapid changes that contemporary societies are facing are radically transforming the perception and the structures of our cities. New topics seem to dictate the political agenda, suggesting alternative options to manage the emerging urban mutations.

An increasingly "data-driven society" is forcing the migration into an almost immaterial world, prompting Information and Communication Technology together with the Smart City .

The crisis of the traditional real estate industry, propelled by the global finance system, is contributing to a renewed consideration of the Public Space as a "space of encounter, sharing, experience and inclusivity", mapping the everyday life to discover unexpected urbanities , through the application of GPS to record pedestrian movement flows.

Most of the deficiencies in the governance methods are addressing us with new social, economic, cultural roles, inviting human beings to perform as strategic Agents of Change. As an immediate consequence, new "forms" of cities are strongly brought to our attention: the "city of sharing", the "city of temporariness", the "city of Life between buildings ", giving an unexpected impulse to the so-called incremental Urbanism processes.

In such a way, the very idea of the city is radically under discussion. We are then required to answer these numerous questions in order to define the scientific coordinates for the city of the 21st century. In that respect, the conference has been calling experts in the field of Urban Studies in order to reflect upon the following main topic:

1. Communities and Governance

The role of Communities and Neighborhoods, conceptually framed within urban policies based on new participatory concepts, sustainable oriented principles and supported by the idea of "proximity" and multi-layer strategies of land management, are one of the test beds of new approaches in Urban Morphology.

Research approaches, as well as design strategies, must be able to read these phenomena, to understand them and translate them into tools for supporting decision makers, stakeholders, citizens, in the transformation process of the city.

2. New methods and Technologies for the urban analysis

The society of the 21st century, being "data-driven", will be highly technological. Urban Morphology should be able to deal with these issues and learn to play an active role in their development, so as to consist in a mediation tool between environmental strategies and the city. It should also experiment with new technological means by developing new analytical methodologies capable of grasping the ongoing transformations.

3. Reading the changing Urban Form

A Classic in Urban Morphology, urban analyzes and the theories underlying them constitute its very foundations, the greatest legacy, of the International Seminar on Urban Form. A legacy that must be fed and implemented in new research and new studies, demonstrating the capacity to deal with the new emerging challenges of evolving cities. If unsuccessful, in that respect, the meaning of the urban morphological discipline will be lost.

4. Designing the sustainable Urban Form

Urban Morphology is also the basis for Urban Design. The city of the 21st century has to be sustainable, to react the ever-changing conditions of existence. The complexity of urban phenomena requires, therefore, a scientific awareness capable of catalyzing different disciplines and expertise, different needs, different themes, within the urban fabrics. Fabrics that will, in turn, be an expression of this complexity, giving "form" to it.

Under those circumstances, Urban Morphology can claim again a disciplinary status.

It is not simply a matter of broadening the disciplinary horizon of Urban Morphology. It is a question of defining a new theoretical and methodological framework, a new "horizon of meaning", and new analytical tools, to understand the complexity of the city's transformation processes. In other words, it is a matter of building a renewed morphological discipline able of intercepting the needs of the globalized society and translate them into physical forms.

*Marco Maretto, Nicola Marzot and Annarita Ferrante
Conference Chairs*

Urban morphology and the challenges of transition

Plenary Sessions Foreword

The etymology of the term 'transition', from the ancient Greek *μετάβασις* (*metábasis*), still bears a trace, evoking its presence, of the implicit threat contained in the unfolding of its effects. It is, in fact, a compound of *μετά* (*metá*), meaning "between", "in the middle", and *βάσις* (*básis*), denoting "foot", "base" and "foundation". As such, it clearly expresses that condition of profound uncertainty, unconsciously removed, between a stability that "is no more", i.e. the socially constructed reality we have left behind, that has now entered crisis, and that which "is not yet", implying the expectation of a new system of values. The multifaceted call for transition, continually evoked by EU policies, especially since the Next Generation EU program, therefore entails an equally obvious assumption of responsibility by all those involved.

These include, first and foremost, individual and/or collective subjects already operating within institutions that have fallen into disgrace having lost their credibility and authoritativeness, to which must be added the outcasts, the marginalized citizens who, in the previous season, were not considered organic to the systemic logic conventionally accredited by the majority, being prejudicially expelled from it. These, along with the willing and enthusiastic for new adventures of all kinds and degrees, are thus faced with crossing a landscape of ruins, which need to be given a name, in order to be able to orient themselves in their choices.

For these reasons, as conference Chairs, we agreed that the function of the keynote speakers invited to the opening session was to provoke an "unreserved call" of challenges capable of activating the participants' reaction during the presentation of their respective papers and posters. It was therefore a question of imagining arguments whose compelling topicality was capable of programmatically destabilizing the fragile certainties of any knowledge that could be defined as scientifically founded, by revealing and opening up its conventional limits. The declared objective, since the original call for papers, thus became that of forcing teachers, researchers, and scholars to take a critical stance towards a built environment that is inevitably hostile to any ideas received, insofar as it has not yet been explored. Even more so, it was ultimately intended to allow them for comparison, verifying a posteriori the emergence of classes of belonging as future goals towards which the advancement of knowledge and the hoped-for identification of new refoundation epistemes could be directed.

With this in mind, we asked Raffaele Laudani to address the issue of 'agency' in the design of the contemporary city. This is, on closer inspection, a theme emerging from the progressive collapse of the credibility of representative democracies, whose legitimacy has been profoundly undermined by the behavior assumed by national sovereignties, first, and then by local administrations, in governing the disorientating effects induced by globalization processes. When the facts were tested, the demonstrated inability to administer territories was responsible for the emergence of movements claiming a role in the promotion and management of urban transformation. The growing demand, over the last decade, for regenerative processes involving a multiplicity of actors, many of whom had never before appeared on the political scene, is an 'immediate' confirmation of this phenomenon. Urban morphology has often misunderstood the principle of the "autonomy of form", almost canceling the dimension of the *civitas* from that of the *urbs*. It is therefore called upon to rethink the function of agency both in the *destruens* phase of overcoming spatial arrangements that no longer conform to change, and in the *construens* phase of new articulations prodromal to the demand for renewal of customs.

We asked Elena Cock to reflect on the function of 'energy' in contemporary society. The assimilation of nature as a resource to be consumed has produced states of increasing devastation and abandonment of the resulting landscape, in which many authors see the

effects of the so-called anthropocene. The paradigm shift in favor of a more responsible use of the planet, which is recognized as a potential to be preserved for future generations, leads to the identification of every human product as an accomplished expression of 'embodied energy' regardless of its dimension, complexity and impact on existing conditions. Its overall assessment must not only guarantee the balance between the various factors that contribute to its construction, but also allow for the full reversibility of its effects. This implies that the project is increasingly accountable to its community and aware of its dynamic interaction with the assigned circumstances.

We proposed to Kayvan Karimi a reflection on the impact of the material and immaterial 'flows' on the contemporary city. In a society increasingly characterized by movement - of goods, people, resources and data - exposure to change becomes paradoxically programmatic. This conflicts with the idea of stability and permanence in which we are led to recognize the meaning of the institutions on which the modern conception of civil living is based, putting the need for regulation of the operation of the subjects, that are part of it, to be verified. The notion of ex-ante government of territories, in this way, tends to be replaced by that of ex-post monitoring of the effects of processes beyond human control, through the increasing recourse to algorithmic logics. Urban morphology, in this way, is forced to review its own statutes, still based on the primacy of the type, as a principle of prediction and conformation of behavior and its relative arrangements, necessarily opening up to an eventual dimension in which the ephemeral and the transient find a full size and authority.

Finally, we asked Alessandro Melis to relaunch the debate on the function of 'information' in territorial performance. This is, on closer inspection, the most ambitious challenge, which somehow implies all the others in view of the objectives it intends to pursue: guaranteeing the transition from material to immaterial culture. This also implies that technology should cease to exist as an instrument at the man's service, capable of claiming control over him, to rather become the unprecedented 'environment' within which we will be made to inhabit. The result is the possibility of recording our continuous "leaving a trace", far beyond any possibility hitherto considered admissible in the natural and/or artificial pre-digital environment. The foundations are thus created for a new anthropology, based on a living/environment interaction that is far more performative than hitherto imagined, because of which the transformation of data into facts will be processable in real time. Thus, it is credible to think that urban morphology can be fueled by an impressive mass of information through the continuous monitoring of the transformation of natural and artificial spaces, drawing undoubted benefits for the definition of the coming society and its urban scene.

Although these aforementioned challenges to the study of urban form do not exhaust the full spectrum of possibilities, we at least consider them to be imperative priorities on which to reflect, and we therefore thank our authoritative guests and colleagues for their valuable contribution to the growth of a shared awareness of their implications.

Nicola Marzot and Annarita Ferrante

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C | *Communities and Governance*

N | *New Methods & Technologies for the Urban Analysis*

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(In)forms of empowerment. The role of the project in inclusive urban transformation processes

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Abstract. *Since the 1990s, the progressive contraction of public policies and the transfer of capital to the globalized private financial sector have subverted and radically transformed the processes of production and consumption (of the city), provoking cyclical international economic crises, reflecting a crisis in the political and social systems that had characterized the Societies of the post-World War II period. Phenomena of social exclusion and spatial segregation (never fully resolved) have gradually worsened in the last thirty years, affecting similarly not only the South of the World, outlining an urban context profoundly changed by new forms and new dimensions of urbanization. These emergent conditions have crystallized into the physical form of cities and appear most clearly in neighborhoods and housing complexes promoted by the welfare state, in "temporary" solutions for communities and ethnic groups, seasonal workers or migrants, or in the "informal" development of peri-urban fabrics. In this panorama, the paper presents some design explorations (didactic and field research) conducted on the popular habitat of the Buenos Aires metropolitan area in order to recuperate the operational character of the research on Urban Morphology as community empowerment tools seeking socio-spatial justice.*

Introduction

Since the 1990s, the progressive contraction of public policies and the transfer of capital to the globalized private financial sector have subverted and radically transformed the processes of production and consumption (of the city), provoking cyclical international economic crises, reflecting a crisis in the political and social systems that had characterized the Societies of the post-World War II period.

Phenomena of social exclusion and spatial segregation (never fully resolved) have gradually worsened in the last thirty years, affecting similarly not only the South of the World, outlining an urban context changed profoundly by new forms and new dimensions of urbanization. (Soja, 2000)

These emergent conditions have crystallized into the physical form of cities and appear most clearly in neighborhoods and housing complexes promoted by the welfare state, in "temporary" solutions for communities and ethnic groups, seasonal workers or migrants, or in the "informal" development of peri-urban fabrics.

However, if the hierarchies overthrow and the crisis of political representativeness have determined or influenced the emergence of these issues, this upheaval, on the other hand, has generated a total change in the manner in which the city transforms itself (outside the disciplinary system of codified and established knowledge), stimulating the rise of social activism, participatory policies and involving an unprecedented multiplicity of actors and stakeholders.

In this frame, the paper presents design explorations (didactic and field research) conducted on the Popular Habitat of the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires in order to recuperate the operational character of the research on Urban Morphology, redefining categories, methods, and tools for the reading and design of complex urban dynamics, prefiguring a possible alternative to the dissolution of the discipline and material action of the project within eminently political and social processes.

Methodological approach. Definitions

To understand the delimitations and scope of the investigation we present, from a methodological perspective, however, it is first necessary to make a disambiguation of what we call Popular Habitat for the purposes of the research (Connolly, 2014, Gassull, 2017). Although the prevailing interest of our studies concerns the capacity of the design disciplines to operate within the physical outputs that materialize the conditions of inequality in the accessibility to the urban space - and thus the more evident manifestations of such phenomena - in this work, we considered it important to investigate not only the self-produced, spontaneous, informal, or squatter city but felt it necessary to include other fabrics as well, which are the result, on the one hand, of the State intervention providing housing solutions (namely the large residential complexes) and, on the other, of the action of the middle classes in the configuration and concretization of housing models (in this case closely related to individual property), keeping in the background the omnipresent power of the grid as the main fabric-building device of the city of Buenos Aires.

Thus, what we call Popular Habitat gathered a multiplicity of realities that intertwine a multiplicity of subjects, situations, dynamics, and forms of construction of the urban fabric (of the space of the city). In this sense, the first necessary step in attempting to understand, read and interpret such spaces is to characterize them, organizing and systematizing the different configurations (formal, legal, economic, productive, and social) that they take on in time and space.

From such categorization, it is possible to carry out a mapping conducted on two complementary

levels: a diachronic reading on the one hand, which allows us to highlight the dynamics and factors that have influenced the fabric generation; and, on the other hand, a morphological investigation that allows us to identify, group and organize recurring rules and models of conformation and articulation of popular habitat spaces, territorializing the phenomenon (Raffestin, 1984).

The recognition we refer to gives us an overall image, a general framework, from which to select a significant sample of investigation that (containing within it recurring characters) can provide, at a later stage, specific disciplinary tools for the design and accompaniment of processes of transformation of the city space. It is a matter of rehashing the system of knowledge, 'adapting' the tools of reading and interpretation to the specific local and regional reality, identifying conditions and possible lines of concrete action to support the regeneration of the habitat (including the issues of housing, labor, production, and public and symbolic space) of the popular masses (Fernández Castro, 2007).

In this sense, we understand reading as an integral part of project action, as a tool that enables inclusive and participatory transformations, recovering a role, but above all, an operability for the discipline within the complex processes of socio-spatial generation and regeneration of the multidimensional contemporary cities (Soja, 1980).

As mentioned above, the general framework for the characterization and study of the popular habitat in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA) includes a diverse set of urban forms with differentiated characters, generational dynamics, and socioeconomic and legal composition. Identifying and cataloging such particularities is important because it highlights how different land occupation mechanisms give rise to different patterns of urban fabric conformation.

The Villas (miseria or de emergencia) are the type of settlement that best fits the established definition of Slums. In general, they arise as a spontaneous occupation of urban land, almost always of public ownership (Cravino, 2001), in which irregular forms of implantation transfer to the settlement system practices of individual self-construction perceived as a temporary and provisional housing solution. Despite being characterized by high density, due to their legal illegitimacy, they often lack essential basic services such as water and electricity connections, garbage collection, or sewage systems.

The Asentamientos, although often assimilated to Villas, are the consequence of a collective and organized occupation of land, generally privately owned, whose low commercial value (because they are floodable or polluted) makes them prone to abandonment (Cravino, 2001). This primitive mode of organization helps to explain forms of parceling and allocation that can be traced back to the block form and to a definition of layouts that replicates the characteristics of the urban grid of the planned city.

The so-called Barrios Populares, on the other hand, constitute a derivation of the planned urban system that is recreated and adapted to the need to house family and friends through the partial transfer of land not occupied by buildings (Borthagaray, 2005), promoting the illegal densification of the fabric, and altering the relationship between open and built space, with implications in the conformation of public space.

A similar dynamic can be found in the development and consolidation of 'temporary' neighborhoods that arose to respond to emergencies, which, having become de facto permanent, recreate city forms from the original layout and in which an overlapping of planned and spontaneous patterns takes place, always with high densities and overcrowding and eroding the original accessibility routes and open spaces.

The large residential complexes (Grandes Conjuntos) promoted by the State, on the other hand, constitute a phenomenon from the morphological point of view that is exceptional, not

only within the panorama of the popular habitat but also with respect to the settlement system of the planned city. Arising mainly between the 1960s and 1980s, they constitute alternative city models and interpretations that, based on their own rules, tried (at least in their intentions and in line with the terms of the international architectural debate of the time) to translate into the physical form of buildings the web of social relations among the inhabitants, eluding confrontation with the surrounding settlement systems (when present) and providing closed solutions with very low levels of adaptability. Even in this context, some practices of appropriation of common spaces and public spaces can be observed (especially along the jagged perimeters of the complexes and the surrounding urban fabric) that have produced spontaneous modes of articulation but also compromised habitability and usability.

Analyzing, in general terms, the development and formation of the urban fabric of the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, two complementary generating devices emerge powerfully: the grid, as a pervasive settlement rule, and the autonomous, individual action of the inhabitants. In this sense, the working-class sectors and middle classes have, over time, made an impressive contribution in quantitative terms to the definition of the city's space, introducing typological, morphological, and semantic patterns that have acted with greater force than planning activity or structural proposals such as the public housing complexes described earlier, which, although significant within the overall picture, quantitatively represented only a marginal phenomenon in terms of urban land.

Diachronic mapping

A chronological analysis of cultural, political, environmental, and urban development events, although reported here in an extremely concise manner, allows us to situate the popular habitat, as a phenomenon, in the broader framework of the development of the urban fabric that it contributes to generate.

Founded in 1536, destroyed in 1541, and finally re-founded in 1580, until the last quarter of the 19th century, the city of Buenos Aires occupied a small part of the present metropolitan territory abutting the Rio de la Plata. The town grew very modestly in about 300 years, from the 16x9 block layout depicted in the 1583 'Plano de división de tierras', in fact, the 'Plano de la Ciudad de Buenos Ayres con la división Civil de 12 Juzgados de Paz' of 1862 reports a fabric consisting of about 28 blocks along the north-south axis and about 20 blocks to the west.

If the expansion of the city is hindered, until 1810, by the Spanish Crown to prevent processes of autonomous claims, even after the declaration of independence (1816) and for more than fifty years, the convulsive process of formation of the nation will also influence the economic and urban development of the city. In this context, the incipient expansion of the fabric slowly advances in continuity with the existing, following the traces of the orthogonal grid of regular blocks of the original nucleus in a northwest direction, while the flooded areas to the southwest, along the course of the Matanza-Riachuelo River, are preserved free of settlements or processes of transformation and occupation.

The relative political stabilization of Argentina and its integration within the framework of the international division of labor, in which the country assumes an important role as a producer of raw materials, are the triggers for the city's growth. The Port of Buenos Aires organizes and reinforces a system of radial connections by concentrating, channeling, and conditioning the expansion along the routes that connect the fertile lands of the interior with the exit to the Atlantic. Thus, while an extraordinary expansion of the urban fabric takes place, immense containers for the processing and elaboration of meat, wool, and grains surround the city, especially along the course of the Matanza-Riachuelo River, in the vicinity of the Port. It is

precisely near these, in flooded marshy areas vacated by the factory buildings, where the first workers' settlements appeared between 1890 and 1930.

The crisis of the agro-export model after the crisis of 1929 laid the foundations for the transformation of the productive system. It forced masses of workers to leave the countryside in search of employment in the incipient industrial activity, which, especially after 1944, received an unprecedented impulse. Along the east-west axis, on the southern edge of the conurbation, always close to the course of the Riachuelo, first, and then along the perimeter of the administrative limits of the Capital, large productive compartments emerged and were arranged, occupying portions of undeveloped land, in a fragmented manner, practically without planning and conditioning future developments. Once again, in the interstices of the productive fabric, more or less organized forms of popular housing appear, contributing decisively to the definition of the urban form.

The dismantling of the industrial apparatus promoted by the military dictatorships, especially since the late 1970s, and the tertiarization of the economy in the 1990s, resulted in the impoverishment of the living conditions of large sectors of the population, encouraging and multiplying precarious housing conditions, increasing the proportions of marginality and informality, and accentuating a dual development of the urban fabric and inequalities. In this context, disused infrastructures and industrial plants also provide new spaces for the expansion of the popular habitat.

After the great economic crisis of 2001, the economic growth, and the reindustrialization process that the country is going through coincide with a generalized expansion of civil and social rights, generating developments in two opposite directions: on the one hand, there is an expansion, densification, and precariousness of the popular habitat, while at the same time, concrete projects of redevelopment and socio-spatial inclusion are consolidated and widely implemented.

Morphological mapping

The mapping of the variety of fabrics that, for the purposes of this research, we have included under the expanded definition of popular habitat in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (AMBA) allows us to outline a general framework from which to identify - in the morphological articulation of the urban plots that characterize them - certain recurrences in the ways in which they emerge and develop. In particular, it is verified that the different forms adopted by the popular habitat follow settlement logics closely related to the presence of three nearby elements: watercourses, mobility infrastructures, and large voids.

Agglomeration on the banks of rivers and streams is a constant in territorialization processes. In the case of the AMBA, particularly regarding the emergence of precarious, more or less informal and spontaneous settlements, the courses of the Matanza-Riachuelo and Reconquista rivers are among the first areas affected by this phenomenon. Swampy, subject to cyclical flooding, polluted and therefore abandoned and of little market value, they constitute "available" soils for occupation, giving rise to forms of fabric strongly conditioned by orographic conditions. The low value of the land also conditions the location of many public housing developments and gives rise to an important development of the action of a lower middle class in search of housing solutions in individual property.

Mobility infrastructures constitute a second attraction factor with unique characteristics with respect to specific situations. Railroad lines and freeway tracks delimit and interrupt the urban fabric, generating inaccessible and residual spaces that tend to become saturated and, especially in the case of the road network, offer advantageous possibilities of accessibility to

the transport system. The numerous dismantled railroad tracks and abandoned shunting yards in the metropolitan area also represent an important catalyzing element, giving rise to forms that, organized from the infrastructure, develop going to completely occupy the available space (in established contexts) or 'jagged' in peri-urban contexts.

The third element of proximity that seems to favor the formation of concentrations of informal settlements is the large voids outside the major axes of urban expansion, flooded or agricultural land, areas whose buildability is not foreseen by urban plans, or spaces surrounding large industrial complexes. While the former lead to a gradual development of the popular habitat with forms that disintegrate as one moves away from the consolidated fabric near large industrial complexes, we often find, on the other hand, phenomena of concentration on edges where the built-up area assumes and reproduces by expansion the forms of the generating element.

The line of popular habitat. Conditions and categories

Superimposing the temporal reading and the morphological survey, it clearly emerges that, although they are distributed in an archipelago along the AMBA territory, along the east-west axis, and parallel to the course of the Matanza-Riachuelo River, there is a concentration of the different forms of popular habitat, condensing variegated fabrics, formed in parallel to the urban growth of the City, which defines what we have called the line of popular habitat. In this sense, it seems pertinent to concentrate in this area of study a deep analytical effort in order to identify, with greater precision, recurrences, rules, and patterns of formation of functional fabrics to the formulation of specific proposals of transformation, actions of spatial justice and activation of inclusive processes that, far from wanting to 'normalize,' conform, or order, try to investigate innovative forms of intervention in the physical and social fabric of the City.

Along the Matanza-Riachuelo river basin, which occupies an area of some 2,300 square kilometers, some 5 million people reside, slightly more than 10% of Argentina's total population. Of these, several hundred thousand live in critical economic conditions, below the poverty line, and in a precarious housing situation. It is estimated that 500,000 people live in the slums and settlements on the banks of the river, and the area concentrates almost half of the total population living in precarious settlements in the entire conurbation.

These data reflect quantitatively the growth processes of the AMBA briefly outlined above and, together with the data on environmental pollution, underline the urgency of channeling efforts, studies, and transdisciplinary and transcultural planning for the formulation of specific policies and for the activation of citizenship.

The localized analysis carried out on 14 enclaves along the orographic and infrastructural axis of the Riachuelo made it possible to morphologically investigate a sample of 22 neighborhoods: A Liniers, the conformation of alternative fabrics, framed in the checkerboard logic; the large residential complexes Soldati, Ciudadela I and II, Piedrabuena and Lugano I and II, promoted by the State; and the villas, asentamientos and barrios populares Villa 31, Villa Rodrigo Bueno, Villa Inflammable, Villa Tranquila, La Cuernito, Isla Maciel, Villa 21-24, El Fortín, Villa Puente Alsina, Barrio Pampa, Villa 1-11-14, Villa Jardín, Villa Las Achiras, Asentamiento Sarmiento, 9 de Julio, Barrio 17 de Noviembre and La Cueva.

The choice of investigation instruments to which the case studies are subjected is based on the definition of certain conditions that define the Urban and to which the project is called upon to respond: accessibility, reference, habitability, exchange, demarcation (Fernández Castro, 2007). These conditions are related to the various forms and modes adopted by the city space. Thus, the analysis tries to recognize and record the characteristics of the examined fabrics

according to 5 major categories that try to identify the forms and relationships between Flows, Containers, Clusters, Nodes, and Boundaries.

The identification of Flows, paths, and continuity does not refer exclusively to the idea of a linear succession of the collective space but includes the meaning acquired by connecting paths as links between points, even distant ones.

The highlighting of referential elements, recognized by the community on a local, metropolitan, and regional scale, includes places to which collective cultural, symbolic or functional values are attributed, as well as Containers defined by mass consumption practices.

The identification of Clusters aims to overcome the idea of a more or less homogeneous neighborhood or place of belonging, going on to detect, even in the presence of typomorphological heterogeneity, conditions of continuity or unification derived from the presence of limits and edges.

The notion of Node includes intersections, crossings, and exchanges between flows in the two meanings referred to above, which define both exceptions and spaces of reference or structuring of the fabric, as well as alterations in the system of restrictions.

The recognition of Boundaries responds to the notion of edge between homogeneous fabrics and clusters but also to the materialization of the separation, barrier, or expulsion of alternative or antagonistic 'different' parts of the city.

By subjecting all the case studies to a systematic project-oriented reading, we were able to describe individual realities (useful for working in individual contexts) but, more importantly, to identify behaviors, dynamics of development, generation, and modification of the form of these parts of the city.

In particular, and as a first general synthetic result, it emerges that the popular habitat fabrics grow by: concentration and condensation, along the infrastructural axes, adjacent or parallel to them (Villa 31, Villa 1-11-14, Villa Jardin, or Villa Cuernito); embedding, occupying disused railroad tracks and around lakes and reservoirs (Puente Alsina, Isla Maciel, Villa Tranquila, or Villa Inflamable); completion and expansion, completely occupying interstitial spaces between boundaries or barriers (part of Puente Alsina and Villa Inflamable, or Villa La Cueva); and protecting and surrounding centralities, mainly public spaces or collective buildings (practically in specific areas of all the cases reviewed).

At the micro-scale, the identification of articulation mechanisms between the built fabric and the open space allows the elaboration of abacuses of recurrent behaviors capable of orienting specific design proposals on an architectural scale, acting on the built system and the public space through key and paradigmatic actions of reconnection and reorganization on the one hand, and diffuse and typified on the other.

Obviously, it is not a matter of building catalogs from which to choose solutions to be used in design proposals but of constructing informed project scenarios, weighing variables and constants. In this sense, it is not only the forms and typologies identified that contextualize and nurture the projects but also the thematic precedents, external references, and transdisciplinary contributions (Fernández Castro, 2010).

In this line, the reading work carried out on the popular habitat of the AMBA has resulted in design elaborations for a specific area and the formulation of strategic proposals that attempt to investigate the possibilities of rethinking a part of the metropolitan territory, involving the compartments of Barrio José Hernández, the villas Las Achiras, La Cueva and 17 de Noviembre and the Mercado Central complex, between the route of the Buenos Aires-Ezeiza highway and the Riachuelo.

Working on the conditions of accessibility, reference, habitability, exchange and demarcation,

the projects propose modes of hybridization both at the physical and the practices levels that strategically orient interventions on the precarious residential fabric, the heritage of unbuilt spaces, the system of connections and accessibility, and the spaces of production and work, outlining an 'open' scenario from which to initiate punctual, widespread and structural actions and around which to articulate actors, competencies, interests, and responsibilities.

In this sense, the project is situated in the furrow traced by the numerous Latin American experiences (e.g., Villa Tranquila, Villa 31, Favela-Bairro Program) in which strategic prefigurations based on the interpretation and valorization of the starting conditions served for the progressive drafting of projects, the activation of the associative fabric, the formalization of interest and power groups, and facilitated the identification and involvement of the inhabitants in inclusive processes that far exceeded the pretensions of improving residential conditions (Gomes, 2018).

Hopeful conclusions

Rooted in studies on urban morphology, the design research conducted on the Buenos Aires metropolitan area works on a field, that of popular habitat, which is, in its modes of production and reproduction, almost completely outside of disciplinary elaboration. Without planning, without design.

Intentionally, in epistemological terms, these explorations are constructed, precisely from the recognition of such territories as urban facts, in an action that carries with it the rejection of the definition of 'informal'. The slums, the sprawl, the Villa have a form. If they did not have it, it would mean that they do not possess materiality, nor organization rules, nor systems of production of their own, nor meanings. It would mean that they do not exist. From the work on the AMBA, on the contrary, it emerges, in fact, that they are part of the cities, with their own rules and forms that exist and that, as we have seen on several concrete occasions (Fernández Castro, 2005, Segre, 2000), in the optics of activating, accompanying, sustaining and giving strength and concrete possibilities (even technical) of implementation, they require to be investigated, classified and systematized. They require moving from a traditional approach to a transitional one, turning the gaze toward the study of the dynamics of change in urban form and the incremental metamorphoses of urban elements and spaces, identifying recurring patterns in the processes of reproduction and modification of space, and then, redefining categories, methods, and tools for reading and design complex, multi-scalar, and multi-dimensional realities.

In this sense, the projects and research carried out over the past two decades by the Centro de Hábitat Inclusivo of the Universidad de Buenos Aires, within which our study has developed, highlight the pivotal role of the project as a prefiguration of possible scenarios of inclusive transformation, anchored in the meanings and values that the community validates, recognizes and exercises and as an empowerment tool for citizenship.

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Figure 1. (Dual City. The northern border of Buenos Aires central area) Image courtesy: Instituto de la Espacialidad Humana, Universidad de Buenos Aires

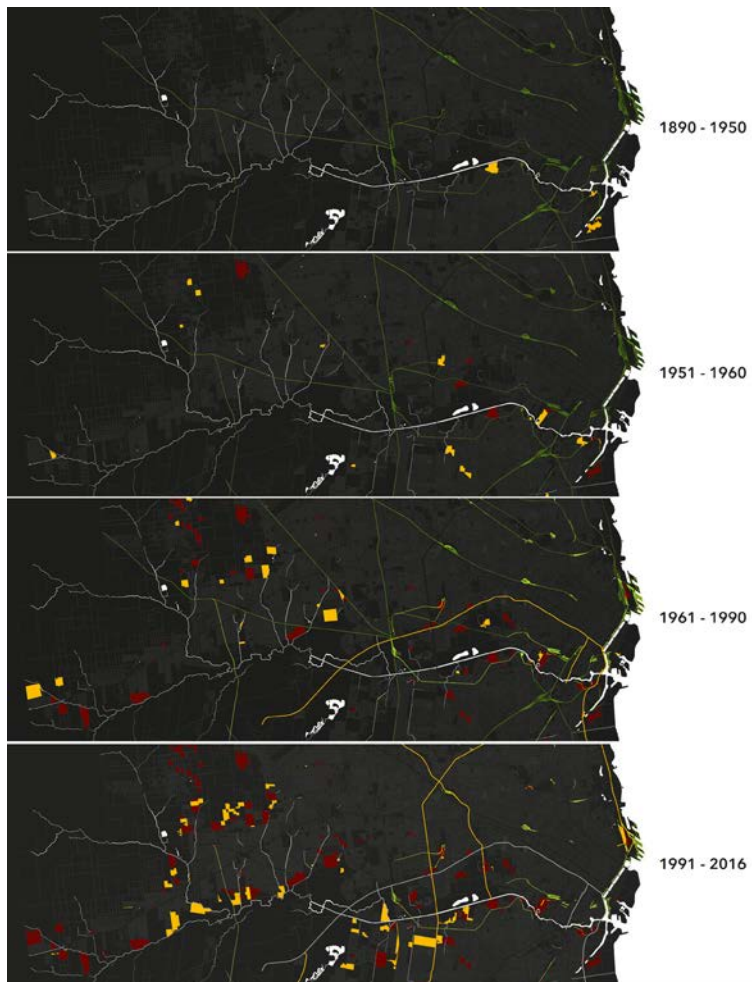


Figure 2. (Popular Habitat. Diachronic mapping) Image courtesy: Mattia Croci

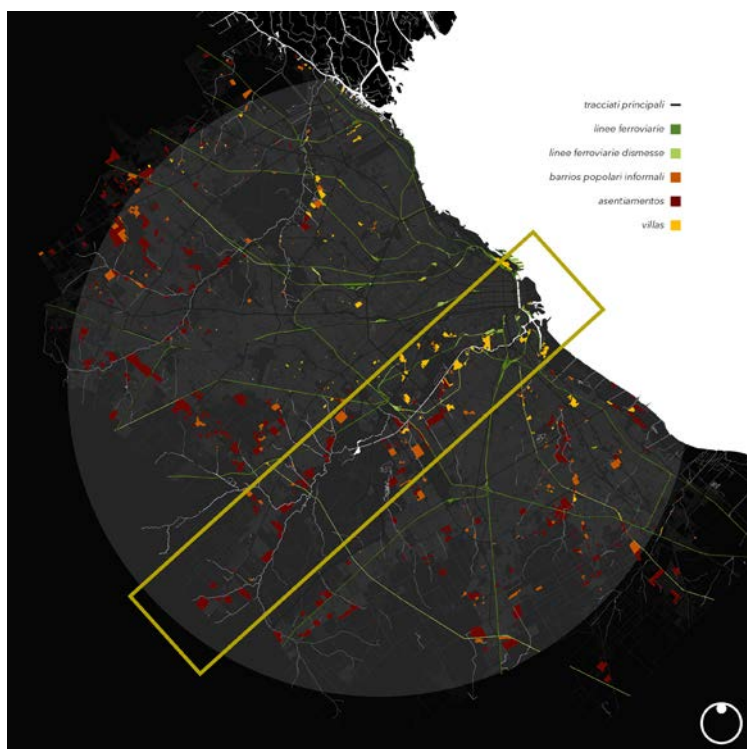


Figure 3. (The Line of Popular Habitat) Image courtesy: Mattia Croci

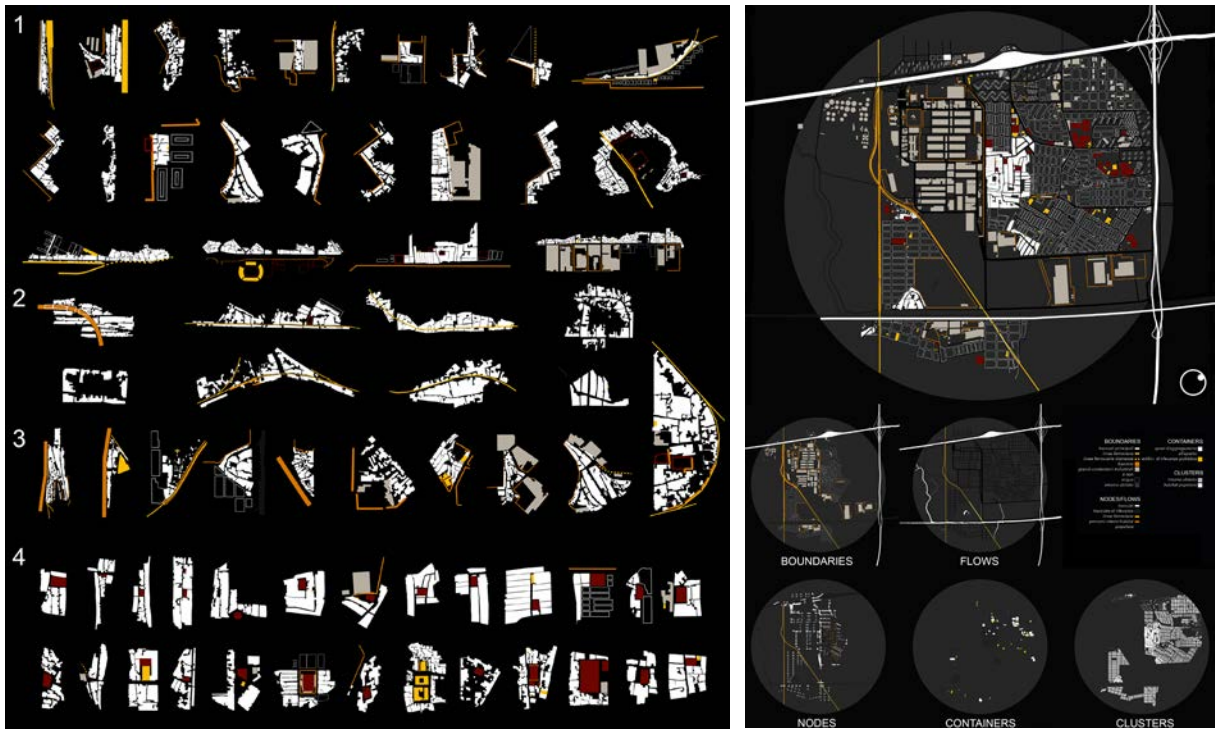


Figure 4. (Behaviors, dynamics of development, generation and modification of the form of Popular Habitat: 1. Concentration and condensation; 2. Embedding; 3. Completion and expansion; 4. Protecting and surrounding centralities) Image courtesy: Mattia Croci

Figure 5. (The Mercado Central area: Reading) Image courtesy: Mattia Croci



Figure 6. (The Mercado Central area: Project strategy) Image courtesy: Mattia Croci

