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Power and authority in the changing city

Cristina Bianchetti

This paper deals with the way the fast transformations occurring in many cities in our country are creating difficulties to urban politics. And the way a specific form of the crisis between power and authority is redifined into a specific shape revolving around such difficulties. Needless to say urban transformation processes have caused serious difficulties of government, arousing extended debates in some cases, even in other eras. On the other hand the crisis between power is not to be fully ascribed to urban issues, although it does find an excellent stage in the urban environment to be represented.

Power and authority are not synonymous words. In very simple terms the crisis in their relationship may mean that some of the power exerted on urban transformations lack a general acknowledgement. Whereas those who have the authority to lead the transformations cannot accomplish them. Speaking about joint power and authority may arouse some embarassment. The possibilities to exert power and to display authority are defined through minute relationshpis and widespread practices. Hence it should be possible to observe the tangled outcomes of power by looking at those very possibilities, as Foucault would say, and grasp their implications. Therefore the changing city and the categories of power and authority are put here into relationship vary cautiously. The aim is to offer a few hints for future studies not to be limited to the observation of their phe-nomenic quality but contained in a reflection on transformations.

The paper puts forward two hypotheses. The first one considers the fast transformations experienced in cities and the juxtappositions they create, as a favourable field for the observation of the way power and authority are relocating, both of them perceived as active and uneven elements, transversally and enigmatically linked to desires and interests of transformation. Such a hypothesis implicitly claims that reverting to using general categories is useful to understand the transformations.

The second hypothesis is more specific and states that public agent copes with power-authority tensions not just by means of bureaucratic or disciplinary speeches, but by looking for authority in the relationships with the public opinion aware and informed on urban matters. Such a process is today widely accepted but nonetheless its problems are often overlooked.

The hypothesis is coupled to these two in the closing states that what has been previously said concerns us to a grat extent. All this for several reasons: firstly because of the power and authority in the technical side; moreover one should consider that what has been previously outlined has a lot to do with the decreased ability of some skills to play a role of social mediation which they were able to exert in the past. This can be seen from different perspectives. One is dealt with in Sennett's latest book about mediation meant as translation of a command into an action. The other one hints at the ability of such a field of study to account for the modernizing processes in our country; which architects and planners have accoplished to do in the past, sometimes outstandingly; other times by simplifying a reality wiewed as a tangle which reason tries to curb; some other times falling in a sort of passionate sociologism. Anyway such an approach is nowadays much more complicated because of the evergrowing inability to mediate the local condition with the social condition during the practices. In other words the fact that public opinion about urban issues fades away refers to the decreased possibilities of the debate on space to construct links among territory, forms of governmet, practices, and collective imagination. It also refers to the difficulty to bind a debate on space to what is not to be considered as such. This difficulty does not concern just us but as long as we are concerned, it has formidable effects of impoverishment on the public opinion informed of urban issues.

The considerations developed here are referred to a urban context which perhaps today is subject more than others to strong transformations, namely Turin's, a city where 'the tough dimension of fordism' makes the transformations' jerks more evident.

Many of the considerations encompassed in this paper were shaped during rhe summer courses I coordinated in the last two years (Summer School 'Great City Mutations in European Contexts', I architecture faculty, Politecnico of Turin, sponsored by the city of Turin, Region Piedmont, Siti). The outcomes are in C. Bianchetti (edited by), *Torino, il villaggio olimpico*, Officina, Roma, 2005; *Torino 2, metabolizzare le olimpiadi*, Officina, Roma, 2006. The approach is indebted with a suggestion born during a public conversation with carlo Olmo in Modena, last november.