

Disconnected cities. The role of social analysis in understanding and planning global cities

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The papers that are presented in this section of Territorio have been realized by PhD students attending the Spud program at the Polytechnic of Milan. They are revised versions of papers that have been originally submitted by their authors for a course about Global Cities, coordinated by myself in the academic year 2009-2010. Much more than student's homework, however, these papers show the potentiality of a specific approach to the issue of globalization and its impact on social cohesion in global cities. They do not only describe the striking social dynamics taking place in three global cities located in emerging countries, but they also pay attention to the emerging conflicts between economic growth and social cohesion characterizing the impact of globalization in such cities. Far from providing a mere description of the current social problems concerning the most disadvantaged people living in such cities, these papers provide a wide analysis on the contradictions arising in such urban contexts as a consequence of economic globalization. The papers show the mechanisms through which social cohesion, economic growth and sustainability are linked. We suppose that these mechanisms are often contradictory and contribute to the spread of new urban inequalities and polarization. In this short introduction, I will try to provide a general conceptual framework within which these case studies can be understood.

Contemporary big cities are under strong transformations affecting both their spatial and social configuration. The high concentration of advanced tertiary services and knowledge workers in these cities has paved the way for the growth of a new urban cosmopolitan elite, which is strongly interested in urban life and creates a new demand for a high-quality urban environment. On the other hand, the new attractiveness of central urban areas has created good market conditions for new real estate investments aimed at providing these urban elite with good accommodation and facilities. However, this movement toward increasing gentrification of the city has gone with the displacement of the poorest population and, more generally, with a worsening of its social conditions. Aspects such as growing inequalities, polarization, segregation of the upper and lower classes and stronger class division are peculiar of such cities.

The new relevance of the relationship between competitiveness and social cohesion has been recently stressed by urban studies scholars as well as institutional bodies. Two perspectives have been developed on this issue. On the one hand, a liberal approach has considered social cohesion as a positive functional element of urban competitiveness. Nowadays the attractiveness

L'introduzione alla sezione tematica presenta i temi trasversali trattati nei contributi che seguono: la globalizzazione e il suo impatto sulle disuguaglianze sociali ed economiche, la polarizzazione sociale, il rapporto tra coesione sociale e competitività globale. La presentazione di tre paper scaturiti dal corso 'Global cities' tenuto dall'autore nell'ambito del dottorato Spud del Politecnico di Milano fa emergere l'esigenza di una rinnovata attenzione multidisciplinare alle recenti trasformazioni urbane

Parole chiave: globalizzazione; città globali; coesione sociale