

Socio-spatial transformations in EU cities: gentrification, polarization, conflicts

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Berlino, Amsterdam, Amburgo, Parigi e Bruxelles: il servizio mette a confronto queste cinque grandi città per analizzare i processi di gentrificazione e di crescente dualizzazione della struttura sociale che stanno cambiando il modello urbano della 'città europea'. Dagli articoli, preparati da un gruppo di dottorandi dei programmi Spud del Politecnico e Urbeur dell'Università di Milano-Bicocca, emerge un quadro contrastante, in cui è chiaro che la spinta delle città a rendersi più attrattive nell'ambito della competizione internazionale contribuisce ad indebolire la loro coesione sociale interna

Parole chiave: gentrificazione; polarizzazione; cambiamento urbano

European cities have been historically considered as an 'urban model' strongly based on a compromise between competitiveness and social cohesion. Specific factors, such as the solid tradition of national welfare systems and locally-based urban planning, the weight of the middle classes in the occupational structure of the European cities, and the high importance traditionally given by citizens and local governments to social solidarity and equality, explain this distinctiveness. Nevertheless, in the last two decades this traditional model has significantly weakened, if not come to an end. Social dynamics seem to have been at work: increasing polarization; growing vulnerability of the middle class; higher attractiveness of the city centre for new social classes considered crucial for place-based competition; displacement of the poorest population; collapse of the housing sector providing affordable accommodation; and increasing risk of segregation for ethnic minorities. Some scholars have interpreted these trends as a consequence of a strong neoliberal turn. Rising inequalities and socio-spatial dualization have been considered a consequence not only of globalisation and financialization, but also of neoliberal policies aimed at freeing capital from social and political constraints. What are the impacts of these trends on the traditional model of the European city? The papers presented in this section of Territorio address this very general question from different sides, considering how European cities are differently exposed to such dynamics. Aspects such as gentrification, the dualization of the social structure, and conflicts related to the development of the 'creative city', have been investigated on the basis of original data and/or extensive literature reviews. Starting from different perspectives, these papers try to link the attention to spatial, territorial changes with the analysis of social and economic dynamics. On the whole, they show that European cities have been facing new trade-offs between their need to be competitive at the global scale and their opposite necessity to preserve the social quality that has been traditionally peculiar of such cities. It's a tension difficult not only to be understood in the scientific analysis, but also to be tackled with by policy makers. Indeed, the same contradiction involves the politics of the city, paving the way to new social and political conflicts. If the model of the European city is not come to an end, it is certainly under scrutiny.

The articles included in this section have been previously prepared as working papers for my PhD course «Global city and urban policy», prepared by the PhD students of the Spud program of the Politecnico di Milano and of the Urbeur program of the Milano-Bicocca University