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Migrants' Maps to Explore the Contemporary City

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“How does a stranger build an image of a new city?”

After having explored the meaning that the image of the city may take for its inhabitants, Kevin Lynch suggests some directions for future research, among them the study of urban landscape representation by foreign people.

This paper presents an empirical research on mapping Milan through a sample of a hundred migrants, interviewed during the first period of their stay in town. The survey takes as its starting point the idea suggested by Lynch to enquire into a subject which today appears as an emerging issue of the contemporary city, which is increasingly inhabited by transitory populations: What is the relationship between the urban landscape and its new inhabitants? While taking the representation of urban landscape by migrants as a gesture of self-organization within that landscape, this research reveals the structural and creative role assumed by the sight of the inhabitants directly involved in the project of a multicultural city.

A new urban imagery

This paper explores the construction of a new urban imagery by transitory populations, which are increasingly inhabiting the contemporary city. It is proposed the possibility of creating a cartography which is different and more complex than technical ones, and which is able to reveal the ‘invisible landscapes’ inhabited by migrants.

In particular, the survey explores a re-reading of the elements (paths, edges, districts, nodes, landmarks) as introduced by Lynch in order to define the contents of a mental representation. At the same time focusing on the migrant’s specific condition in today’s city: a condition where the perception of the place aims at finding a direction in the urban landscape, rather than examining the urban layout legibility.

Participants were asked to draw a map on the basis of their perception and experience of the city: from the mental maps drawn by the interviewees on the basis of the Lynch’s elements, variable geographies emerge where the urban objects that the migrants first relate to are revealed, as well as those that better lend themselves to the creation of an image of the city for people who are trying to get their bearings.

“Can it be accepted that knowledge is based on the exclusion of the knowing subject, that thought is based on the exclusion of the thinking subject, and that the subject is excluded from the construction of the object?” (Morin, 1983)

As such, the hypothesis of the research is that the rethinking of the city and trying to include a planning of transitional living cannot be separated from the observation and experience of the people who live and inhabit the condition of transiency. In the representation of the city as expressed by migrants, there could emerge indications about the perceptions of urban landscape specific to the observers who see it from a mobile, not rooted and unpredictable point of view. This is useful to guide city planning research through un-coded approaches in regards to services and urban living, which are traditionally based on an assumption of permanence.

The inclusion of the migrants’ point of view is necessary to understand what it means, for those who arrive in a new town, to inhabit and come to know it; therefore, it is the intention to listen to people who are ‘guests’ of the new city and who at the same time are architects of its transformation.

The representation of the city is intended as a gesture of imaginative thinking by the persons who are preparing to tell their own idea / experience of the city: through the act of representing, migrants are encouraged to take a creative point of observation, using a graphic representation as their main medium of expression.

“How does a stranger build an image of a new city?”

A representation which is able to provide information on the first relationship established between the migrants and the city should above all contain the elements that these new inhabitants consider most important in their interaction with the urban space. Tracking these elements in each person’s experience of the city - disorienting, fragmentary, full of new impressions and images, as always happens when you come in contact with an unknown environment - can be difficult and can prompt the imagining of a chaotic set or the failure of the identification of any precise elements.

Therefore it was decided to take advantage of an element of mediation. The participants were asked to think about their experience of the city through some elements they considered representative of the main relationships with urban spaces, which demonstrated knowledge of the city. This approach derives from the most authoritative source in the exploration of the significance of places through direct experience of the inhabitants, “The image of the city” by Kevin Lynch.

After having explored the meaning that the image of the city may take for its inhabitants, Kevin Lynch suggests some directions for future research, among them the study of urban landscape representation by foreign people.

“How does a stranger build an image of a new city?” (Lynch, 1960) The survey takes as its starting point the idea suggested by Lynch to enquire into the relationships between the urban landscape and its new inhabitants.



His study is taken both as a conceptual and methodological reference. As a conceptual reference the contemporary city model of analysis has been assumed. This model attributes a decisive and structural role to the observation of the people who have a direct stake in the project of the space. As a methodological reference, its research setting based on the classification of elements characterizing the experience of the city has been followed.

The transposition of Lynch's categories for transitory inhabitants

The re-reading of the elements introduced by Lynch, is developed by tuning them to the migrant's specific condition within the contemporary city.

Paths: They are the usual movements in the city, the most frequently used paths by foot or public transportation. As Lynch defined, paths are intended as "channels along which the observer moves," but only "customarily" and not "potentially", since the element of interest is not what is perceived as a path, but what is usually used as such.

Boundaries: It is the transposition of the category of "edges" which is kept in its meaning of barrier, of break in the continuity, as boundaries between two phases, not meant as physical boundaries, but elements of border between a known (or knowable) city and a city considered off limits, where the migrant doesn't go or feels he cannot go; these places are considered inaccessible places, impenetrable spaces, the imaginary walls of the city.

Living Spaces: These are the places where the migrant lives and has lived since his arrival in Milan; for it is the phase that precedes any rootedness, often these are not places designed to live in. As the Lynch's category of "districts", these are places where "the observer mentally enters inside of"; the spaces of everyday transient experience.

Nodes: They are the most popular places, those where the main activities take place and where you meet other people, "intense foci", as defined by Lynch, not because of their strategic position ("typically the convergence of paths, events on the journey") but because they are points of aggregation that "gain their importance from being the condensation of some use or physical character" according to a meaning that does not concern the identifiability of the physical form, but that concerns the importance assigned to the nature of activities which are carried out in that place.

Landmarks: These are the places of reference, which identify the city or which are used to get one's bearing in the city; they have the same meaning of the Lynch's category "Landmarks" as punctual elements and are used as marks of identity, the more recognizable as their visual importance is coincident with the symbolic one.

On the basis of these five elements, participants were asked to draw a map representing their perception and experience of the city.

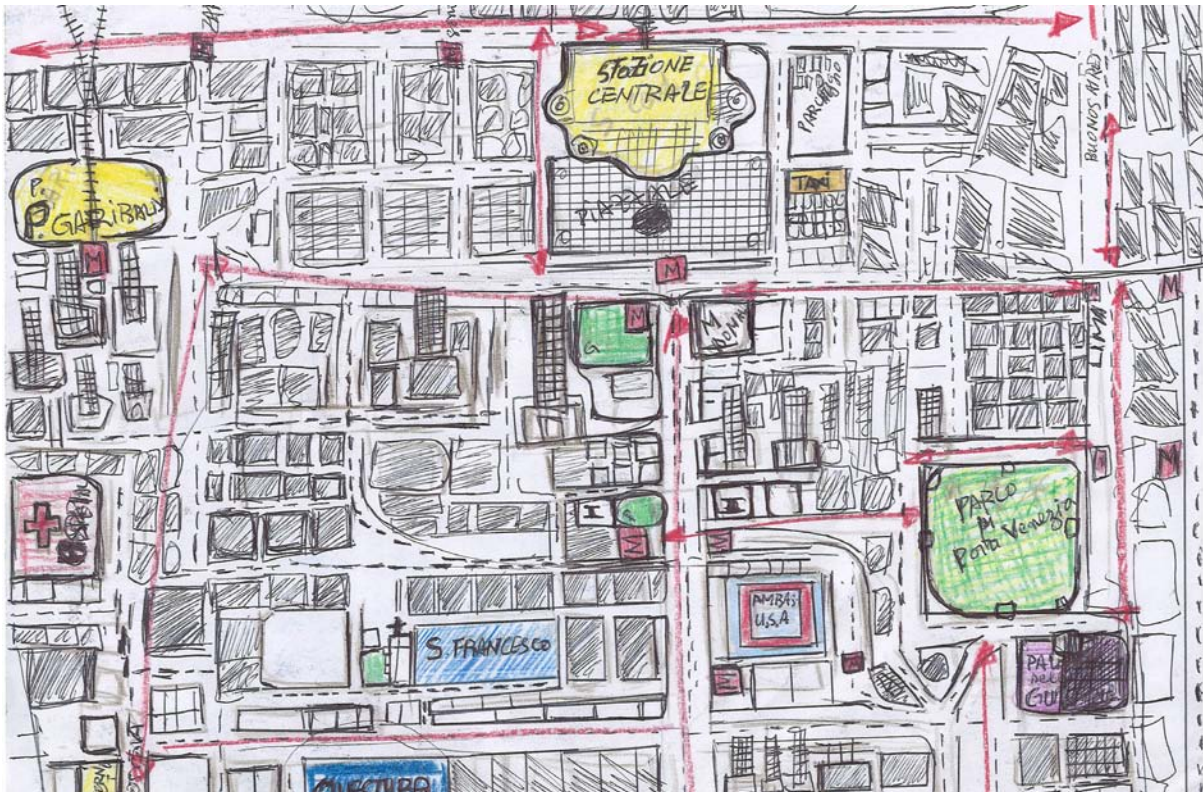


Figure 1 | Map by Ako Atikossie, TOGO

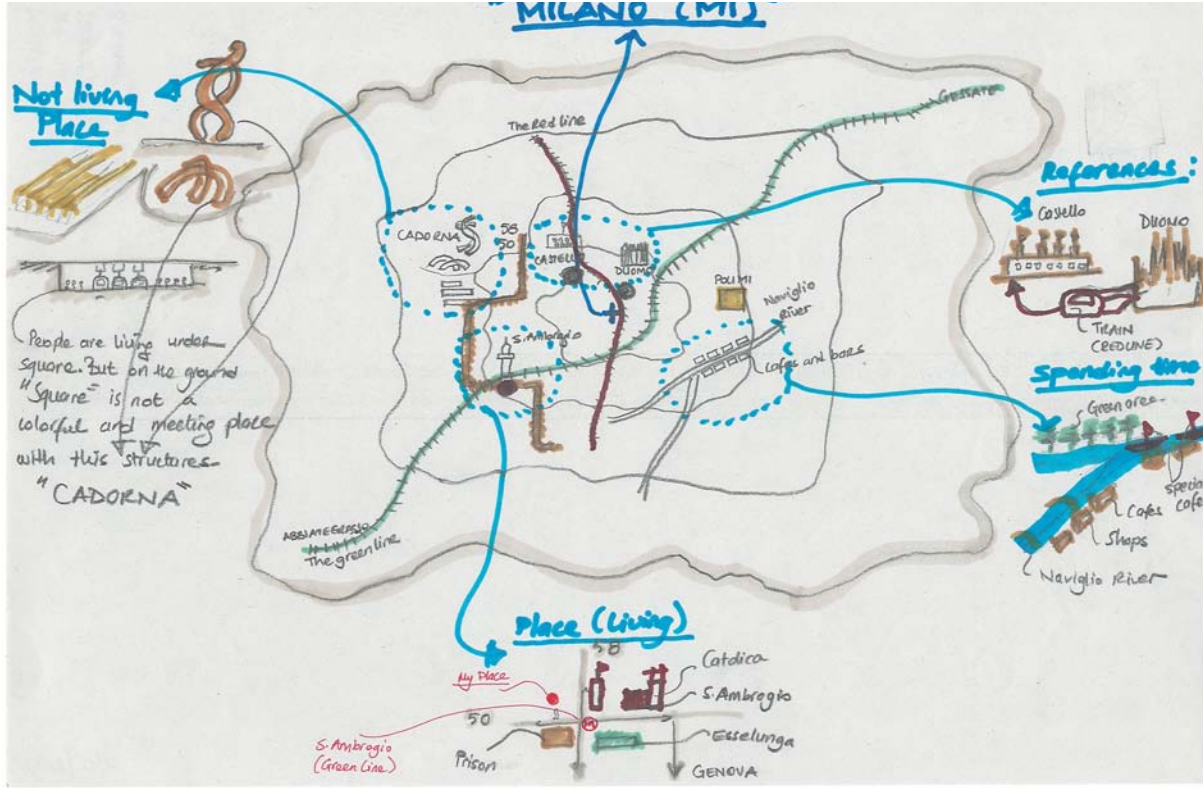


Figure 2 | Map by Murat Aydin, TURKEY



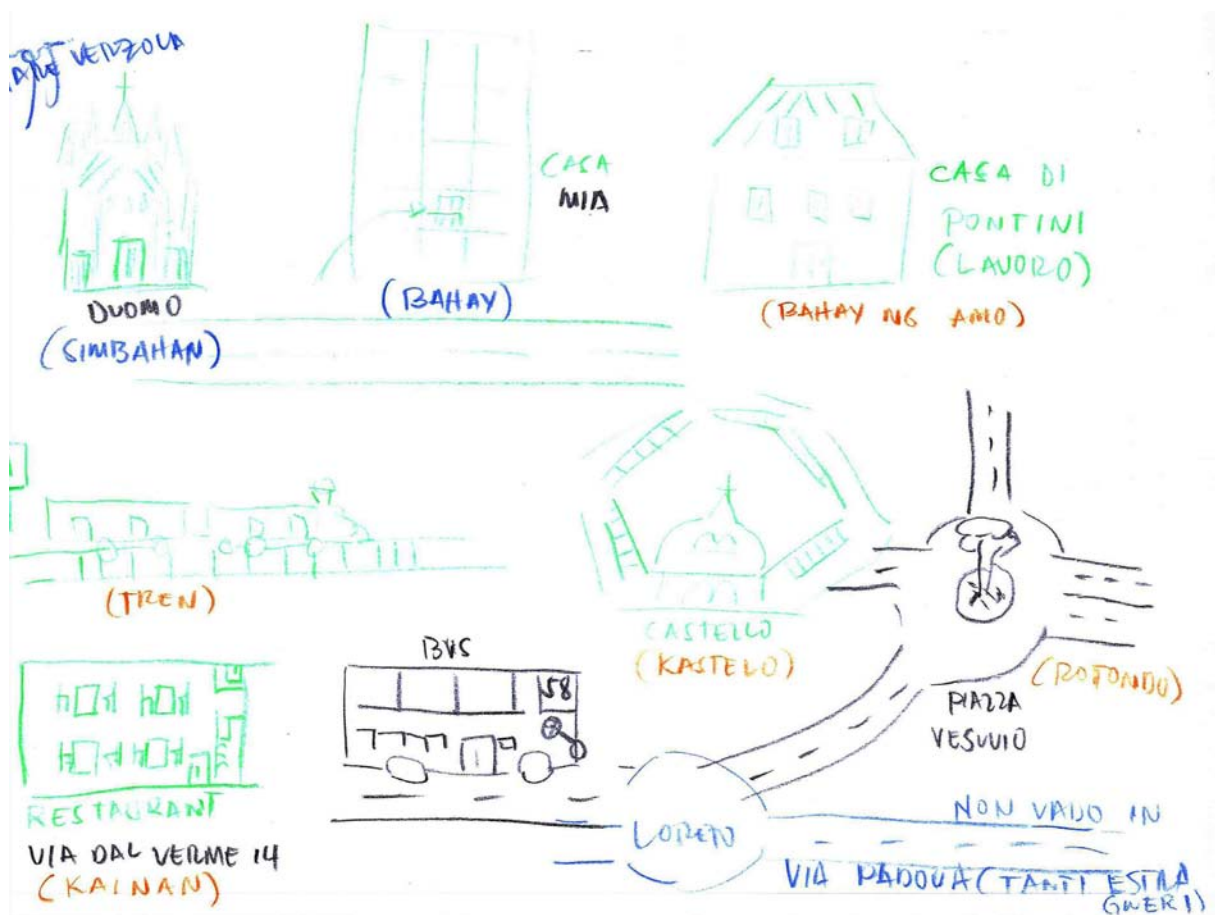


Figure 3 | Map by Voltaire, PHILIPPINES

The work method

The investigation of the relationship between the city and the transitory populations through the drawing of mental maps, requires the definition of a frame within this type of representation of the city would have returned significant information in order to understand which is - how it is lived and represented - the transitory living.

Sample of interviewees

We proceeded first to define what types of migrant populations might respond to the requirement of transience. They have been declared belonging to the category of transitory populations all those persons who had not yet found a stable living arrangement. Based on this classification, the sample of interviewees includes people from all over the world, arrived in Milan for different reasons and through different migratory routes; their common characteristic was that they had not yet been established in the city. Thus they could propose a representation of city from a mobile point of view, due to a housing condition marked by instability.

In addition to this predominant group, it was identified a secondary type of transient people, composed by students of architecture and urbanism who had been staying in Milan for less than 3 months, interviewed in the classrooms of the University: they represent the 'technical expert' view, although estranged, to the city, which is relevant to know another type of 'first access' requests - the expression of another level of needs, or another meaning attributed to the reception - and at the same time to study the specific representation of who is familiar with the instruments of 'representing' and uses it to express the strangeness.

The third category is made up of people 'no longer in transit', who arrived in Milan a few years ago: they have a better understanding of the city and yet are witnesses of a recent experience of immigration and landfall. In representing the city, these people return us the process of 'learning' about it, a process developed from their arrival to the current date; they draw paths, boundaries, living spaces, nodes, landmarks on the basis of a critical eye. This observation point, just after that one of transience, allows to analyze the transition from a first 'layer' of knowledge and enjoyment of the city, composed of the elements identified by those persons who are trying to get their bearings, in a more conscious layer, which elements are the result of a selection occurred after a period of relationship with the different urban spaces.

Instruments

The instruments used for each interview are: a sheet of A4 paper, pens, crayons and markers, which are left on the table available to the interviewee who can choose the most appropriate graphical tools to draw up his map. On the back of the map, they are asked to write their name, age, country of origin - and whether the original house is in a city or in the country - and the elapsed time from their arrival in Milan.

In addition to materials for the representation of this mental map, a video-camera is used, in order to get a testimony of the implementation process of the design: this further view, and voice, allows to observe, in addition to the final product, the act of representing, the way to approach an interpretation of the city that does propose preconceived answers but involves in a more active, self-reflexive action and a shift from imagining to representing. These are a series of acts often explained in the interview associated with the drawing and which are interesting as a further expression of seeking a relationship with the city. With the recorded sequences of interviews to migrants and of some significant urban spaces, a film was produced, titled "The Un-rooted city".

Activities/Where

The sites considered representative of the migrants' city, identified in order to meet the transitory populations to be interviewed, were selected defining the main activities related to the services of first access to the city, and for each one it has been analyzed a reference space.

It was chosen the Help Center of the City of Milan at the Central Station with regard to the *orienting* activity, where they are given to newly arrived immigrants the 'very first access' information on the city.

For the *sleeping* activity, we have analyzed different types of spaces that offer night hospitality: a public dormitory for the first reception service in a municipal structure, the House of Charity for the service first and second shelter in a structure of a religious foundation, the Porta Romana railway station as an example of informal housing.

With regard to *eating*, the table of the San Francesco Foundation was chosen, being the most popular in Milan.

Regarding the help for *legal assistance*, reference has been made to the Naga, a volunteer association that promotes and protects the rights of foreign people, and the Centre Naga Har, that in addition to providing legal and social assistance to asylum seekers and refugees, contains a library, a classroom where classes are held in Italian, a lounge with TV, and that for these specific functions has been chosen as the site representative of the *joining* activity.

With regard to *health services*, the clinic of the Fratelli di San Francesco Foundation has been chosen as a center of reference for migrants who seek medical care in several disciplines: general medicine, psychiatry, gynecology, ophthalmology, ENT, dermatology, dentistry and other.

Moreover some sites have been identified as significant for the considerable presence of immigrants in certain moments of the week: the square in front of the Central Station on Sunday afternoon, the market behind the subway station of Cascina Gobba and some urban parks on weekends.



Results

As a result of the survey, two kinds of analysis are been developed: the first on the participants to the interviews, the second on the contents of the maps.

The analysis on the participants to the interviews shows a great variety of the migrants' places of origin (people from 41 different nationalities, a sample that can be considered representative of the foreign populations inhabiting in Milan), and a period of stay in Milan that is for the most less than 3 years, with an average of 2 years and a half. About the current living places, we can say that, referring to the 3 groups of the sample of interviewees, the transitory inhabitants are 91%, the 'no longer in transit' inhabitants are the 9%, and considering all the interviewees, 19% are students. The interview location was for the most a collective place (dormitories or schools of Italian), private houses, the street, or the University for the students.

The analysis of the maps

The analysis of the maps' contents is developed through some keys to the interpretation of the maps. First of all, each map has been classified on the basis of the most relevant category among the five elements that derive from the transposition of the Lynch's elements. For example, if in one map mainly appear landmarks (such as the cathedral, or the castle) it was attributed to that map the category 'landmarks'. And for each category the specific places that are indicated were identified. This analysis gives the fundamental information to draw the city of migrants, where all the places indicated on the mental maps appear with different levels of intensity according to the number of times that each element has been drawn.

The later step of this kind of analysis was about the relevance of each category in the different periods of time. In the first period of stay migrants have indicated mainly landmarks, that are the urban objects that better help the orientation into the city; in the second period of stay /from one to three years/ more paths are visible, and it points that migrants start going through the city; after three years the living places and the nodes appear, as signal of an initial involvement in the city.

Another analysis is based on the quantity and the variety of elements that appear on each map, and this key to the interpretation let us understand the different levels of knowledge of the city. Four different categories were identified: the most elementary maps with only 1 or 2 places and sometimes a link between them; the maps with a sequence of homogeneous places; the representation of places of a typical day; the most complex ones which represent the system of experienced and known places. Most immigrants (45%) draw the places of a typical day, using maps that represent the daily movements and the most visited places.

Another key to the interpretation of the maps is about the approaches to the representation of the city, and five different kinds of approaches were identified: the representation of familiar places; the reconstruction of the most popular routes or everyday paths; the combination of the more frequent routes and the most familiar places with the urban context, where there is an attempt to capture the entirety of the city or put in the 'right' position the main landmarks of the city; the critical representations, which are abstract drawings, where the problematic aspects of living the town are pointed out; the planimetric drawings, that demonstrate an acquisition of knowledge of the city through a technical drawing – this last approach is used mostly by students.

The insurgent city

The last key to the interpretation of the maps, is through each of the five elements which had guided the representation, an interpretation that has enabled a comprehensive reading of the city emerging from the drawings.

Landmarks reveal an image of the city made of just a few elements, first of all the Cathedral and the Central Station, but also other elements exploited to find one's bearings, constituted above all by the hubs towards the inhabiting areas.

Living Spaces let emerge an inclusive city, which is able to embrace different populations and yet putting them, for an undetermined time, in a condition of impermanence where different inhabiting solutions alternate,

among them dormitories are considered as one of the most stable solutions.

Paths let emerge the city of connections, where public transports are used by many migrants and yet a difficulty of movement emerges, due to the impossibility to buy tickets, which implies a constraint to isolation in the suburbs where most dormitories are located.

Nodes represent the different experiences of the public space, and this element has received three different interpretations: 1) places connected to the initial arrival (help center, canteen, outpatient clinic); 2) places functional to inhabiting (city hall, police headquarters, market, internet points); 3) meeting points (parks, main square, central station). Each category corresponds to a different level of integration in the city.

The prevalence of nodes connected to inhabiting primary needs brings to a symbolic change of the role of public space. In fact public space has always been represented as the place where most abstract inhabiting activities are carried out (meetings, public discussions, exchange,...). In this exploration instead public space has become the place closely connected to most basic inhabiting functions.

Boundaries is another element which has received different interpretations: 1) The first consists of the locations of the negative experience - dangerous places - in particular because of criminality which mainly characterizes the Central Station; 2) the second is about places which are indicated as inaccessible places for a negative reputation – marginal places – that are the areas inhabited by many migrants, which are perceived as ghettos and thus to be avoided regardless of the fact that its population belongs to one's own or someone else's etnia; 3) the third is represented by the feared places, and these include the police headquarters and the prison; 4) the fourth are places with no access, that migrants cannot attend, in particular because of their distance.

Conclusions: mental maps as an instrument to explore the city

The research hypothesis, which this work is based on, is that the 'sight' of migrants is a factor of fundamental knowledge to be able to build a city plan that is truly inclusive of the instances that they introduce. In order to find a suitable instrument to contain the representation of the migrants' city, an initial question was asked: Do we choose a cartographic, technical basis of the urban area, on which participants could track their representation of the city, indicating the most important elements in the process of knowledge of urban landscape, or provide them with a blank sheet of paper where they could draw the city *ex novo*?

We opted for this second option, to allow a free choice of urban objects and how to represent them. From the variety of interpretations that are possible to give to the urban space, original information about the use of city environments and the meanings assigned to each of its components could be obtained; moreover, the use of the blank paper was intended as an invitation to draw a different and more complex map that could reveal the invisible landscape inhabited by migrants in their first approach to the city.

This hypothesis refers to Farinelli's critical considerations on the function of mapping in the context of geographical knowledge, where the representation itself is assigned the role of producer of a particular vision of reality, in contrast to a scientific, objectifying vision, which believes the map is a reflection of reality. "Every map is primarily a plan for the world, as the various meanings of the Anglo-Saxon word plan still testifies, and the project of every map is to transform - playing in advance, that is preceding it - the face of the earth in its own image and likeness". (Farinelli, 1992)

To give up a topographic support to represent the migrants' city, would mean to give up an observation of reality that wants to be objective and offer an observation where the observer's sight is a constitutive part of the observed field.

Another topography, which is not limited to the morphological appearance of urban objects, and that even apart from that, may include depictions of the 'insurgent city'¹, which means to build a dematerialized repre-

1 *Spaces of insurgent citizenship* are called, by James Holston, "the spaces delivered from the planned and modern dominion of the city: the land of homeless, migrant networks, gay's neighborhoods, self-made suburbs (...). Holston considered insurgent those spaces where practices take place that disturb the consolidated narratives of the contemporary city". In an article entitled *Insurgent City. Topography of another Florence*, G. Paba traces the



sentation of the city where life practices of the new citizens take place along with the multiplicity of points of view that each new citizen brings to the city.

Through the representation of the city by migrants, the vision that they bring to the territory in which they inhabit is investigated; mental maps made by migrants bring to the surface the implicit transformative project underlying a description of the city “in its own image and likeness”.

The action of imagining and drawing the urban geography corresponds to the act of mentally inhabiting the city and in this way taking possession and transforming it from a space of estrangement into a space which is more articulated and complex, where even a person who has recently arrived can conceptualize and live within it.

We can say that this gesture makes explicit the act of taking to oneself a space which, no longer pertaining to an estranging experience, changes into a space open to unpredictable inhabiting conditions.

From the planner’s point of view who observes the city emerging through the migrants’ mental maps, this exploration enables a widening of the survey, as it includes the migrants point of view and their creative contribute, thus going beyond a vision where inhabitants are considered as passive subjects of the city plan. It is an exploration which makes it possible to get closer to the city under transformation, by observing the city not from above as it were something outside, but getting into the urban space and gathering the experiences and the visions of the city as they come out while being reproduced by the new inhabitants.

This survey also focuses on a specific step of inhabiting which is the condition of temporariness, the moment before settling down, which town-planning and migration literature do not consider as a subject by itself. In this research it has been taken as the most meaningful moment to get a new sight of the city.

Thinking the contemporary city as a place of encounter and confrontation, means finding possible new instruments to experiment the relationship between citizens of different origins, and between citizens and the different urban spaces. Knowing and discovering migrants different ways of living and experiencing urban spaces, necessarily means to have migrants involved as actors and not merely as observers of the space they inhabit, so to better understand what “the right to the city” means to a migrant.

In this survey we adopted an unconventional approach aiming at generating a sense of belonging to the city in a condition where the relationship between the new inhabitants and the city itself is characterized by temporariness. In this way it has been possible to achieve a notion of citizenship no longer linked to a condition of permanent dwelling.

The hypothesis and the wish of this research is that contemporary city will actually be hospitable when it will be able to include the instances of migrant populations, and starting from those instances – from the different ways of thinking the city introduced by migrants - will be able to regenerate itself so as to open up the way to inclusive politics.

interpretations, from Sandercock to Geddes to Mumford, of the word *insurgent*, to explain the research in which “the object of representation must be exactly the boiling world of the insurgent city (...). The materials to represent were then made not by objects, but by weaving of human relationships, new intersubjective relationships and their difficult and controversial interaction with the morphological and organizational structure of the city”.(Paba, 2004).

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