Migration and the Built Environment in the Mediterranean and the Middle East

CAUMME III
Contemporary Architecture and Urbanism in the Mediterranean and the Middle East

PAUMME I
Projects of Architecture and Urbanism in the Mediterranean and the Middle East

International Symposium
Naples, November 24-25th 2016

conference proceedings
CAUMME III/PAUMME I
international symposium
MIGRATION AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT
IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE MIDDLE EST
Naples, November 24-25th 2016

Caumme Abstracts/Paumme Projects Book
includes CD with conference proceedings

edited by:
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Graphic Design and Application:
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Cover Design:
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Printing:
Ermes Serivizi Editoriali Integrati Srl
via Quarto Negroni, 15
00072 Ariccia (RM), Italy

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Index

Migration and the built environment in the mediterranean and the middle east
Renato Capozzi, Adelina Picone, Federica Visconti

Architecture as welcome
Rosario Pavia

Presentation. Vers un exprit nouveau?
Paola Galante

Caumme III papers, authors

T1. Anthropological interpretations: global flows, spatial development and the spread of ideologies

Efsun Ekenyazıcı Güney
Revisiting the meaning of home in a world without boundaries: transnational experiences of migrants

Ina Macaione, Maria Italia Insetti, Vera Autilio
Immigration and resilience: the case-study of inner Italian areas

Michele Sbacchi
New tents

Sirma Turgut, Huiya Berkmen, Kemal Gülmez
The interaction between refugees and local people in urban life: mersin case and Syrian refugees

T2. Migration and the spread of architectural languages / trends

Manuela Antoniciello
Migration of Mediterranean language in Argentina

Vanna Cestarello
Architectural translation as alternative to the homologation processes

Pina Ciotoli
Mediterranean skyscraper: migration of a modern type

Grazia Giulia Cocina
Cultural needs in hospital humanization

Anna Irene Del Monaco
Mediterranean Architecture, as outcome of cultural migrations

Andrea Donelli
Survey and architectural representation of the frontiere
Nicola Marzot
The city and the “otherness”.
Aporias in morphological understanding

Giuseppe Resta, Giuseppe Tupputi
The grammar of italian design in Albania:
transforming landscape in the early twentieth century

Claudia Sansò
East and West mosques. Influences and contamination

T3. Migration and housing environments

Aurosa Alison, Federica Boni
The interior identity in the era of migration

Gisella Calcagno, Roberto Bologna
The refugee reception challenge: call for design

Francesco Collotti, Claudia Morea
Like a sleeping-bag on the sofa for an unexpected guest

Santo Giunta
Sequential reasoning: the case of the tamils in Palermo

Seyed Jamalaldin Hosseini, Fereshteh Beigli
Impact of migration on affordable-sustainable housing in the metropolitan area of
Tehran/Iran

Emine Koseoglu, Esma Bozkurt
Where is home: the Iof spatial perception of syrian immigrant children in Istanbul
by using cognitive mapping method

Ilaria Montella, Chiara Tonelli
Housing emergency: requirements of resilience

T4. Migration and materiality:
materials and construction techniques

Roberto Bianchi
Tiny architectures.
Light constructive strategies for dwelling nomad

T5. Social justice and the spatial practice of migrant communities

Suzan Girginkaya Akdag
Adapting location aware technologies for urban everyday life of migrants

Laura Parrivecchio
The integration processes in the contemporary city

Ehsan Valipour, Samira Tayyebisoudkolaieib
The role of urban facilities in title development of social sustainability:
the case of traditional architecture of Isfahan city

T6. Migration and cities in transformation

Tiziano Aglieri Rinella
Learning from Dubai: behind an urban show

Daniele Baltano
Rediscovering the civil space

Hulya Coskun
Istanbul: migrations and transformation of the historical peninsula
Isabella Daidone
Multicultural places for ethnically diverse cities p. 231

Nazire Diker, Erdem Eryazicioğlu, Elif Kirpik, Hüseyin Cengiz
Syrian refugee flows, social crisis and Istanbul p. 238

Massimo Faiferri, Fabrizio Pusceddu
The space of integration as a space calling for action p. 249

Pierpaolo Gallucci
The Accomplished form p. 254

Paola Gregory, Cristina Marras
Old and new towns: architecture, languages, discourses p. 262

Andrea Gritti, Laurent Hodebert, Rita Occhiuto
Informal infrastructures and public spaces along the migrants’ routes p. 271

Francesco Menegatti
Voidopolis. a city “for the rest of us” p. 278

Lilia Pagano, Rita Simone, Adriana Sarro
Designing the new landscapes between migration and permanence. International itinerant design seminar Villard: projects for Strategic Territories p. 282

Adriana Sarro
The Mediterranean project between integration and transformation p. 290

Valerio Tolve
Sicily as metaphor p. 300

Antonella Violano, Marco Calabrò, Rossella Franchino, Caterina Frettoloso
Legal, technological and environmental aspects of refugee camps p. 311

Index by author p. 321
Migration has been a continuous phenomenon over the last decades. In fact, a rising number of persons have been forced to leave their lands for escaping the war, often losing their life in the sea. As a consequence, some countries have decided to face the problem closing their borders. Those are the reasons why nowadays migration is a very complex phenomenon. This is a new type of human mobility, caused by wars and poverty. These people leave their country, pass through our cities and arrive in a sort of “waiting spaces” on the political boundaries where they are forced to live because of the barriers built for preventing their entrance. “[...] social and political barriers that we oppose to refugees, foreigners and even “nomad” who have been living a territory for centuries which is theirs too” (Remotti, 2016).

This situation has definitely intensified and made more complex issues as “reception” and “living” defining new spaces which can be often identified with refugee camps. This has been defined by Marc Augé as “urgent localization” where “refugee camps, temporary camps and settlements which, once were thought for promoting the laboring class, have become [...] unclassifiable places in terms of places able to welcome, in theory provisionally, who is forced by necessities dictated by misery, war or intolerance to expatriation” (Augé, 2007). In fact, modern times are characterized by images showing the desperation of migrants coupled with, as Alessandro Dal Lago claimed, “inhuman conditions of “short staying” camps which justified their protests and escaping attempts” (Dal Lago, 2012).

Consequently, the question is: Which is the right way for facilitating reception and integration processes? Nowadays, is it still possible promoting and stimulating a multiethnic way of living?

Our history has always been characterized by population movements. Culture which, passing through cities, have left testimonies of their passage being a treasure in theirs coexistence. Conversely, these days the presence of diverse ethnicity do not always contribute to a perfect integration inside the cities. In fact, the effect is that they are often relegated in suburban area or inside old cities creating that so called “enclaves”. Consequently, different urban spaces with specific borders are defined by migrants themselves which seek to find their place and their identity inside a new community.

Indeed, sometimes (as Riace’s case) migrants, settling in a new place, are considered as resource in terms of improvement and recovery of places, spaces and activities which have been abandoned.

This example demonstrates that ways of integration inside cities is still possible and that they might contribute to define a new coherent construction of the city which takes into account the social aspect of architecture as well.

The considerations regarding the actual phenomenon of migration raise different discussions related to some of the rising matters that characterize the contemporary city such as multiculturalism, identity, religion and social activities.

The attention to this phenomenon arises from its relevant importance, implementing socio-cultural processes changing and coexistence between different cultures and leading to a transformation of the urban structure and the spatial definition. Reflect on the phenomenon of migration I think can be a starting point for understanding how the architectural design is capable of being coherent expression of contemporary society. The urban spaces are continually crossed by moving populations; different identities that live in a temporary or permanent urban space.

The phenomenon of this mobility, whose causes are to be found in the wars, poverty, political regimes, has highlighted, through the images filtered by the media, as the cities are often unprepared to know how to deal with a changing social, cultural and so profound and irreversible historical in which the migrant, as claimed by Chambers, is the modern underground figure, as
an active protagonist in the city, able to reinvent the language through its culture, its traditions, its lifestyles. “In these encounters, in an ethic that tries to respect other people, the language loses its tradition, its focus and its direction that had before, slipping away to different dialogue. Live somewhere else means being constantly part of a conversation in which different identities are recognized, mix up each other without lose the own identity. Here the differences do not necessarily act as barriers but rather by complex signals [...] Our sense of social identity, our language and idols that we carry inside ourselves remain, but no longer as origins or signs of authenticity able to ensure a meaning to our life. Remain as traces, voices, memories and whispers mixed with other stories, other episodes, other encounters” (Chambers, 2003).

Today, sounds, voices, different languages are increasingly becoming part of a place, of a city. Franco La Cecla when he writes about using “happy” for the misunderstanding as a tool of tolerance and coexistence between different people and cultures, he states that “it is precisely the visibility of migrants to allow more than anything else, a spot in the city. A kind of showing mutual involvement, is not the only conceivable response but the most predictable existential uncertainty established in the new fragility or fluidity of social relationship” (La Cecla, 2013).

In some places of the city populated by different ethnic groups, since their establishment, these areas are transformed - and very often recovered - as they bring their own experience which give in forms and languages the transformations of the urban space and of the landscape.

“In this context, cultural enterprises are presented as promoters of processes that promote the revitalization of the center or parts of it. In addition, they can constitute the core of the new social formations, playing the role of local stakeholders in decision-making processes”. The cultural ability make the “plurality” of languages an important key point, suggesting a possible scenario where to investigate new possible integration forms of the different cultures and identities, in a way to contribute the architecture value in the social and to provide a definition of coherent city in development. The architecture then, being directly involved in the construction of the city, should propose matter related to migration, not only for the purpose of solving them, but also to open a new debate “working to build ethics and morality of the urban landscape in which architecture is able to invent new stories” (Tuzzolino, 2012).

IDENTITY AND BOUNDARIES

The phenomenon of migration is a huge matter that involves various issues of identity, rights, religion. These factors are common with the figure of the migrant, The Other, often identified as a apprehension and uncertainty with the society. In fact this feeling concerns some European countries with the realization of defensive practices through the construction of the vertical separation lines that highlight how there is not yet a political plan able to deal with what is going on and around us. “There is a will and an idea of the city ready to welcome and to cooperate that it works to aim the integration? The reality of today tells us many other processes [...]” (Brambilla, 2010).

The effect of globalization on the political and social processes “would seem to be precisely to mark the boundary between inside and outside, to put it in deep crisis, creating a mutual conditioning, rather than a mere opposition. With globalization there is often no longer an out and everything is within society and the boundary ends like this to always show the two sides, becoming a relational reality. But if the company crosses borders because it is communication to be the world and with it the reports, the bodies (some bodies) are not involved and the material is stopped” (Ricci, 2015).

Physical space, what we are going through, at first glance looks like a fluid space, where information flows but at a closer look we see that this space has become increasingly “cut and interrupted by walls, fences, thresholds, obstacles, virtual borders, specialized areas, protected areas” (Boeri, 2011).

These spaces defined by Dal Lago in his book “No people” as camps of “temporary stay”, located along the borders, or identified in the stations, ports. Reverses the sense of belonging and identity inherent in the cities, becoming “temporary destination”. The sense of living connected to the movement and the different cultures investigated by Bauman shows how the ability to live with differences and through them to gain benefits from it, are deeply linked to the processes of homogenization produced by globalization.

“More powerful is the incentive to homogeneity and the attempts to eliminate the difference, more difficult it is to feel at home in the presence of strangers [...] gradually the uniformity becomes more intense and more the perception of terror facing the “stranger” is growing [...] it is becoming easier to associate the strangers to insecurity fears [...] trying to keep distance to “the other”, the different, the stranger; the decision to exclude the communication’s need, mutual involvement, is not the only conceivable response but the most predictable existential uncertainty established in the new fragility or fluidity of social relationship” (Bauman, 2011).
The redefinition of political and cultural boarders has definitely increased and made even more complex the concept of reception and living, raising the urgent need to find new solutions of multi-ethnic coexistence through the recognition of the Other as an enrichment, both individual and collective.

The Italian and European cities have for years affected by events related to the presence of various groups of migrants; “Events that, if we read in terms of the implications on the city’s character and the theme of the culture, pay attention on social issues even on those more properly urban. Cities and societies have to deal with a not new situation but with unexpected dimensions that challenge the formation of a new city permanently settled by groups with different religions and cultures - including of living cultures and use of space - different with which you have to create the conditions for integration for a civil coexistence”.

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The latter fact, in their different beliefs, express their need for spirituality in cities where they have settled.

The presence of numerous cultures within society poses a reflection regarding religious space, as a possible tool for dialogue between the different populations.

“(...) The construction of new worship places, already in action in Italy but with problems regarding the urban redesign as consequence for the mobility population, the growth of new social arrangements and obviously from the most different ethnic groups originated from the migration” (Piva, 2011).

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Religious architecture (be they churches, mosques, synagogues) they have always proposed, through their constitution, as dominant and crucial elements within the urban fabric defining the identity of places. Walter Benjamin in describing the city of Moscow, locates in religious places of remembrance and their central position in the landscape. “(...) The construction of new worship places, already in action in Italy but with problems regarding the urban redesign as consequence for the mobility population, the growth of new social arrangements and obviously from the most different ethnic groups originated from the migration” (Piva, 2011).

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We are always witness of settlement processes of places that are inhabited by migrants, these are completely unknown to their culture and to their identity expression of life.

Emanuele Carriere in describing life in the «jungle» of Calais shows how this place «is a nightmare of misery and insalubrity, where terrible things happen [...] but there is also something extremely exciting: an energy, an extraordinary hunger for life, those that have driven so many men and women face a long journey, troubled, heroic, which Calais also seems to be a blind step end, it is only a stopover” (Augé, 2007).

This description suggests a different view of the “Other” in which the reasons for the survival and the search for a better future overcome all the barriers, physical, mental, cultural, even if forced to live those places defined by Marc Augé not anthropological in which the identity, relationships and history of who lives those are not becoming remarkable. “(...) the respect for differences, the right to be difference, the concept of a multicultural society can provide an elegant language and an excuse to an ideology of the ghetto and exclusion” (Augé, 2007).

The changes taking place show the need to modernise, tools, knowledge and sensitivity so as to define an urban quality able to increase to the people the sense to be part within the city.

The acceptance of the “Other” as claimed by Carlo Magris is “the only real evidence of the man dignity. The ability to be helpful to those who are facing serious difficulties and to really give - and sometimes even own uncomfortable - help to those who suffer” (Magris, 2016).

The acceptance no more confined only in the peripheral areas of the city through structures that do not respond to this need, but involving different areas identified in strategic locations capable of relating to each other and with the rest of the city.

“The logic of the camp itself is now old. Instead we must think to a hospitality able to establish relationships, to raise the culture of incoming populations and pass it and to let these people live in harmony with our world” (Panzarella, 2007).

RELIGION

“(...) Religion [...] shows to have a capacity of aggregation of different nationalities without having the power or the desire to delete” (Panzarella, 2007).

The presence of numerous cultures within society poses a reflection regarding religious space, as a possible tool for dialogue between the different populations.

“(...) The construction of new worship places, already in action in Italy but with problems regarding the urban redesign as consequence for the mobility population, the growth of new social arrangements and obviously from the most different ethnic groups originated from the migration” (Piva, 2011).

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Today, the project for the religious architecture is essentially the transformation of buildings built and dedicated to a particular cult and later adapted to a different religion, or reuse of warehouses or depots.

The considerable presence of immigrants in European countries, especially of Muslim origin, expressed the need to equip the places where they have settled in spaces for prayer. The solutions adopted to meet these requirements, were in fact those of retrofit existing buildings or abandoned (churches, warehouses) in mosques.

The Muslim community places particular importance to prayer because it is not only spiritual but also social and cultural aggregation. However the spaces allow the conduct not only of religious worship but also meeting and cultural exchange between the different communities. “[...] In Italy, most of the mosques have arisen the last ten or fifteen years is constituted improperly, as result mostly of adaptations, in which the most attention concern the establishment of few significant elements, pursued mainly through the furniture or otherwise elements connected to existing structures” (Panzarella, 2007).

I think is necessary today to design spaces for prayer because the presence of ritual places belongs to town culture and it is extremely important in contemporary cities. These places allow the migrant to regain possession of their identity, feeling part of the community in which their settle in.

“Immigrants, even in the special condition of foreign urbanized, show that they need a place in which to exercise the practice of collective worship. The marginality and precariousness faced by generally the Muslim religious buildings in our country reveals the insufficient of the public attention and the resistance to the application of the constitutional provisions. The concession of adequate space to prayer could help to control and to promote the mutual knowledge practices”.

Today facing the question to this project in a contemporary context in which everything moves and changes rapidly, and where cities are the result of different pieces together, may seem an immediate problem to solve. However the possible relationships between cities and religious space may develop not only as a place of prayer but also a place for social interaction, pursuing a variety of functions through its spaces and may be an opportunity to become one of the main places of urban and social connection in the cities.

What is crucial to show is “attention to a human reality, which arise city problems and advances to legitimate needs of identity and requires facilities and services for a projected life in search of the quality of living in any part of the world” (Culotta, 1992).

NOTES

1 According to data provided by UNHCR in Europe between January and August 31, 2016 approximately 281,000 people arrived. Constant warfare have increased the scale of migratory flows so much that in 2015 more than a million migrants have crossed the Mediterranean in front of 216,000 in 2014 and 60,000 in 2013.


3 F. La Cecla, The misunderstanding Anthropology meeting, Editori Laterza, Bari 2009, pag. 51

4 The city of Palermo, which has in its history the presence of different cultures, is still characterized by the presence of numerous ethnic groups that have settled mainly in the historic city center. This presence has encouraged the recovery of the latter through the arrangement of housing and the opening of local abandoned by migrants, promoting integration and interaction with the local population.

5 An example is the city of Riasa, recovered thanks to the administration of the mayor (Domenico Lucano) through the settling of migrants who, through their work, have restored much of existing assets, which until then had been completely abandoned, reviving also to commercial and historic crafts.

6 C. Tidore, Multicultural scenarios in the center of vibrant and critical, in Mediterranean. City, culture, environment, governance, migrants, (a c. di) Angelini A. Franco Angeli, Milano 2007, pag. 140.


8 According to F. Dal Co “[...] never walls built along the frontiers of the world were built as numerous as in the era of globalization. Missing a thought able to replace them”, Francesco Dal, “Augustine, The City of God”, Casabella n. 854, pag. 9.

Marc Augé identifies the word «exclusion» the predominance of spatial language to evoke the social situation that characterizes our cities, our countries. He refers to the concept tele both physically and in the sociological sense, referring to those who, in rich countries, benefits or otherwise of such wealth. “This group is part of many of those who managed to escape from the poorest regions of the planet, going from the first to the second type of exclusion”, M. Augé, Between the boundaries. Cities, places, interactions, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2007, pag. 17.

9 The migration phenomenon today invests more and more the current record, by the mass media to the dailies. It represents one of the main topics addressed especially in the political debate, due to the closures of the borders between the states of the European Union. An overview of the contemporary situation of migration, starting from the Middle East, through both the liquid route (Mediterranean), and for the Earth (Balkan) that for the Arctic, has been investigated by journalists report Claudia di
Pasquale, Giulio Valesini and Giuliano Marrucci in order to draw guidelines on how to transform this disaster into an advantage both for asylum seekers, for citizens, and for Europe itself. "We are facing the most serious migration crisis since World War II to today. Europe’s response was the signing of an agreement with Turkey which effectively closes the Balkan route and prevents the refugees arriving in the Nordic countries Europe. The Schengen Treaty wobbles, many European states raise barricades, bored wire, or introduce border controls. The result is that today the only open route is the Mediterranean from Libya to Italy. We can not close the Mediterranean with bored wire and in fact we are becoming, along with Greece, the only landing place. To avoid instability in the country, we must address the wave of migration radically changing the reception setting. Report has tried to build a pragmatic project (fully publicly managed with European supervision), where the drama is transformed into opportunities. The costs and benefits that would result were also calculated. The project, submitted to the European Commission and delegates of the northern European member states, found openness and availability, both to accommodate the dimensions of asylum seekers and to take action by supporting the costs (from "The way out", Report, RaI, 09.05.2016).


Z. Bauman, Liquid modernity, Editori Laterza, Bari 2011, pp. 118-121.


E. Carrere, A Calais, Adelphi Edizioni, Milano 2016, pag. 33.

M. Augè, op.cit, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2007, pag. 45.


M. Panzarella, Build a mosque in the West, in Multiculturalism and communication, (a c. di) F. M. Lo Verde, G. Cappello, Franco Angeli, Milano 2007, pag. 154.


In the city of Palermo, there are numerous mosques spread in all districts of the city, to the official cut into the church of San Paolino gardeners. It is very often adapted buildings, warehouses or depots where some of them also function as Koranic school. The same happens in the city of Mazara del Vallo in which there is a mosque built inside a warehouse in the Arab neighborhood of San Francesco.

M. Panzarella, Ibidem, pag. 148.

This text has been converted from an interview I conducted, within my PhD in "Architectural Design, Theory and Technology", Prof. Antonino Cusumano relative to its profound investigation of the phenomenon of migration within the city of Mazara del Vallo. The results of this research are widely described in his book "The unfortunate return".

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INDEX BY AUTHORS

Capozzi Renato, p. 11
Galante Paola, p. 19
Pavia Rosario, p. 15
Picone Adelina, p. 11
Visconti Federica, p. 11

CAUMME
Aglieri Rinella Tiziano, p. 207
Alison Aurosa, p. 120
Antoniciello Manuela, p. 53
Autilio Vera, p. 33
Baldano Daniele, p. 216
Beigli Fereshteh, p. 148
Berkmen Hulya, p. 43
Bianchi Roberto, p. 173
Bologna Roberto, p. 128
Boni Federica, p. 120
Bozkurt Esma, p. 156
Calabrò Marco, p. 311
Calcagno Gisella, p. 128
Cengiz Huseyin, p. 238
Cestarello Vanna, p. 62
Ciotoli Pina, p. 68
Cocina Grazia Giulia, p. 73
Collotti Francesco, p. 134
Coskun Hulya, p. 220
Daidone Isabella, p. 231
Del Monaco Anna Irene, p. 79
Diker Nazire, p. 238
Donelli Andrea, p. 87
Elif Kırık, p. 238
Eryazıcıoğlu Erdem, p. 238
Faiferri Massimo, p. 249
Franchino Rossella, p. 311
Frettoloso Caterina, p. 311
Gallucci Pierpaolo, p. 254
Görgünkaya Akdağ Suzan, p. 183
Giunta Santo, p. 138
Gregory Paola, p. 262
Gritti Andrea, p. 271
Gülmek Kemal, p. 43
Güney Efsun Ekenyazıcı, p. 27
Hodebert Laurent, p. 271
Hosseini Seyed Jamalaldin, p. 148
Insetti Maria Italia, p. 33
Koseoğlu Emine, p. 156
Maciome Ina, p. 33
Marras Cristina, p. 262

Marzot Nicola, p. 96
Menegatti Francesco, p. 278
Montella Ilaria, p. 162
Morea Claudia, p. 134
Occhiuto Rita, p. 271
Pagano Lilia, p. 282
Parricchio Laura, p. 190
Pavia Rosario, p. 15
Pavia Rosario, p. 15
Pusceddu Fabrizio, p. 249
Resta Giuseppe, p. 105
Sansò Claudia, p. 110
Sarro Adriana, p. 282, 290
Sbacchi Michele, p. 39
Simone Rita, p. 282
Tayyebisoudkolaei Samira, p. 195
Tolve Valerio, p. 300
Tonelli Chiara, p. 162
Tupputi Giuseppe, p. 105
Turgut Sirma, p. 43
Valipour Ehsan, p. 195
Violano Antonella, p. 311