2nd International Symposium "NEW METROPOLITAN PERSPECTIVES" - Strategic planning, spatial planning, economic programs and decision support tools, through the implementation of Horizon/Europe2020. ISTH2020, Reggio Calabria (Italy), 18-20 May 2016

For an ethical and integrated way of life: from non-places to places of human interaction

Vereno Brugiatelli[a],*

[a] University of Verona, 17, Lungadige Porta Vittoria, Verona, 37129, Italy

Abstract

We are witnessing a relentless spread of "total cities", widespread urbanised spaces, which are totally alien to the territory with detrimental consequences to places and the environment. This frequently has devastating effects on man and the landscape through the disruption of the natural cycles, pollution, hydrogeological instability, loss of the identity and cultural complexity of places besides the breakdown of mutual relationships among men and their interaction with their surroundings. The regeneration of urban centres should keep pace with the rebirth of the territory and the environment through an operation of "riterritorializzazione", the conversion of non-places into genuine places.

Keywords: Non-places; Places; Misrecognition; Disorientation; Mutual relationships.

1. Introduction

Modern cities, with their "urban tentacles" (Le Bras), exist regardless of the territorial context and expand with no correlation to the landscape. These cities are hubs in global networks without a narrative identity. In the modern urban context, any feature of local cultural identity is annihilated by the architectural landscape which frequently

---

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +39-347-9348367.
E-mail address: verenob@libero.it

conforms merely to political and financial criteria and policies favouring consumption. By extracting an urban area from its territory and historical past, it often becomes indifferent and alien to its inhabitants. An urban centre often adopts the characteristics of an assembly line of skilled parts with determined functions: productive, commercial, financial, political and institutional, artistic, recreational (night clubs, restaurants, parks etc.), and for communication (stations, airports, road and rail interchanges). These features of the modern city and its transformation into a metropolis constitute forms of "deterritorializzazione" and are related to the environmental crisis which also represents a human crisis.

2. Deterritorializzazione and misrecognition

Cities are scattered everywhere and we live in widespread urban spaces, which are at times continuous, at times fragmented, where the flow of motor vehicles, physical and digital networks and new and changeable relationships connect and link empirical and virtual spaces. The separation between inner city and periphery can no longer be maintained. City centre and periphery are everywhere and nowhere. Both share the lack of identity and a scarce sense of belonging on the part of the population.

"Deterritorializzazione" causes a striking increase in the degradation of nature through the collapse of the natural cycles which are drastically accelerated. This produces pollution, disregard for the geomorphology of the territory, and the loss of the identity and cultural heritage of places. Furthermore, the renovation of ancient monuments and buildings is not carried out with the aim to restore relics from the past but for the purposes of local tourism. In addition, the excessive reliance on new technologies and the economic system often leads to a complete distortion of the specific and, at times, unique characteristics of the place. The problems of pollution and the accelerated destruction of non-renewable resources are accompanied by the loss of that "environmental knowledge" which characterised the relationship between settlements and the territory.

The effects of "deterritorializzazione" affect man's physical and mental dimension by compromising the quality of life with phenomena such as social and psychological alienation, standardisation, destruction of cultural differences, loss of traditional human interaction which constitute the collective and local identity. The creation of a uniform global landscape, which is separate and apart from the territory, leads to human degradation: urbanisation that causes numerous strata of the population to precipitate into "unsustainable" forms of life. From this point of view the weaker segment of the population is cast to "the margins" of society with the margins being of a spatial, social, economic, psychological, cultural and political nature (Bauman, 1998). The alienation of much of the population is characterised by social, emotional and juridical misrecognition. At the basis of these forms of misrecognition we often discover the inability to take part in the struggle for power and the logic of consumption. Only through consumption is it possible to gain access to certain urban spaces. The "Metropoli Consumata" (Sassen, 1996, 2009) – "Consumed Metropolis" alienates those people who are unable to consume. This phenomenon presents itself as far as the unstoppable spread of the "total city" is concerned, where widespread urbanisation is characterised by "deterritorializzazione" and the destruction of places and territories with the consequent loss of a sense of belonging, together with the loss of a sense of identity and the mutual relationships among the population and with the environment. However, "deterritorializzazione" and the multiple negative consequences for man and the environment is not only a phenomenon produced by capitalism and the logic of consumption. Such phenomena raise a more profound issue as their origins are rooted in the scientific and technological culture (not only in the Western world) of modern man which aims at power and control for their own sake.

3. Non-places and disorientation

Urban spaces often acquire the features of non-places (Augé, 1992). Anthropological places are characterised by the identity of their inhabitants. These symbolic contexts, or "existential spaces" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945), in which continuous human interactions are generated, are the result of historical processes where the members of the local community can interact with one another in a fluid network of a personal, linguistic and symbolic nature.

These places are spaces in which people come to know themselves and reciprocally acknowledge others as being part of a narrative of human experiences. In addition, they are places of remembrance and hospitality, and also provide a sense of belonging.