

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
FIRST SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
Master of Science in Architecture Construction City
Honors theses

Through a slum

Actors and words, history and interpretation of the social and spatial segregation in the (in)visible city. The case of the Villa 15 in Buenos Aires

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Investigation on the informal settlements, between characteristics and identity, from the historical genesis to the colorations of the language, over the rigid and segregating classifications. An inside and direct observation of a *slum* in Buenos Aires, the *Villa 15*, ground of a possible experimentation in a different approach. Choosing to go beyond the frontier that separates the North from the South, not only different geographies, but anymore cultures, histories and different looks, but not invisible. Starts from city, a metropolis, catalytic of the South America geometries: Buenos Aires. Capital, a potential future territory¹, in a precarious balance, crossed by speed and voracity, in a trajectory that seems to mark the whole new urban realities, those that are below the equator. They appear to our eyes like divided, in a continuous conflict between civilization and barbarity², city that invades country, illegality that scares legality.

In between these contrasts there are the citizens and their way of living in the city: some of them live in wealthy gated communities, while others live in informal settlements, the slums, places painted always in black. There are the London's back streets of the 19th century which have nowadays different names: *bidonville*, *favela*, *villa miseria* and so on in many other languages, however always as a synonymous of poverty, degradation and violence. The city of the rich and the city of the poor³, the place of inequalities and distances imposed by fear. The same fear which operates thanks to the so called security and produces nothing but intolerance⁴.



Fig.1 Aerial Photo of the Villa 15, the Ciudad Oculta and the Elephant Blanco, within the city of Buenos Aires

The exploration starts from the *Taller Forma&Proyecto*, lecture given by the professor Fernandez Castro at the Architecture University of Buenos Aires, based on the proposal of "urbanization" of the villa: new houses and facilities for the slum's dwellers. Parallel to this project, a fieldwork is developing with the professor Ricardo La Sarraga (FADU – UBA), where a new vision evolves. This type of research is not only spatial but also social and anthropological of the *villa* territory. Both work and project aim to increase the awareness about this topic.



Fig.2 The redevelopment project of the Elephant Blanco proposed within the Taller Forma y Proyecto (UBA)

The reworking led then to “a subsequent” learning with the teacher's Filippo De Pieri, from the Politecnico of Turin. Read and measure the change from various perspectives, tools to make visible those unknown islands inside the urban fabric. Interviews and stories of the people living there, people who know the reality, who are the protagonists of the experience. The language in the construction of the city: words can qualify, classify, organize and evaluate the experience, and by doing that they create new types of experience of the world and an action on it⁵.

The stigmatized lexicon⁶ and a superficial observation make informal settlements the marginal areas and problems of the metropolis. The link with our times is given by the time, through the history arise policies and decisions that led to the present.

Narrative of a new direction, where the city is generic and grows out of control, mega and after the metropolis, in a transitional form and unseizable. Sprawl become slums, the urban issue changes, becomes new. Causes and characteristics in an attempt to give an objective and transversal view, not all-encompassing, because diversity is an integral part of the phenomenon of informal settlements, there is no simple opposition, is identity.

The inside, the focus on Villa 15, not only numbers and statistics but the actual condition in its specificity. The need for infrastructure and facilities to make citizen who is not. A course "upside down" in order to identify the strategies, recognizing the potential and suggesting the possibility. Not only survival but change, which starts from being able to see.

¹ Giorgio Piccinato, *Città del mondo*, Macerata, Quodlibet Studio, 2009.

² Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Culturales Argentinas, 1961.

³ Bernardo Secchi, *La città dei ricchi e la città dei poveri*, Bari, Laterza, 2013.

⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Fiducia e paura nella città*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2005.

⁵ Christian Topalov, *L'aventure des mots de la ville*, Paris, Editions Robert Laffont, 2010.

⁶ Jean-Charles Depaule, *Les mots de la stigmatisation urbaine*, Paris, Editions de la Maison de sciences de l'homme, 2006.



Fig. 3 View inside the Villa 15, in the background the abandoned skeleton of the Elephant Blanco

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