

Multi-Ethnic Urban Space. New signs on the territory

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Methodological approach: a qualitative analysis.

This study intends to examine urban space transformations and changes resulting from the presence of an increasingly higher number of immigrants within the city's social texture.

The analysis is carried out at two levels, one focusing on the social-cultural aspects, the other on territorial aspects. The aim is to use empirical observations to show how social and cultural factors strongly interact with urban environments and their changes, in an attempt to identify the ways in which certain processes occur and to define their " visible traces " in the urban texture.

The survey has been restricted to immigrant communities from the African and South American continents; this choice was made necessary by the vastness of the topic under exam.

The research intends to provide an overview of the current situation, identifying wherever possible the signs of social and spatial transformations affecting the environment. By signs we mean visible changes in architectural aspects (transformation of residential spaces, premises run by immigrants and used as shops, restaurants, cafés, mosques, etc. installed on the territory), different use of public areas (meeting places in the streets etc.), new relationship between outside and inside spaces (blurred boundaries between public areas and areas open to the public).

The following methodology criteria have been adopted in this study:

- empirical research carried out directly on immigrants (although, lacking a representative sample, all generalizations have been avoided);
- use of non-institutional channels in establishing contacts;
- combined use of three different approaches: participant's observation, photographic documentation, interviews.

With respect to the two levels of analysis – social-cultural and spatial – the work has been divided into three general sectors: " conceptual " space, inside space and outside space.

" Conceptual " space: identification of the cultural features, if visible, characterizing each ethnic group, identification of the different migration paths and patterns of interaction between the various groups of immigrants and between the latter and the Italian population; analytical process description which characterizes such observation, and definition of tools adopted along the way.

Inside space: spatial analysis of homes and family relations inside them.



Outside space: spatial analysis of work places and social relations inside them, spatial analysis of worship places and of the role religion plays among immigrants, analysis of cultural associations and their relationships with migrants, analysis of problems connected with education, analysis of meeting places and of the socializing mechanisms inside them. Lastly, analysis of urban and architectural modifications resulting from the new migrant settlements.





Areas for more in-depth study have been identified within each sector. This work does not claim to be exhaustive – its structure is, in fact, designed to trigger further in-depth research on the various topics or to develop into other study areas. All of this is made possible by the fact that the tools adopted are extremely sensitive to the speed and instability of changes.

Research data have been collected through direct observation; the diversity of situations found could hardly be subsumed within a pre-defined scheme, and necessarily required the use of different tools, such as interviewing, creating and filling in observation sheets, taking photographs and using multimedia communications.

Due to the empirical nature of this approach, it has been necessary to apply several specific criteria to organize our findings.

In view of the relatively heterogeneous nature of available materials, I believe that multimedia and hypertext applications may provide the most flexibility and therefore prove to be the most suitable media in which to publish the results of my study.

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