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Urbanities

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The authors are put alphabetically and have contributed equally to this publication.

Following a consolidated tradition since the first number of the journal, the 16th of Archi-DOCT is the result of a call for contribution focused on one single word “**Urbanities**”. When we were discussing the direction that we wanted to give to this issue, we concluded that we aimed to focus its critical slant - through a specific call to action to the schools of architectures and their students - towards a new interest concerning the multiple scales and resolutions of the so-called urban dimension.

During the last decades, centralized planning - as a result of the Modernist heritage - fostered the implementation of top-down hierarchic processes that despite the political and ideological background led the city to be suffering phenomena such as sprawling, undefined expansions, and the emergence of the alleged “urban voids” (that aroused a new matrix of problems and issues to be tackled).

Whether we refer to Rome, Tirana, Valencia, Athens, or any contemporary metropolis, these criticalities are far from being solved and, even less, we are close to defining a methodological approach that could suggest effective strategies to proactively remedy this condition. For this, we have been interested in collecting inputs from our authors in order to set the scene so that everyone could tell a specific story and personally question the keyword we choose.

Following a well-known narrative gimmick, we imagined this issue constructed using the formula of the “**frame story**”, a literary technique that serves as a companion piece to a story within a story, to build a palimpsest where our main narrative could be used by our contributors for a more emphasized second narrative or for a set of shorter stories that could relate to the topic of “**Urbanities**”.

We had two major inspirations to achieve our goal. The first one was the Decameron, one of the Italian most famous collections of novellas by the 14th-century author Giovanni Boccaccio. As in his prose, we wanted our authors to contribute to the main mosaic with tales of architectural wit, different nuances in approaching the topic, and with inspirations on how their practice and research could help to picture a less vague framework to address the topic of “Urbanities” through both a theoretical or practice-

based approach, and highlight the breadth and scope of the results their possible implementation could bring about.

The second deals with a specific dimension of the city in order to enrich the architectural practice with some hints coming from the semiotic features of urban areas. In his *L'invention du Quotidien* (1980), Michel de Certeau defined the city, due to the specific connotation of the word "urban fabric", as a proper "text", a textual entity continuously overwritten by the systems of practice and interventions that define their physical dimensions and connotations. Following the improvement of this concept by urban semiotics in the last twenty years, we claimed that the city is not simply a text but, as an always-changing living entity, it rather acts as a text (Lotman, 1998; Volli, 2008; Thibault, 2020) and, like the latter, it can be not only read but also approached, analyzed and understood.

At this point, what are these "**Urbanities**" and what is the main narrative we used to create our frame? With the term 'urbanities' we anticipate a possible constellation of projects that symbiotically operate to define the future urban environment and respond to multiple crises associated with intertwined issues such as climate change, flooding, land consumption, but also inequality, gender issues, production processes, and geopolitics. 'Urbanities' don't only convey a functional quality to the city, but they also carry within themselves a whole set of social, political, and human values. As a reflection of the IT era, they often inherit the multifunctionality at the core of the digital technologies that allow them to be open to phenomena of people's appropriation and re-semantization, which consequently lead to the rise of new aesthetics. In a city similar to a motherboard, 'urbanities' are small strings of codes that, as specific plug-ins, connect to the urban environment and become meaningful narrations that open to continuous rewritings where, as smaller texts, they are interconnected by their simultaneous presence within the city.

The 16th number of Archi-DOCT attracted five diverse pieces from doctoral students and researchers around the world, each of them with its specific narrations and intriguing approach to the issues presented in the call and with the subtle aspiration to directly illustrate their resonance within the real world.

Vertical Growing as an Opportunity for Reactivating Historical Quarters is a contribution submitted by **Maria Piqueras Blasco**, a PhD candidate at the Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain. Maria's essay aims to show how the concept of "Urbanities" could be applied, and implemented, in a specific morphological and dimensional configuration such as that of the city of Valencia. Introducing the migratory problems that afflicted the Spanish city during the 19th Century, the researcher focuses on the distortion and incoherent modifications with the original urban condition that these phenomena have caused over the last decades. Urging to propose an operative framework to cope with this crisis, the notion of "vertical growing" is proposed as a possible design solution to urban reactivation, providing regeneration of existing housing and to guarantee the sustainable construction of new ones. Such a topic is analyzed and discussed not only from an architectural point of view, but also through the investigation of the historical conditions and legal framework that characterized the previous dramatic and inefficient expansion model of the city.

Andrea Ariano, PhD Candidate at Sapienza - University of Rome, in his essay **COVID-19 as a catalyst for collaborative city-making: from emergency to praxis**, reflects on how the recent pandemic has largely affected the urban fabric and which future strategies we should foresee for more sustainable development. His work suggests that we should start looking at the city as a 'hackable system' where new processes of bottom-up city making incorporates

hacker culture and suggests a novel logic to organize urban society through social and digital media platforms. Andrea states that he established linear design methods should be replaced by flexible processes and experiential means, fostering a *what...if?* approach and test-feedback loops where the creation of spaces happens in collaboration with its users.

Flavia Magliacani, PhD candidate at Sapienza - University of Rome, approaches the topic through the juxtaposition of a further term the word 'urbanity'. In her piece, **Urban densities and diffuse urbanities, the researcher uses the concept of "density"** as the critical lens to investigate surprising diversification and heterogeneity of spatial practices that compose the actual "urban mosaics" of European cities. Inspired by Lefebvre's theoretical elaborations, the author challenges the reader on the idea of the urban dimension as a closed socio-spatial condition and, indeed, on the necessity of redefining the real urbanity concept through a proper and updated system of tools and practices. The paper pictures an intriguing complex system of different urbanities, each one with its nature and peculiarities, explaining that only through the capacity to manage this complexity we could be able to foster alternative dynamics for urban regeneration.

Recovered materials for participatory urban design processes: The case of Struga City, is the third paper and the fruit of the collaboration between **Gerdí Papa** and **Emel Petërçi**, respectively Doctor of Philosophy and PhD candidate at POLIS University, Tirana. The objective of their research is two-folded: on the one hand, they want to demonstrate how the methods of urban design can benefit from a more sustainable approach based on recovered materials as transformative resources for design practices and how the latter could impact specific problematic urban scenarios; on the other hand, the paper presents the results of a community-based workshop in Struga, Northern Macedonia, where through dynamics of civic engagement and empowerment, recovered materials can be a meaningful agent to ignite urban transformations and improve the conditions of the built environment.

Roman Diaforentities. Interdisciplinary insights for urban regeneration in Rome, authored by **Anna Riciputo**, PhD from Sapienza - University of Rome, attempts to propose an operative methodology that frames the concept of "Urbanities" within the anthropological meaning of the notion of the border. Through the term Diaforentity, borrowed from anthropologist Pietro Vereni, the author aims to address the real meaning of non-place and junk space and offer new perspectives that could allow us to intervene and to prepare a new dialectical strategy between old and new, between the historical traces and the need to introduce the screech of contemporaneity into the palimpsest of the consolidated city. As the object of her investigation, the author focuses on a specific neighborhood of the city of Rome, the Mandrione area, whose existential condition is by now trapped between a glorious ancient past and a recent past of misery and rubble. Architecture's role is twofold: to recompose this fracture: firstly, it serves as a tool to understand the ontological conditions of the urban environment and, secondly, through gained knowledge discloses how urban regenerations is a matter of tangible and intangible injections within the flow of time.

The last paper **Architecture within infrastructure: habitable bridges** as a vector for social urban regeneration, is delivered by **Bianca Andaloro**, PhD candidate at the University of Palermo. Bianca's essay is articulated around the concept of the bridge not just as an architectural and engineering typology, but as a concrete possibility to regenerate and reactivate the urban environment of our metropolises. Specifically, the entity of the inhabited bridge is a valid approach to confront the needs of the city and its inhabitants and to offer them new types of public and flexible spaces. The typology of infrastructures is analyzed from a historical and functional perspective,



demonstrating how enzymes of multi-scalarity, multi-temporality, and multi-functionality can be used as a proper design material to define new “urbanities” that can address the complexity of the urban tissue.

These are the six contributions that have been selected to compose the “frame story” we imagined for this new issue of Archi-DOCT. At the beginning of this journey, our intent was not so much to propose another new agenda - we already have plenty of those - but rather to juxtapose these practices - independently from the scale of the ‘urbanities’ proposed by the authors - with what is already happening ‘out there’, how this speculation regarding the urban could potentially inflect, positively or negatively the recomposition of the fracture within theory and praxis in the realm of architecture.

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