

## **Report on the EURA Conference held in Milan, Italy** **'Learning Cities in a Knowledge Based Society'** 9-11 October 2008

### **LEARNING CITIES IN A KNOWLEDGE BASED SOCIETY - XI EURA conference in Milan**

The 11th EURA conference took place in Milan, on 9<sup>th</sup>-11th October 2008. More than 200 scholars participated in this special event, hosted by the Faculty of Architecture and Society of Politecnico di Milano, in particular by the Department of Architecture and Planning.

- The conference gathered 126 papers presented by 178 authors who presented a vibrant image of a growing scientific community (most participants were not EURA members) from all over Europe and beyond. Many PhD students and young researchers were interested in presenting their research results and discussing them. 204 people registered and took part in the event; some 80 students of master courses of Politecnico also took part in the opening and closing session.
- The title of the conference showed its consistency and relevance for a reflection on the role that cities play and are asked to play in a *Knowledge based society*. The conference discussed the paradoxes offered by cities: cities central competitive nodes, where concentration and exchanges of information and innovation go on producing new forms of economy, welfare and richness, but also, cities, where new forms of poverty and exclusion have emerged. It looked at cities also as significant and provoking social laboratories, in which the notion of citizenship is questioned and people learn to deal with change and the multiplication of differences generated by a mobile, multicultural society. And, finally, cities as settings for institutional and political innovation: where major transformations compel institutions to face new emerging societal problems and to develop new skills and experience, new forms of governance, leadership, democracy, policies and politics.

#### **Box 1: Four tracks**

##### **EMERGING SPATIAL PLANNING PRACTICES**

Track chairs: Liliana Padovani, Carolina Pacchi,  
Track coordinator: Paola Briata

##### ➤ **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND URBAN CHANGE**

Track chairs: Roberto Camagni, Gabriele Pasqui  
Track coordinator: Simonetta Armondi

##### ➤ **LEARNING THROUGH GOVERNANCE**

Track chairs: Pierluigi Crosta, Valeria Fedeli,  
Track coordinator: Davide Ponzini

##### ➤ **INTEGRATION AND COHESION IN KNOWLEDGE-BASED URBAN SOCIETIES**

Track chairs: Serena Vicari, Antonio Tosi,  
Track coordinator: Marianna d'Ovidio

- Keynote speeches in the opening and final sessions were thought provoking: in the closing session Mario Pezzini (OECD) proposed to reflect upon the way in which cities are still important places of concentration, although this is neither sufficient nor necessary in terms of development. In fact he has shown that current processes of urbanization are not actually reducing disparities. On the contrary differences and inequalities are still persisting (and growing), though changing in their profiles. This has implications for urban policies, since they have to face a role of cities which cannot be taken for granted and for urban studies, as there are territories and cities whose competitiveness is not linked with the traditional characteristics of an urban environment. In this sense the closing and opening sessions tried to answer a double question: what can we learn from cities and to what extent are cities learning? Cities are real "working site": the local level appears stressed by processes of social, economic and political

change. And in certain cases they organised to learn through action and research: as Lucy De Groot showed, this is one of the major tasks cities are undergoing. Efforts for producing interpretation of ongoing processes and visions for the future are evident all over the world. Cities are engaged in complex processes of interpretation and at the same time trying to innovate in their modes of action. Of course, this is rather difficult, as discussed by prof. Dente in the opening session. "Has urban government learned new ways to cope with old and new problems? How has this affected the institutional dimension? And which are the implications for future research?". He argued that "it is not clear whether some cities have engaged themselves in these exercises far better than others". Mostly in the field of institutional innovation (forms of government) and planning: he concluded that "both institutions and planning have very slightly changed in order to face the new challenges of society". Much work has to be done in this direction. As prof. Martinotti discussed in his presentation, it is always more difficult to talk about *society*. What we are facing are actually the challenges proposed by a network society, "VERNETZUNGSSCHAFT". This implies the relevance of "simulation" (rather than the stress on will); of "avatar" (rather than "individuals" and "persona"); on "credit" (rather than "possession and wealth"), of "derivates" (rather than "land and money") and on "covenants" - and of an "I accept" perspective- (rather than on "family law" or "contracts"). What this implies in terms of the role of planning, was the focus of prof. Amin's key note lecture. In front of what he defined the "decline of 'knowing' tradition in urban planning" he discussed the "rise of 'pragmatist or deliberative' tradition". One able to acknowledge complexity but also to act programmatically, to "plan with contemporary social visionaries", to "plan in contexts of emergencies" such as "Infrastructural collapse or militarization, sprawl, disconnection, polarisation, economic exposure and vulnerability, risk assessment and preparedness, racism, social intolerance, poverty, public culture on hold".

- All presentations will be available on the EURA Milan conference website.

#### **Box 2**

##### OPENING SESSION KEYNOTE SPEECHES

**"The Urban Public Realm After The Good Citizen", prof. Ash Amin, Durham University**

**"Is urban government able to learn?", prof. Bruno Dente, Politecnico di Milano**

##### CLOSING SESSION KEYNOTE SPEECHES

**"Surfing the tsunami. Understanding places in meta-cities", prof. Bruno Martinotti, Fondazione SUM**

**"Learning Cities in a Knowledge Based Society – a local government perspective", Mrs Lucy De Groot, IDEA**

**"Competitiveness FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT", Mr Mario Pezzini, OECD**

- The conference organizers offered participants a further learning experience on the city and the urban context of the Milan city-region through an exhibition devoted to the exploration of Milan urban region and promoted by the province of Milan in collaboration with the Department of Architecture and Planning. Videos, maps, data, interviews presenting a complex urban context, living profound processes of transformations, which care challenging cities and laboratories. Mobile workshops organized on Thursday afternoon have tried to offer EURA conference participants an overview of the ongoing major challenges and processes and some hints on the reaction from the city via policies and projects.

#### **Box 3: Mobile workshops**

- 1. Sectioning the city region. A bike tour along the Martesana canal**
- 2. The Bicocca neighbourhood. Knowledge city: the University and the Metropolis**
- 3. Visiting the new exhibition area in Rho-Pero**
- 4. Visiting Sarpi, a Chinese neighbourhood**
- 5. From Duomo to Rozzano: discovering Milan urban region**
- 6. Parco Nord**
- 7. Milan and Its Music Places. A Historical Introduction**

- Finally it was for us a learning experience also from the organizational point of view: three departments of three different universities, PhD students, master students, researchers and full professors, have collaborated in building this event, in line with EURA's philosophy.

**Box 4**

The conference was organized by the Department of Architecture and Planning of Politecnico di Milano, in collaboration with the Department of Sociology and Social Research of University Milano-Bicocca and the Department of Planning, Università IUAV di Venezia

**CONFERENCE CHAIR**

Alessandro Balducci

**SCIENTIFIC BOARD**

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Luciano Vettoreto, Serena Vicari.

**CONFERENCE ORGANISERS**

Valeria Fedeli (coordinator), Simonetta Armondi, Giulia Amadasi, Paola Briata, Carolina Pacchi, Davide Ponzini, Marianna D'Ovidio, Giulia Fini, Marianna Giraudi, Valeria Inguaggiato, Gabriele Pasqui, Anna Moro, Lina Scavuzzo, Daniele Villa.

**Box 5**

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**Box 6**

EXHIBITIONS

**SPAZIO MOSTRE**

**VIVIMI 6-11<sup>th</sup> October**

In the occasion of the 11th EURA conference, the Faculty Exhibition Hall has hosted an exhibition dedicated to "**PROGETTO STRATEGICO CITTÀ DI CITTÀ**", promoted and produced by the Provincial Administration of Milan in collaboration with DiAP. **The Exhibition "VIVIMI"** was originally held in Triennale di Milano in 2007 and was then, after a restyling, reproduced in several Municipalities of the Province: it provides interpretative description of Milan Urban Region and a vision for its future.

[www.cittadicitta.it](http://www.cittadicitta.it)

Next to the Exhibition Hall, the "Tunnel" and Agorà area, have hosted: the outcome of a photographic competition launched on the web on the themes of the mobile workshops organized for the conference; a sound installation by the architect and musician Nicola Ratti which reflected upon the correspondences between visual and auditory perception of territory; a series of videos about the spaces of the contemporary city from the photographer and video artist Cedrick Eymenier; Posters and installation of GFOSS <http://www.gfoss.it/mapparemilano>.

**Box 7**

**NUMBERS**

**198 participants**

- 178 authors/ 126 papers
- 20 visitors

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85 eura members  
113 non members

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7 Eastern EUROPE  
9 Non EUROPE // 3 usa, 1 japan, 1 israeli, 4 iran  
35 ph d students

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**PAPER/ sessions**

Track 1/ 9 parallel session/ 33 authors  
Track 2/ 7 parallel sessions/ 25 authors  
Track 3/ 42 authors  
Track 4/ 7 parallel session/26 authors