

Diversity as a marker of the temporality of the city.

English version

The International Students of History Association (ISHA) conference that will take place in June 2016 will focus on the question of temporality in the city and the use of the notion of diversity as an analytical tool. This theme is a reflection of current work in urban sociology regarding urban renewal and its influence on the notion of “inhabitation”.

In “Urbanism as a way of life”, Louis Wirth (1938) submits a definition of the city encompassing spatial, social and temporal criteria; a relatively wide and dense space inhabited and occupied permanently by groups and individuals with heterogeneous characteristics. Jacques Levy (2003), when he defines diversity, explains that it should be understood as the “ratio between the level of heterogeneity of co-present realities in a given space and the level existing in a wider space in which the former is contained and that is used as a referent”. Using Wirth’s concepts, he proceeds to give three categories of diversity: social groups, productive activities and functions. The functions of the city are defined by the combination of the relations between its sociological composition and the activities it hosts (Marcel Roncayolo, 1990). The city, then, is no longer only considered with its social or physical aspects in mind, but in its production of diverse space in relation to the referent space that encompasses it. This argument raises as many questions it opens doors.

The main problem with this definition is its practicality: how can one observe and measure diversity? Levy suggests that we concentrate on two phenomena: co-presence and interrelations. A diversified territory would thus be characterised by the coexistence of many groups and several activities that would be more or less in relation with one-another. The function of this territory can be read by measuring the activities in orientation of their production (to the territory in question or outward) Yet the co-presence of individuals, groups and heterogeneous activities isn’t necessarily correlated with the formation of relations and, thus, diversity; a space can be characterised by a heavy density of activities without these being connected.

Given this, several initial lines of approach can be envisaged. The physical composition of the territory, the stratification of times, functions, activities and groups that lived there, forces the researcher to look at urban materials with historical considerations, and also with a diachronic analysis of the occupation of space. The modern city puts forward economical functions (Halbwachs, 1938) to the point of creating financial centers that aren’t cities sociologically speaking, but single-activity zones (la Défense, the City, Silicon Valley). The urban frame is

scarred with these areas that have, at one time, a monofunctional vocation. One must distinguish, like Magnaghi (Alberto Magnaghi, 2000), between metropolis and big city, the urban space from the city according to their composition and their function. The city would be a more heterogeneous composition than the urban space, mixing different activities and functions in a combination that is conducive to promote different forms of diversity.

In European cities, because of the co-presence of multiple types of habitats and activities, diversity is stronger in their city-centers than in their suburbs or their peri-urban areas. Political, religious, commercial or residential functions are concurrent in places where one can observe a strong mix of the poorer and the affluent populations, which fosters potential diversity. The analysis of relationships, of trading, and of meeting places, allows the researcher to report in the realization of this potential over time.

Research focus 1: Methodology : how can diversity be observed?

The main issue with the discussion above is its practical application. How can one observe and measure the diversity of a territory with spatial and temporal categories? According to what has previously been said, a comparison based on selected criteria between one space and the space it is enclosed in is a seemingly good option. It boils down to an analysis of the difference between territorial heterogeneities. It appears however more relevant to introduce the notions of co-presence and co-spatiality that echo the study of the relations between the different elements that make up the territory. (Lewis Mumford, 1960).

Moreover, these relations evolve with the transformation of the roles of the actors and the production methods, leading to a mutation of the city which is more or less visible. This transformation can potentially reduce the diversity of a space compared to the space it is included in. Is it then a displacement of the city? Can this phenomenon be explained with the metaphor of connected vessels or is this displacement visible in the territory thanks to the progressive reconversion of the surrounding spaces?

Research Focus 2 : Patrimonialisation, Renovation and diversification of the city.

In the foreword of his book *Lecture de ville*, Marcel Roncayolo (2002) reminds the reader that the time of the city is plural (making, uses and practices) and that it evolves at different paces and time scales. Patrimonialisation is one of the processes that plays with time in the city: it freezes specific places in time. This is an important activity because it gives meaning to the city by making visible different time strata through architectural diversity. But this aesthetic diversity often fosters social homogeneity as it accompanies a process of gentrification (Hovig Ter Minassian, 2012). One can therefore wonder if it is possible to consider the

copresence of architecture styles from different times as a sign of all types of diversity. Parallel to patrimonialization, another activity plays with time in the city: urban renewal. The latter seeks to update the city, to make it more relevant to the present. Most of the urban renewal operations nowadays come from the acknowledgement of the failure of functionalism. Circumventing functionalism was first a theoretic decision, advocated by Françoise Chaoy (1980), who wanted to reclaim history, words and symbols in urban studies. Then, it became a practical challenge, as the work of Magnaghi on the local project testifies. He criticizes the transformation of human-beings into residents of metropolises when we should be inhabitants of big cities, that is to say individuals involved in their local areas. If those two authors do not explicitly discuss diversity, their reflections can contribute to our understanding of the creation of diverse spaces. Are public policies able to create architectural and urbanistic forms that give shape to a city, or can they only produce urban spaces? How can functionalism be circumvented in the field, and can diversity be ‘injected’ into spaces where there is none? Finally, is it possible to create diversity by suggesting different ways of living and renewed local public policies, rather bottom-up down than top-down, as proposed by Magnaghi?

Research focus 3: The diversity of cities and forms habitation: Ephemeral cities, utopian cities, mobile cities

The definition of the city as a habitat was proposed by Max Weber in 1921. This concept was used to describe the city and the territory from different perspectives: geographical, sociological, historical, and philosophical (Paquot et al, 2007). From the moment of a city’s foundation, they become a utopia, a myth, and nourish the urban imagination, dreams, expectations, and wishes of its inhabitants. Historical events, like wars and natural catastrophes – earthquakes, fires, or tsunamis – may have important implications for urban form. The city landscape can change radically- it can be completely destroyed and rebuilt on the same site, demonstrating its resilience.

In other cases, cities have been moved and refounded elsewhere (Alain Musset, 2002). But the diversity of cities cannot simply be attributed to chance. Public policy plays a fundamental role in the constant transformation of cities and their functions. The city’s limits expand as the boundaries between different neighborhoods merge with the new urban borders. The location of social housing, the rental prices, the definition of priority areas, among other things, mark heterogeneity but can also sometimes indicate socio-spatial segregation. However, residents are not always silent and inactive, the poor can seek to obtain their “droit à la ville”, changing the urban landscape with the creation of activities beyond their domestic sphere: leisure, business, artistic venues, etc.

This research group focuses on a simultaneous approach to the diversity *of* cities and diversity *in* cities. If, at the neighborhood level, the city can experience strong heterogeneity of its activities and its lifestyles, this diversity can be transferred in both time and space. Therefore, the city, as a result of diversity, can move, change and mutate. The city is therefore not static or fixed to a particular territory. But how can we analyze the movements of the city? Can we predict its movement? How do we distinguish the city - according to the definition that we developed earlier – of the inhibitor?