

Atlas Of Re.cycle. A learning tool for abandoned cultural Heritage

A. Luigini*, C. Rizzi**

* Faculty of Education, Free University of Bozen

** Department of Civil, Environmental and Mechanical Engineering, University of Trento

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◆ ABSTRACT

This contribution aims to develop a concept expressed in a recent paper presented at the international scientific conferences "Heritage urbanism" in Zagabria and "ReUso2015" in Valencia. Due to the large amount of neglected and abandoned buildings in Europe, the definition of heritage needs a new paradigm. The recycle of existing artifacts includes a new range of values that updates the typological, chronological and geographic extension of the notion of historical heritage proposed by Françoise Choay.

This update process defines a new theoretical and practical horizon that entails new categories of mapping and new approaches of evaluation and intervention.

The techno-ontological infrastructure that best works for this proposal is the Atlas: an "OpenStreetMap" based on ODC Open Database License (ODdL) and developed in a shared mode with social context. It can be seen not only as simple listing and geo-referencing of buildings or generally manufactured structure to "re.cycle", but as a real learning tool capable of organizing and categorizing the artifacts suitably.

Heritage in the Re.Cycle age

We are in the Re.cyle age. The topic of recycling is not a new one. The exhibition "Re-cycle; Strategies for architecture, the city and the planet" held at the MAXXI museum in Rome in 2011, presented important examples of new cycles of life for architectures and landscapes. However, the innovative aspect emerged in the recent research program of national interest (PRIN) "Re-cycle Italy" is that recycling is a new paradigm and not a countermeasure in a particular contingency.

"Architecture and the city have always recycled themselves. Examples like Split, like the Theatre of Marcello in Rome or the Cathedral of Siracusa, just to mention three of the most obvious examples, are manifests of recycling. These are not restorations. The idea of preservation tends to embalm the image of architectural or urban space giving value to the immutable. The process of recycling changes its value when it manages to generate Fig.s as those in the aforementioned cases. The innovative aspect of the contemporary condition lays in considering this policy as strategic for the city, its architecture and derelict landscapes. The recycling paradigm is in contrast with the paradigms of new construction and demolition that have dominated the modern age, but not in a banal way. What interests us here is only observing the recycling experiences that produce culture, beauty and urban quality for the city." (Ricci M., 2012)

The key issues to understand this phenomenon are the large number of abandoned buildings and landscapes in the post-industrial territories and the new ecological consciousness.

Numbers | In one of his famous “Scritti Corsari” Pier Paolo Pasolini argues that in contemporary age the word ‘development’ is misunderstood as synonymous of progress. With the first term, he referred to the trend toward an increasing production of goods with the real benefit of a few, and with the second, the improvement of collective conditions of life.

Pasolini argues that development, welcomed by the mass as an opportunity of emancipation, was a bearer of new consumption values. After few decades, the effect of the ideology that Pasolini called the “blue-jeans Jesus”, a kind of unconditional faith in the consumer product, are evident.

Buildings and infrastructures were considered as consumption products; environment, soil and landscape as unlimited resources. In Italy, from 1999 to 2009 approximately 300 million cubic meters per year were built. The data show that the national level of exploited soil has increased from 2.7% in the ‘50s to a 7.0% estimated for 2014, an increase of 4.3 percentage points. In absolute terms, it is estimated that the consumption of land has now affected some 21,000 square kilometres of our territory (ISPRA, 2015).

In 2013 about five millions vacant apartments or buildings were recorded, while in 2012 the cumulative Italian brownfields area was as big as the whole Umbria region (ISTAT).

Ecological consciousness | In the last decades ecology has become a central issue in architecture and urbanism debate. As C. Waldheim in one of his articles points out, the emerging of ecology in urban disciplines describes “the aspirations of an urban practice aware of environmental issues and imbued with the sensibilities associated with landscape.” It “reveals the ongoing need for re-qualifying urban design as it attempts to describe the environmental, economic, and social conditions of the contemporary city.” (Waldheim C., 2011) It is a radical change of approach where both specialists and society address the challenges of the future. Recycling as paradigm is a part of this change.

Heritage | Recycling means creating new values and new meanings (...) It’s an ecological action that pushes what exists into the future by transforming waste into something that prominently stands out (Ricci M., 2012).

In this sense recycling as paradigm introduces a question about the issue of heritage. It undermines the traditional meaning of what is worth of being inherited. The 1989 marks the crisis of the monument. After the end of the Cold War the Iron Curtain was transformed: the void becomes a space to be indicated and transformed into an updated version of a monument.

According to Zygmunt Bauman, we can affirm that today monuments are as contingent, fragile and perishable as what they commemorate.

Atlas

The new meaning of heritage requires different tools and approaches. This update process defines a new theoretical and practical horizon that entails new categories of mapping and new approaches of evaluation and intervention. Atlas is not only a bound collection of maps, but also a volume of charts, graphs, or tables illustrating a subject. It is not a new tool, but

recent technologies and new social approaches based on sharing communities can help us to define a new kind of Atlas for recycling of existing heritage.

The recycle of existing heritage includes a new range of values that updates the typological, chronological and geographic extension of the notion of historical heritage proposed by Françoise Choay.

New collective values are non-utopian, conversational, and non-structuralist. They concern everyday, ordinary life and reality. A scenario determined by the fast challenges of last years – the effects of economic and ecological crisis, but also the great acceleration of innovation in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) – has transformed every citizen in a potential recycle cartographer and city maker.

Atlas can be considered sort of open-ended tool to test and to experiment a new form of urban renaissance based on a collective intelligence. The laboratory-city is the hypothesis of this experiment. “The cultural and tangible background of practices related to urban and architectural recycling as a response to the new economic and social scenarios and the urgent environmental needs regarding resource management, is now a laboratory where the new smartness of the city and of its communities informs the way advanced technologies and information are used, actions are carried out, and decisions are made in an *open process*” (Nava C., 2016)

Representation as knowledge tool: why social is better?

To arrange, to measure, to classify, are the actions of the construction of new alternative ways to simple list paratactic processes. The shift from quantitative listing to qualitative observation is made increasingly difficult by the overabundance of available information – both automatic or voluntary – and brings the need of critical data analysis tools to a level that was unimaginable only a few years ago.

The possibility expressed by the social cartography is a transition – mostly already started – that marks an era: the users’ participation in the creation of the Atlas can be a carrier of the same elements of the social potential that later could become the totality of all consumers of the spaces resulting from the recycling processes. It constitutes a virtuous route that springs from participation to get to the social use of abandoned heritage, through innovative design visions, open to non-authorial forms of project. (Rykwert J., 2002)

A similar projection has been anticipated, in the first half of the ‘90s, by Mitchell, who in “The city of bits” wondered – and partially provided answers – about the role of the voyeurism/participation dichotomy, recognizing that the integration of the world of atoms and the world of bits precisely promotes this substantial shift between two approaches, between two “positions” towards the Reality by citizens (Mitchell W., 1995).

Since when urban space is also lived through mobile connectivity and geo-referencing of various social and relational information, it describes a very liquid geography, to decline Bauman’s lucky metaphor, where the construction of the sense of place inevitably passes through the

complex system of relationships that the places are able to host, promote and increase (Gordon E. -de Souza A., 2011). And the citizen that passes by the sharing of emotions to share critical information makes social networks resilient: no longer users/actors of relationships between people in places but citizens/sensors capable of determining relationships between people and places. Some clarifying examples are related to emergencies caused by floods or earthquakes which, unfortunately, we often witness and where citizens/sensors have played a key role in mapping real-time status of the heritage, infrastructure and other citizens. Known to most are the Ligurian flood, the earthquake in Haiti or the tsunami in Japan that have worked as field of participative development of shared platforms.

The process depends, however, on the technological infrastructure in which the social meaning of this process is configured: the current territorial representation instruments, clearly, allow a spreading and deepening of the previously described practices and open new scenarios compared to the previous local policies, isolated from overall general broader context.

The territorial description systems, based on the sharing of information (from Google Maps and OpenStreetMap to Crowdmap, Ushahidi and others) are open systems of voluntary mapping by citizens/sensors which take major benefits from the use of both input and output data: in getting to know and to use a space the user/sensor is brought naturally to become itself a resilient bearer of a shared know-how and, therefore, to establish an open relationship with the space itself and the perception of it by other users (Goodchild M., 2007).

Therefore, it goes from a system based on "expert knowledge" to a system based on "collective knowledge", in favour of the correct identification of project inputs and social issues. Thus, the project supported by a system of representation like that is aimed at a much more likely success, having the chance to mature on the input of users/sensors that later will be the users of reuse.

The proposed Atlas is not a mere collection of mappings, but it is a self-mapping system that the users themselves can trigger, defining the descriptions of the places to undergo processes of reuse, creating the relationships with the places both before and after the reuse actions.

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