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URBAN SAFETY AND SECURITY

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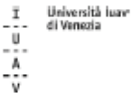

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Foreword:
An Introduction to Urban Safety and Security

Emanuela Bonini Lessing

This book is about three scientific works, two of them led by Iuav University of Venice, the other one by SUPSI and performed with the contribution of Iuav scholars. Although their primary objectives differ from one another, the policies on security and safety in chosen contemporary cities and territories can be indicated as their common thread.

The studies give accounts of the putting into action of different local strategies showing an impact on urban security – being it the main goal or only a 'secondary effect' of the observed urban policies, and being their result effective or only perceived. The essays describe the process, the stakeholders involved and their role, as well as the specific tools that have been employed.

The case studies reveal site-specific consequences both on the urban fabric as well as on the lifestyle of different social groups, due to a variety of described undertaken actions. They also encourage new considerations on the significance of only apparently theoretical constructs, like welfare and right to citizenship – the latter intended not only as the right to live in a nation, but also as the right to be part of a broader community and to share the same standards of living. It is put in evidence the existence (or absence) of a space of negotiation among the stakeholders on issues affecting urban assets, like the destination and the use of public space. The quality and the nature of this negotiation, and the degree of interaction between the subjects, can have an impact not only on effective criminality but also on risk perception – which affects in its turn, and even more powerfully, the demand for other public and private interventions on matters concerning safety and security.

Comparing European and non-European case studies revealed itself to be a necessary research methodology considering the increasing economic gap that is progressively characterising the social context of the European countries – traced in previous time only in other continents, like Africa and Latin-America – as well as in areas of many European nations. Also,

financial assets proved to be global but the way they influence the local situations, and the way they affect the living conditions experienced in urban areas, differ considerably.

It is therefore not surprising that scholars working on different researches describe situations that reveal complementary aspects, similar policies and actions, common trends one with another. The sequence of the essays included in the book allows to understand the aims, the methodologies and the achievements of the three studies – but considerations crossing the studies are possible too.

A common thread distinguishing all the researches is that public spaces are 'spaces of mediation' that can play a role in preventing segregation and fostering peaceful coexistence. In particular, the researches conducted by some of the IUAV *Reducing Boundaries* scholars and by some of the members of the Laboratory of Visual Culture – SUPSI *Mobile Access to Knowledge – Culture and Safety in Africa* are guided by the assumption that socio-economic differences in the cities are mirrored by architectural forms, and that there is a relation between the quality of urban (public) spaces and security. Following this hypothesis one of the studies on Porto Alegre – belonging to *Reducing Boundaries* – stresses the impact of the building companies' propaganda, aimed at promoting a segregated lifestyle, while the study on the deeply divided city of Luanda – as part of *Mobile Access to Knowledge – Culture and Safety in Africa* – investigates the role of (public) art in preventing social isolation.

On another level, the works conducted by the latter team and those developed by IUAV *Sharing Space* make it possible to sketch an in-depth and multifaceted – although still partial – portrait of the safety and security policies adopted in Johannesburg. *Mobile Access to Knowledge – Culture and Safety in Africa* highlights the way in which public art actions condition the perception of security in the communities living nearby the areas that were requalified; the second study describes the policies implemented during the preparations for the Soccer World Cup that took place in South Africa and their impact on the conditions of the marginalised segments of the urban population.

In the background of many of the considerations on safety and security treated by the individual researches lays the issue of the global migration flows, whose characteristics and cliché of manipulation are specifically described in the research *Sharing Space.*

Even if they originate from different perspectives, all studies allow further reflections on the gentrification process that is nowadays interesting many European cities, often activated by the merging of local interests with national and international powers – see the cases of the cities' nominations for the hosting of sport games or cultural events on a global scale.

The book structure

The reported researches show that dealing with the topics of safety and security in urban contexts implies assessing the role and the diverse combination of a great variety of stakeholders – local governments, supranational entities, companies and enterprises, lobbies, associations of citizens, etc. – each carrying its own vision and a specific goal toward citizenry and security. Despite the three principal studies have been conducted starting from a peculiar point of view, all of them are qualified by a cross-disciplinary approach: research teams include urban planners and designers, policy planners, communication designers, sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers and other experts. All works were based on field researches and comparative studies.

Each book chapter is named by the research it is referred to.

Reducing Boundaries considers the way in which the high and upper-middle classes configure as a goal the preservation of their own security, and the ensuing strategies they put in action in order to achieve it. By means of a comparison of three urban areas – Porto Alegre, Brussels and the Padua-Treviso region – it examines the policies and the tools employed by this target group, and the way the process of exclusion produces barriers, both on the physical structure of the city and at the immaterial level. Being the research still underway, this chapter includes an introduction to the research topic and two reports based on the first field research performed in Porto Alegre.

Mobile Access to Knowledge – Culture and Safety in Africa focuses on the role of public art actions in the perception of safety and security expressed by the local population of the violent African cities of Douala, Luanda and Johannesburg. Assuming that art has a value *per se*, the researchers show that these initiatives have had an impact also on the lifestyles of the local communities, and improved their living conditions – though only partially. Art proves to work powerfully also on the identification process that connects the people to the artworks and to the urban areas – but in different ways, like the three essays describe.

Sharing Space aims at acquiring expertise and knowledge on different features of the international migration phenomenon, with the purpose of gaining an understanding of the nexus between international migrants and the cities' collective urban space. Universities and research institutes of two European countries – Italy and Portugal – and three of the Global South – Argentina, Mexico and Republic of South Africa – participate into the interdisciplinary project aimed at the social and spatial inclusion of international migrants. Introduced by an essay on the research objectives, two writings provide evidence of field research in Puerto Madryn and Johannesburg.

At the end of each chapter it is presented an essay of an independent researcher, who had not shared his/her scopes and achievements with the other scholars before.

The reasons of the inclusion of these studies in the publication are mainly two.

On a first level, they provide an additional viewpoint – in most cases a complementary one – to similar research questions, even if originating from different situations. On a second level, what the three works have in common is that they have been developed by visual communication designers and design curators.

This way, while the supplementary essays show connections with the three main research topics, all together they perform a sort of specific section per se, crossing the book sections. Although at least two of the three main investigations include experts in the field of visual design, the essays by the independent scholars highlight what the contribution of communication design can be in research areas that most commonly are developed (only) by urban planners, architects, sociologists.

Notes on the researches

The researches are at different stages of completion: *Mobile Access to Knowledge – Culture and Safety in Africa* was started in 2010 and is now completed, *Reducing Boundaries* and *Sharing Space* have respectively started in 2014 and in 2013. Every chapter of this book is dedicated to one research. The purpose of the study, the methodology and the tools applied to accomplish the research goals are described in the first essay, while the following ones describe single aspects deriving from specific undertaken tasks.

The promotion of transnational mobility for the scholars, including visiting periods in partner institutions, contributed to the development of expertise and to the promotion of scientific excellence and of the transfer of knowledge. Joint research work fostered the interaction and the fusion of diverse perspectives for exploring the challenges that the researches are posing to urban governance in different contexts. Most of the experts taking part to the three studies are early-stage researchers, thus the investigation gave them the opportunity to acquire cutting-edge skills and interface themselves with their colleagues, while reinforcing the basis for long-term collaboration among partner institutions.

I have been actively working on two of the three researches myself: I am serving as the research coordinator of *Reducing Boundaries* and I worked as a member of the research team of *Mobile Access to Knowledge – Culture and Safety in Africa*, giving a major contribution by defining the research methodology and its tools. Some scholars taking originally part to *Mobile Access to Knowledge – Culture and Safety in Africa* have been involved – in the meanwhile and with different roles – in the other two studies.

The three principal works were made possible thanks to open calls supported by prestigious international scientific institutions: both studies lead by IUAV are Marie Curies IRSES projects, that is they are basically staff exchange activities selected and funded by the European Research Agency, while the study conducted by Laboratory of Visual Culture – SUPSI was selected and co-funded by SNIS – Swiss Network for International Studies and by Lettera 27 Foundation. NGOs, as well as local, public and private partners and associations have actively contributed to the definition and the development of the research objectives.

The researches have been carried on by international teams including the following universities and research institutes: ACC African Centre for Cities – University of Cape Town (Republic of South Africa), ACMS African Centre for Migration & Society (Republic of South Africa), CEG Centro de Estudio Geográficos (Portugal), Centro Universitario La Salle (Brazil), IDAES Instituto de Altos Estudios Sociales (Argentina), Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora (Mexico), IUAV University of Venice (Italy), Latitude – Platfom for urban design and research (Belgium), SSIIM Unesco Chair at IUAV University of Venice (Italy), SUPSI – University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (Switzerland), UFRGS – Federal University Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil), Usi – Università della Svizzera italiana (Switzerland).

Reducing Boundaries

1. Research Purposes

Emanuela Bonini Lessing

Modern society has been often defined as 'risk society', because of an increase of the perception of criminal phenomena in the cities, connected to manifestations of social disease. The paradigm of risk society is used in the research on urban security and on perception of risk, proving how contemporary societies are characterised by distrust, anxiety and uncertainty which envelop structures and places of everyday life (Beck, 1992).

The demand of urban safety and security differs considerably according to specific territories and contexts and does not allow for general solutions. Many studies are pointing out how the perception of an increased sense of insecurity is originated by a progressive shrinking of the welfare state (Wacquant, 2006) which causes to view differently administration and politics, shifting the issue of security from a national to a local concern, especially at the urban level (Reid, 2003). If on the one hand governance strategies mix repressive treatment of safety emergencies with security actions aimed at prevention and rehabilitation (Bauman, 2003), on the other hand private, communal and local interventions against insecurity are progressively growing (Reid, 2003). In fact different strategies and interventions for securing private and public spaces vary according to the specific social and spatial conditions, and range from spatial segregation (e.g. gated communities) to the control of accesses, the use of street bollards, installation of closed-circuit television systems, and other techniques of crime prevention through environmental design (Crowe, 2000). This approach, largely used in America and progressively exported to Europe, is the base for the paradigm of 'designing out crime' (Colquhoun, 2012), which aims at producing spaces that prevent offences by means of control and defence of the areas.

Human sciences have kept focusing their attention on class differences and its consequences (Devine, 2005), concentrating their analysis mainly on how the poor and the low-middle classes inhabit the space or might be evicted

from it. The main exception to this is Pierre Bourdieu. In a pioneer study, he analysed the role of specific 'social aesthetics' in the creation and strengthening of class-identity barriers – including upper class ones (Bourdieu, 1979).

The Marie Curie research *Reducing Boundaries. Understanding exclusion through security defensive systems in wealthy urban areas. Porto Alegre, Brussels, Veneto region* aims at highlighting how a sense of 'safety' and 'security' is perceived and reproduced by the upper middle and upper classes and how it modifies the urban territory. The project studies and compares the defensive spaces and devices in three areas: Porto Alegre, Brussels, and the Veneto region (Padua and Treviso urbanised areas), aiming to understand the socio-political dynamics that lead to their production. The case studies have been chosen because they provide great differences on many levels, from the morphology of the urban areas, to the social composition and the position in the regional and national economy. It is interesting to see how similar social classes face problems related to urban security in different contexts. On the one hand, the aim of the study is to detect eventual prejudice in the perception of risk and on the other hand it is to make specific urban trends 'recognisable' and 'manageable' by local institutions. The expanding economic gap is a global phenomenon and it is necessary that research institutions located in different continents get involved with one another in order to analyse its effects. Moreover, contemporary wealth is deeply intertwined with financial assets and is thus increasingly global in itself. Therefore, the strategies adopted by wealthy individuals to create a sense of security for them and their families could gradually converge in common reaction strategies (e.g. The 'marches exploratoires', Brussels).

Nowadays, we could say that the way the upper class reproduces itself is deeply entangled with ideas of risk and security: Daniel Goldstein, for instance, has recently defined the 'rise of the security paradigm as a framework for organising contemporary social life' (Goldstein, 2010). This leading paradigm is changing the social aesthetic and physical space of urban areas and the everyday life of their inhabitants, and it is reaffirming class differences rather than abolishing them. Describing gated communities, Setha Low has talked about a 'visual landscape of fear' (Low, 2001). Nevertheless, despite the fact that the security issue in gated communities has been openly addressed, the same issue has been scarcely analysed in reference to the gentrification processes that concern the middle and upper classes (Herzfeld, 2009), and to how security devices modify the urban context in these environments. This difference is probably due to the visual impact of gated districts, which, especially in Europe (as in the Veneto case), have a less defined morphology. Thus the research concentrates on specific gentrified areas and analyse the adopted environmental strategies which, in turn,

supposedly increased the perception of security or eventually diminished social anxiety in relation to crime.

The research objective is that of focusing attention on the consolidation of exclusion through a modification of the lifestyle and the built environment. The focus is on the different strategies (from material to immaterial) of appropriation and defence of space that the higher classes have developed in order to create a secure, comfortable environment for them, their families and businesses. The final objective is to understand if a sense of safety and security can be produced by other means than building physical obstacles and barriers that result in a highly divided city.

Research Methodology

In order to carry out the research, an interdisciplinary 'Think Thank' has been formed with the aim of putting together different geographies and disciplines: two research groups of *Reducing Boundaries* originate in Europe, one from the Iuav University of Venice, Italy and one from the Latitude – Platform for urban design and research of Brussels, Belgium. The other team comes from the FURGS (Federal University Rio Grande do Sul), Porto Alegre, Brazil. Although each group is characterised by the point of view of a specific branch of knowledge – the Iuav group mainly by communication design, the FURGS group by urban planning and the Latitude group by urban design – scholars of various disciplines contribute to the definition and to the completion of the research aims: urban planners, sociologists, anthropologists, risk analysts. All three groups composing *Reducing Boundaries* are working on the same case studies and the local research institution provides support for the field research of other scholars. This approach completes studies in urban safety and security by focusing on how the urban environment is modified by upper middle and upper classes at different scales, ranging from the limit of private space to public shared spaces, and on how cities and geographies are changing according to the expanding economic gap. Moreover, it allows a cross cultural analysis – from countries with a rising economy to countries with a declining economy – in order to assess strategic similarities and differences. Following this structure, the FURGS group is concentrating on the morphological analysis and spatial description of the selected areas, the Latitude group works on building typology (especially residential areas), with a focus on social and visual anthropology – howpeople live there, while the Iuav group investigates the visual communication aspects that characterise the focus group. The latter two research approaches have many points in common, assuming that cultural and symbolic manifes-

tations are crucial in understanding the way people act in relation to others as well as to the environment they live in.

The task of the scholars from Iuav university starts with the necessity of describing the wealthy upper class citizens residing in the three cities: their attitudes and thoughts in relation to the urban security issue. Which symbols and visual representations identify upper class citizens as a social group per se? What are the visible cultural, social and political elements that internally unify them? How does the group distinguish itself externally from 'the others'?

An analysis of the communication strategies (politics of representation) employed by these people in order to brand or signify their own territory is further conducted. This helps to put in evidence the relationships between the members and 'the others': conflicting dynamics, isolation or socialization, negotiation, etc. Are there borders in the physical space of the city where the 'possession' of the territory or its branding is not definitive, but contended? How does the focus group preserve its own security? What are the practices of use of the territory of other social groups in a comparative perspective?

The work on the identity of the focus group includes a survey on the relation of power the upper classes establish with other subjects, integrating research tools of urban sociology and social anthropology. Special attention is given to the relationship with the city government, in order to assess the influence of the focus group in urban policies (Bonifacio and Bonini Lessing, 2012a, 2012b).

Part of the European literature in the field of communication design has focused up to now on the way the city government can shape the relationship towards the city dwellers by means of visual representation (logo, stationery, wayfinding systems in the urban territory or in public buildings, etc.) – assuming citizens are all equal and passive addresses of this linear top-down communication process (Chapelle and Eeveno, 1988; Anceschi, 2010). Recent publications have shown instead that contemporary society is much more fragmented and 'unstable' in its social, cultural and economic composition than previously assumed. The competition among many stakeholders, both in planning the development of a city and in creation of its 'visual reputation', produces tensions on many levels. The impossibility of offering a unitary and stable visual representation of the city – if not for commercial scopes, like its brand – goes parallel with the tendency of private bodies to swallow public spaces, to create separate urban areas, to brand them, and to let them accessible to 'homogenised' users, usually in the name of security (Bonini Lessing, 2010; Baur and Thiery, 2014).

This segment of the research is going to be completed with the study conducted by the sociologists and policy and urban planners belonging to the Iuav group. They are primarily concentrating their analysis on the 'nar-

ratives' characterising the focus group: its attitudes, actions, etc. This should help reveal its relationships and attitudes towards other subjects like institutions and authorities and should make it possible to assess their power and influence on local urban policies. The study also looks for narratives possibly related to perception of/reaction to risk of the focus group. In addition, it deals with the following aspects: institutional communication on the topic of urban security – documents created and diffused by public institutions and governments, like reports redacted by boards of enquiry monitoring the urban security issue; media communication – how do press, magazines, television, radio, public communication, etc. report news and facts; social media and the internet – digital tools related to the urban security issue, messages diffused on social networks, especially by the focus group. Can any of this media influence the perception of risk of the focus group?

Another key factor is related to technology: does technology have any role in the prevention of crime? What kind of devices are used by the focus group in order to protect itself? What are the consequences on freedom, privacy, etc.?

The highlighted problems are approached from different but interconnected points of view: risk assessment (collecting and analysing data about a given town's security), risk perception (recording and analysing the focus group's subjective evaluation of risk/danger), policy inquiry (investigating the political and philosophical principles inspiring rules, laws and policies about urban security), technological devices (that enable control, but also participatory policies) (Morini, 2014). Some of these points of view can be seen as 'frames' – see, for example, Schön and Rein (1994) – or as cognitive biases (see Slovic, 2000), giving rise to possible conflicts.

The 'culture of fear' prevailing in contemporary western culture (Furedi, 1997) has given rise to a mainstream 'top-down' or 'precautionary' approach to urban policies. Researchers will try to investigate the presence of this attitude – or, on the contrary, a more 'participatory' one – in the three case studies and how this impacts security policies.

The methodology adopted for the research draws on pragmatic sociology (Cefaï, 2007, 2013), i.e. the study of the actions and interactions related to certain public issues, in this case to security issues. The analysis takes into account: the argumentative repertoire, the strategies of communication, the regime of involvement, public arenas and relations of proximity ('proche'). The aim is to look at actions, practices, representations and related meanings in order to understand the complexity of interests and behaviours guiding actors (citizens and institutional decision makers) involved in public issues concerning risk and security.