

TURIN-EARTH

Cities and new migrations

The twentieth century has been the century of cities and new migrations. While in the history of human societies people had always lived mostly in rural areas, for the first time at the beginning of the XXI century the majority of human beings lives in the cities. This epochal transformation is the result of the extraordinary urbanization process that has been witnessed in the last hundred years. It is one of the most visible aspects of migratory movements, both on local and global scale, that make proper defining the actual epoch as “the migrations era”.

Turin is a good example for this phenomenon. Our city is indeed the fruit of migrations: at first regional, then national and at last international. In particular, we owe the transformation of Turin to the flux of new citizens from Southern Italy, in the decades following the Second World War: tens of thousands of people who found a job mostly in the large industry and got a house in the new districts of the city, from Moncalieri to Falchera.

The new international migrations that have involved Turin since the Nineties have developed in a very different economic and urbanistic context: on one hand the economic crisis that struck the city in the last decades has made job occasions less numerous and most precarious; on the other hand, it is the former workers barriers that have become the new zones of migrants’ settling, together with some relatively central districts like Aurora and San Salvario.

More than forty years have passed since the beginning of this new phase in the city’s history, and today migrations represent a structural element of Turin’s social, economic and cultural life. According to the latest data, at the beginning of 2022 the foreigner citizen residents are 131.000, a little less than 15 percent of the total population. Among those foreigners, almost one third is represented by communitarian citizens from Romania, followed by communities from Morocco, China, Peru, Nigeria, Egypt, Albania, Philippine, Moldavia and Bangladesh. Barriera di Milano is the district with the highest number of residents from foreign origin, more than 17.000.

A long time passed since the arrival of the first “pioneers” of migration, and that makes our city’s social panorama very complicate and leads us to put under question even the categories of “immigrants” and “strangers” that we commonly use to describe this phenomenon. People who spent most of their life in Turin, youngsters born and grown in our city, families which took shape here and here are imagining their future... beyond the juridical condition, the presence or absence of Italian citizenship, we must take

account of those dimensions of “de facto citizenship” that express themselves in everyday’s life of Turin dwellers, of workers in the most different sectors of local economy, of students at school and in the university, of active members of the community. From this point of view every district offers the portrait of a Turin that can’t and won’t go without all those thousands of citizens that, with roots and bonds connecting them to other cities and countries of every part of the world, made themselves in these years real Turin dwellers.

To describe the Turin of migrations in 2011, as part of the celebrations for the 150 years of National Unity, the Museo diffuso della Resistenza, della Deportazione, della Guerra, dei Diritti e della Libertà (“Widespread” Museum of Resistance, Deportation, the War, Rights and Freedom) has made an exhibition on these themes. The collection of photographs, maps, videos and vocal testimonies allowed to reconstruct 30 years of urban history from the eyes and the words of the new dwellers. The choice of having as curators three anthropologists, Carlo Capello, Pietro Cingolani e Francesco Vietti, was not made by chance. The anthropological approach actually enhances the migrants’ point of view, and contributes to translate the various systems of meanings. It is only through direct experience and ethnographic comprehension that emerged the various city images which are now exposed; the selected photographic material has been produced through the years by professional and nonprofessional photographers, by migrants and by the anthropologists themselves. To this material have been added images from newspapers and magazines, which reveal the predominant public look over the migrants.

Today’s rearrangement represents a selection and an update of the material presented at the 2011 exhibition. Thanks to the stimulus and collaboration of Porta delle Culture, a net of associations that promote the intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the frame of Porta Palazzo district, it was decided to choose part of the original visual material and organize it in six sections: “Abitare a Torino” (Living in Turin), on spaces of the home, on families and on community relationships; “In viaggio per Torino” (On the way to Turin), on the tales of arrivals, departures and returns, also through the pages of the newspapers; “Aspirazioni e fatica” (Expectations and fatigue), on the work’s worlds; “Le religioni, tra spiritualità e identità collettive” (Religions, between spirituality and collective identities), on public and domestic manifestations of religious diversity; “Le scuole torinesi” (The schools in Turin), on the multifaceted worlds of formal and informal education; “Il diritto alla città” (The right to the city), on the spaces of socialization, of friendship and of solidarity, with particular regard to the new generations.

To these six sections is to be added the last one, with an open shape, which will be realized with the help of the associations of the net Porta delle Culture. During the exhibition period new and not only photographic materials will be added by and by, which will allow to take a look at Turin’s near future.

Living in Turin: physical spaces and places of relationship

“In Morocco we left the house of our parents, it is empty, no one lives there...my house has never been finished, it's there under construction, it's interrupted, we didn't finish it but we didn't want to sell it, my children will decide what to do. The trees that were little when we left, now are producing nuts. It hurts so much to speak of it”.

As in the words of Latifa, immigrant from Morocco, the house means, both in Italy and in the countries of origin, a fundamental resource, a physical place that produces stability and safety, and in the meantime a space of affections and identities. Many are the immigrants' residential solutions, from makeshift shelters to informal camps, to shared apartments, to individual houses either for rent or property. As conditions grow better the areas of first settlement, as Porta Palazzo and Barriera di Milano, are often abandoned in order to search houses in other districts, in the outskirts or in the towns of the hinterland. These ways depend on subjective choices but are also determined by urban and housing policies carried on by public institutions and private actors. For instance, many owners in Turin are unwilling to rent to foreigners. The houses' interior becomes a stage on which, by furniture and rooms organization, one can recall to memory the house left in the country of origin or give an answer to new tastes and needs related to living in Italy. To the domestic dimension are also related the most important social relationships, the familiar ones. There are many forms of processes of division, reconstitution and formation of new migrating nuclei. From the meeting of different models originate also variations in social practices. For instance, there is a continuous rising in the number of couples formed by components of different nationalities, and likewise are beginning to spread also in Turin homosexuals and omogenitorial couples of foreign origin. For all the above items, making a family and making a home is a procedural experience, gradual and reversible, that goes beyond the borders between private and public, and between individual and communitarian.

On the way to Turin

“This year we plan to go back to Peru on vacation, so our son, who went away from Peru when he was a very little child, will be able to know something of the art and culture of his country. We will go to Cuzco, a

city that we too have never seen”.

The words of Pucalpa, originally from Peru but living in Turin since more than twenty years, can well underscore the complexity of migration travels: there are obviously the outgoing travels, those who lead to Italy, that can mark a great change in migrants’ lives and give us a great impact, especially when they happen in dramatic and dangerous ways as in the case of perilous crossings of the Mediterranean. But there are also many other forms of mobility that have a tendency to pass unobserved: family reunifications; getting back “home” to visit one’s friends and relatives and to invest the fruits of work abroad; “second generation” holidays in one’s parents’ country; the definitive returns of those who put an end to migratory experience; the “secondary migrations” of those who, after migrating in Italy, move to other destinations; internal mobility in our country, since very often migration does not stop at the first landing, but implies subsequent movements from city to city or even from urban to rural contexts.

In this section of the exhibition, the images depicting the cycle of arrivals, departures and comings back which connect Turin with other cities of Europe and of the world by means of migrants’ travels, are put in dialog with the representation given to migrations by public and media opinion.

The pages of the newspaper “La Stampa” show the way in which, between XX and XXI century, local information media told the migratory phenomenon and the transformation of Turin districts in relation with the presence of immigrant dwellers. The subsequent narration, so common in Italy when speaking of migrations, gives way in some occasions to journalistic reports and surveys more attentive to the mid-long term dynamics that, silently and daily, made of migration a “normal” and structural component in the social, economic and cultural reality of Turin.

From these pages of the newspapers stands out in any case a problem which is also at the heart of scientific research on migrations: who has the privilege of representing “the others” and how is conquered the right to self-representation? What voices manage to be heard on the public stage when speaking of immigration?

Job

“At present I have three jobs: as caregiver on Sundays, domestic help or baby sitter on weekdays and, occasionally, cultural interary. Before I got here I thought I would work for just one year to change my life. This was my idea of the western world: a better world where freedom would lead to personal improvement. In fact it was quite the opposite: I was living in a feudal world, when I worked as a caregiver”.

Irina, a Moldovian migrant who has lived in Turin for many years now, witnesses the paradox of migrants' conditions: they aim at improving their life standards, yet they are obliged to live under medieval work terms.

Indeed, the search for work is still at the foundation of migrants projects: they still aim at well being and, sometimes, social improvement as well, and yet they are still underemployed, or even exploited, without any rights.

Owing to discrimination, to problems with their educational qualification, and to the lack of social relationships, migrants are obliged to

concentrate their search for a job within the range of poorly paid, short term, hard, dangerous jobs. As testified by the pictures on exhibition, a high number of migrants work in the small industry or the building industry, little qualified health services or care services. However, owing to the scanty opportunities of social improvement in these areas, they soon turn to small entrepreneurship, in particular trade, catering, or building, to quickly improve their work and living conditions. Research on the work field clearly highlights the dynamics leading to the migrants

subordinate conditions, and even quite a number of outcasts.

Throughout Italy and in Turin, the numerous crisis, ranging from the financial crisis in 2008 to the pandemic, and the present war in Ukraine have had severe repercussions on the migrants' conditions, making their lives harder and more precarious.

Nevertheless, we feel that their legitimate aspiration to improve their own and their family's status, a strong drive to any migration, will win over any crisis.

Religions: between spirituality and identity.

"Our feastday is Friday; on Fridays Moroccans go to the Mosque. Once there were no Mosques in Turin, now it is like being in Morocco, we have 5 to 6 Mosques, now we feel good here, because we can get anything we want: halal meat, the Mosque, any kind of Moroccan goods, dresses, anything."

Abdel, a Moroccan who has lived in Turin since 2001, stresses the importance of having a religious life as a migrant. In fact, beside being a spiritual nourishment, religion is a part of their identity as members of their community, as Irina confirms: I am a Christian Orthodox, but I can't say I go to church every Sunday. Anyway, people go to church, not only to pray, but also to meet other Moldavians, the church becomes a meeting place of the community".

Migrations have widened the range of religions on the ground: we now have Christians Orthodoxes, Catholics, Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Moslems who include the highest number of members, but there are smaller groups, like Hindus, Buddhists, Copts..., not to mention quite a number of atheists and non observants.

The new cult places, like the prayer rooms mentioned by Abdel, which are often the target of criticism, actually witness the wish of integration and stability expressed by migrants.

This does not occur without some friction, yet it is caused by political or identity problems, rather than by religion.

Schools in Turin: laboratories of citizenship

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Religious pluralism is a challenge also for the school system, which is one of the most important institutions socializing new generations of migrants and their children.

In the scholar year 2021/2022, 20,500 students without Italian citizenship attended school in Turin, i.e. almost 20% of the student's population. These students cover all the ranks, from the primary school through the various courses of studies and are from 152 different countries, mostly from Romania (30%), followed by Morocco, Albania and China.

The label "students with non Italian citizenship" covers multiple stories of arrivals and re-entries from abroad, of socialization courses followed in Italy, but not necessarily in Italian speaking environments. 69% of this population, namely 14,200 students were born in Italy from parents of foreign origin. This figure has increased a lot in the last few years and is expected to further increase.

Even if these students are not legally considered Italians, nevertheless they share their companions' social and educational experiences as well as their needs, arising from moving through languages of different identities and cultures.

The school represents the physical and social environment where all these diversities may turn into a good help for social mobility, besides being a very important support in the town most disadvantaged areas.

The right to the city

"Their eyes are puzzled, full of joy mixed with that strange bewilderment of people finding themselves in a place not of their own. They were not born in this place, but they feel it like theirs. The city envelopes them in its summer heat, but the eyes of indifference hold them in their inmost shelter, in embrace". Thus writes Younis Tawfik in his story "Sotto la Mole" (Under the Mole). An important issue arises from these few lines: migration is not resolved in the single, albeit fundamental, dimension of work, and the relationship with the city cannot be reduced to a case of production and consumption. As rightfully maintained by the philosopher Henri Lefebvre, for all citizens, migrants and not, of first or second generation, there is the theme of a wider "right to the city". That means a full access to urban life, going beyond the level of

essential needs and being able to enjoy the city's resources and opportunities and actively participating in social and cultural life. This condition clearly calls for the need to have leisure time, the availability of meeting and socializing places, and continuous processes of redefining identities.

Getting together with one's own countrymen, participating with them to cultural activities promoted by diaspora associations, celebrating national and religious feasts and going to restaurants, pubs or public parks: all this can represent a way of feeling oneself part of a "community", cultivating common affections and interests, strengthening bonds of solidarity that have a reassuring function and help to fight the longing for one's homeland. On the other hand, especially for young people and second generations, the prevailing look is not toward the past but to the future. Having fun with one's peers, regardless of family histories, is above all a way of moving together towards adulthood, in a city more cosmopolitan than that known by one's parents, putting in play one's own multiple identities.