

From the global city to the city by parts. A reflection on the meaning of the contemporary city starting from the case of Prishtina

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The opportunity to reflect on the city of Prishtina is inspired by my participation as a visiting professor at the workshop organized within the course Study and Theory of Architecture 3, at the Polis University of Tirana¹, dedicated to its regeneration through some focused urban recovery projects in strategic areas of the city. However, this particular occasion gave me the opportunity to reflect on one of the issues that I believe are currently the most debated among architects and experts dealing with reading and interpreting the contemporary city, or the now decreed impossibility on the part of the same to understand it in its complexity. This "impossibility" brings with it as a direct consequence the end of every possible generalizing theory on the city and on the possible rules to be put in place in order to be able to govern a coherent future development, or coherent with a premise-based theory for its future development. On the other hand, the signs of this situation had long been under the eyes of all of us: the last real text of Theory of urban transformations still remains the unsurpassed "Architecture of the city" by Aldo Rossi (Rossi A, 1966) Only Rem Koolhaas twelve years later

(Koolhaas R.1978) opposed to the full-bodied and well-founded studies of the Milanese architect, a similar and in many ways opposite Theory of the city. In essence, the Dutch architect, drawing inspiration from the lack of planning in a city like New York, drew, instead of a weak point, a strength in the construction of the image of a city. To these two texts. long gone, they did not actually follow the same systematic studies on the city and on possible theories of its future development as if to sanction in fact the impossibility of being able to systematize any theory of urban development, leaving to the single architectural event the responsibility in defining the quality of the future city.

On the other hand, if it is true that post-modernity has sanctioned the end of the possibility of "great stories" replaced by the sum of small stories that reassembled together should restore the meaning of contemporary man's life, it is equally true that the "city "Was and especially in modernity, one of the most incisive and great stories in human history, so that, starting from the 1980s, topical years of the post-modern thrust, that the

¹ / The course was led by Loris Rossi and Dorina Papa. for more details see chapter 4.



Fig1 / Genova
Source / author

great story of the city, in post-modern society, was theoretically abandoned in favor of a fall back on the city seen as a simple summation of architecture (small stories). If the man of post-modernity is no longer able to face and conceive a new great story, unlike his modern predecessor, the architect of post-modernity is no longer able to understand and govern the processes of transformation of the city as a whole and coherent organism.

Here, then, that while the most structured metropolises of the Western world, especially the developed European and North American (the Japanese metropolis deserves a reflection apart from the present writing) they had somehow metabolized the profound transformations due to the first industrial revolution and to the advent urban infrastructures, primarily the railway, today pose questions related to the recovery / transformation of partial areas, which can therefore be solved with partial architectural narratives that do not affect the general meaning of the city. Other cities, such as the cities of the former communist bloc in Europe and those in Asia and more generally those of the so-called "third world" in development, have instead suffered

a strong demographic acceleration and therefore also spatial precisely in the historical moment in which even the best-equipped city theorists could no longer devise strategies for the coherent development of large urban agglomerations. The results of this lack of strategy are visible to everyone: just think of today's cities like Mexico City, the large African conurbations, the huge Chinese cities.

Then face a theme like that of the city of Prishtina, like other cities that like the Kosovar capital now face a new season of total rethinking of the urban structure also in relation to the ever more pressing demographic growth, in a historical moment like that current it must necessarily start from the assumption that any reflection on the rethinking of individual urban fragments will have to rely on a more general critical reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the current state. So the method used in this occasion of work on the city of Prishtina is very welcome: to put the most strictly architectural phase, a first step of analysis of its urban structure where students have practiced reading what Aldo Rossi would have called the "Urban facts". An exercise that is certainly difficult due to the issues



Fig2 / Honk Kong
Source / author

discussed above, but necessary in order to be able to establish the specific projects that have been developed specifically in the second part of the course that is the subject of this review. Indeed, to maintain that the contemporary architect is no longer able to dominate the city as a whole from a theoretical point of view, necessarily having to take refuge in the project of its singularity, reducing in some way the scale with which to face urban complexity, does not mean giving up the reading of "urban phenomena", again to use a Rossi's category.

It is the gaze and the perspective that change: giving up global understanding only means adapting the tools of analysis to the reality of one's own time, the post-industrial modern city grafted, for the first time in urban growth, elements extraneous to the history of the city for the first time moment like industries and railways, the machine was for the first time in urban history its entry into the physical space of the city, nothing could be as before. For these reasons the urban planners of the modern set themselves a problem of refounding. The contemporary city, as well as

the epoch we are experiencing, does not have and cannot have any need and prospect of re-foundation, if, as Zygmunt Bauman claims on the basis of Lyotard's original post-modernist theses, ours is a liquid society, and the contemporary city reflects this state of liquidity: a sort of indefinite magma ever more physically extended that regenerates itself by wounding its wounds (dismissals) from time to time and sporadically. Its general meaning is given by the individual episodes of urban recovery.

The ideal city of modernity, starting chronologically from the Cité Industrielle of Tony Garnier (Garnier T. 1917) to the Plan Voisin of Le Corbusier (Le Corbusier ,1945) to finish the extremism of the vertical city of Hilberseimer, beyond its visionary and intrinsic utopian aspect, actually wanted to present itself as a model also achievable by parts, something that really happened but that has really established its failure as an urban theory. That idea of the city could probably have a meaning, and we say probably because it has always remained on paper, only if made in its entirety.



Fig3 / La Corricella , Procida (Napoli,Italia)
Source / author

The city excerpts made according to the dictates of these great examples of modern cities, especially in the case of Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer, (Hilberseimer L. ,1927) have indeed given the impetus, with their failure, to the final renunciation of the modernist ideal and it is no accident that the post-modernity in architecture is emblematic starting from a precise event concerning the demolition of the residential complex of Pruitt Igoe built between 1954 and 1955 according to the dictates of the ideal cities mentioned above, by one of the

masters of the modern movement, Minoru Yamasaki (the same as the Twin Towers in New York), demolished between 1972 and 1974 exactly from March 16, 1972, when the historian Charles Jenks (Jencks C. 1977) decided to definitively kill modern architecture. Today we can certainly say that modern architecture has not died on that date and has risen several times and on several occasions, as opposed to the parable of post-modern architecture, as interpreted by Jenks and others, which instead has shown a breath very short, but just as certainly we



Fig4 / Le treport (Francia)
Source / author

can say that the idea of an ideal city, feasible even for parts like this, was no longer "thinkable" and probably won't be for a long time yet, unless we discover a new paradigm at the moment not yet on the horizon. After the first hard impact with the "foreign body" of the machinic reality, the city, as the human body reacts with its own metabolism and antibodies in rejecting the foreign body and regenerating itself, has reacted in recent decades (one could say to starting from the end of the Second World War in the Western world) starting right from

the regeneration of its internal parts, renouncing any kind of totalizing vision. The strategy implemented in the exercise on the city of Prishtina, is therefore completely inserted in this vision of urban regeneration that starts from the analysis of the local context without any globalistic bias, to then entrust the individual projects developed in the areas that are strategic from the preliminary analysis, the task of providing ideas, in some ways of the "microvisions" of what could be the Prishtina of the future.

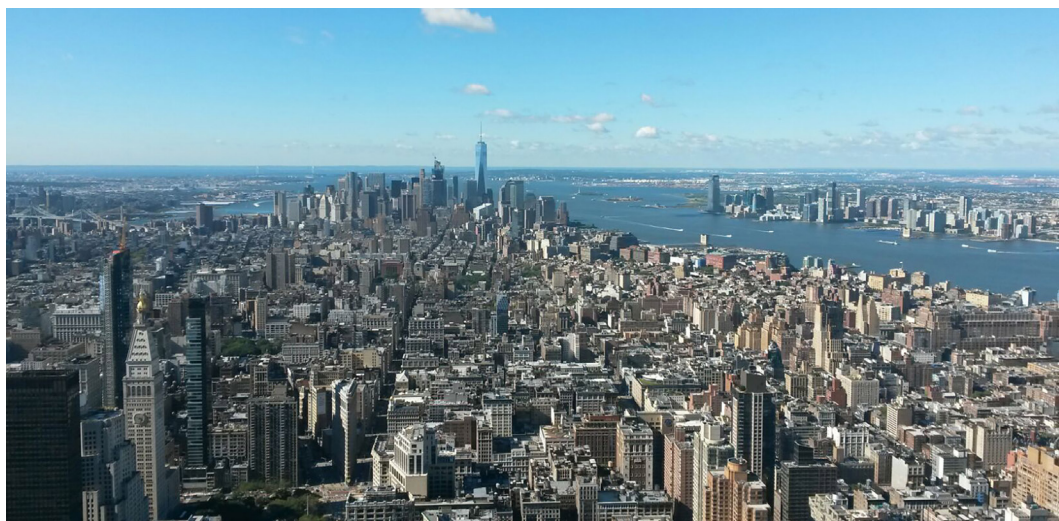


Fig5 / New York
Source / author



Fig6 / Pechino
Source / author

In this sense the case of Prishtina is certainly a city that could well represent, in a translated and metaphorical sense, the "liquidity" of which Bauman treats. This is due to its characteristics of a city that is anything but dense and devoid of a single polarity but with different and multiple internal polarities, in many cases more connoted as empty than full urban ones, think for example of the library area, which they make it an excellent testing ground for this new approach to urban regeneration and transformation.

If urban planning intended as an operational tool for the organic control of growth and urban transformation seems to be definitively set to make room for the regeneration of city pieces by the tools of the architectural project in its various scales of intervention, a possible new frontier for In my opinion, the formulation of a new "urban theory" will have to go beyond the technical instrumentation of an "urban science" as it has been considered up to now, to take on more human and social science instruments, the only real field of understanding and



Fig7 / Pitigliano (Italy)
Source / author

global direction of future development
of our cities.

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