City, Territory
and Architecture

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Citizenship and new urban realities

Francesco Indovina[1,2*]

Abstract

Cities have always been the place where 'diversity' has settled, within a substantial ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity. The author's emphasis on the need for a cultural policy on migration and welcoming not in 'moral' terms but in relation to a mutual interest between different peoples and cultures. A policy which highlights 'diversity' and allows for peaceful coexistence and sharing, provides the basis for what can be called a policy of coexistence, or a strategy for coexistence. Such a policy can only be the result of a collective debate and effort which can propose new ideas of citizenship.

Keywords: Citizenship, Identity, Migration, Diversity, Co-existence

Cities and diversity

The world is changing, this is nothing new, but what is new is the speed of this change; this spurt is a challenge to our attitude both towards the "new" and to our means of response. And if fear or hostility towards these changes are "natural", our response can no longer be one of restraining or slowing down the dynamics to defend a "tradition" already compromised; on the contrary, the opportunity should be grasped to make the best use of the elements of change—viewpoints need to be shifted, from past to future.

We cannot, nor would we want to, tackle the great changes in world geopolitics, or the transformations in production processes due to the incorporation of new technologies, or the great migratory movements between the various countries and continents due to the different conditions—social and those of development, freedom and peace, or even climate changes, but we would like to measure, albeit in general, non-analytical terms, the effects of all these changes at city level.

Not particularly or solely out of professional interest but mainly due to the role the city/urbanisation has had in the evolution of humankind. Moreover, nowadays the population is tending towards becoming a majority of urban population, which does not mean standardised settlement but that the urban condition is prevalent today in spite of diversities (in dimension, organisation, wealth, culture etc.). One fact of notable importance though not without contradictions is that the city may be the condition that facilitates integration but may also be a type of settlement that succeeds in triggering intolerance of diversity. The "proximity" studies begun in the Sixties by E.T, Hall (1966) and developed in the semiotic and phenomenological fields have acknowledged that the "distance" people take from others responds to precise cultural and social criteria both of attraction and repulsion. The city, as we have maintained, may be considered humankind's ecological niche, namely the place where the species has evolved and produced the best. A role the city has carried out "naturally", one might say, i.e. with few deliberate intentions. Nowadays, the issue presents differently: compared with the past, deliberate intentions must be concrete and organised in actions. Today's cities contrast with each other, according to the well-known theory of competition between cities, but can above all become "creative" by organising technology, tolerance and talent on the one hand and culture, communication and cooperation on the other (Florida 2005). Basically, cities are the places and organisations that can best use the transformations underway, improving the situation of their inhabitants.

However, this positive evolution of the city is by no means guaranteed – on the contrary, involution of the

*Correspondence: indovinacta@gmail.com
[1] Università Iuav, Venezia, Santa Croce 191 Tolentini, 30135 Venezia, Italy
Full list of author information is available at the end of the article

urban condition can be glimpsed through the fog, and we are reminded of this by the continuous failures of public policies set up to tackle the negative conditions generated by the capitalist-type production system now prevalent on a world scale (unemployment, poverty, marginalisation, etc.). Phenomena that have continued to affect the city have also had a disruptive nature (suffice it to think just of urbanisation processes and migratory flows, as well as the extreme events generated by climate changes).

We should acknowledge that to generate positive conditions the determination factor must be considered more than in the past; policies must be developed to facilitate interconnection with and between all, eliminating every kind of barrier which on the contrary hinder it—barriers such as status, sex, culture, race, religion, trade or profession, and any other that we are able to invent (we must be aware that most of these barriers are not "natural" but cultural or "artificial").

This obviously does not mean imagining equality between us all, which could be an aspiration, or even a political project—in the given situation we cannot think of interconnection between equals but only give ourselves the objective that diversities and inequalities must not constitute a hindrance to coexistence and interconnection.

Cities have always been the place of settlement, of "diversities", which mainly had a vertical connotation, namely within a basic ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic, etc. identity, individuals were placed on a scale of a social/economic type creating a pyramid, with a few lucky ones at the top (let us say) and the mass of less fortunate at the base. This circumstance has changed in the current phase, at least for many cities, as a horizontal connotation was added to the vertical one that interpreted the urban condition, grouping different populations from the original population in terms of race, culture, religion, language, etc. These in turn do not present as homogeneously compact but show the diversities typical of the vertical connotation, i.e. social and economic differences. To these sums of diversity, which already on their own constitute a quagmire difficult to cross, other attitudes are added—of closure, racist and religious or even professional—caused partly by feelings of fear or selfishness, which multiply the difficulties of coexistence.

This situation constantly makes interconnection between all these populations complicated and in some circumstances coexistence becomes conflictual (both in a partial and general form); in order that the situation does not explode but remains in a manageable state, it seems indispensable for the various populations to find a unifying element, namely an element that, by overlapping the single populations, is able to make coexistence and interconnection possible between all the populations. An

"artificial" element, so to speak, but nevertheless able to smooth out the harshness of the coexistence of diversities. For if diversity produces social and cultural richness, and if in the current state it has become an "ordinary" condition and a necessity, we must not forget that this causes obstacles to coexistence that can be eliminated or reduced through political and institutional decisions.

Before dealing with this issue, it is worth reflecting further on the new condition of the city.

We have already referred to the different speed with which changes are occurring in the present era, a variation in speed not only involving a reduction in the time necessary for people to "get used" to a new change or for something to take the place of what went before; attention should, however, also be given to the effects on the context, especially to the fact that only apparently can changes be considered timely – in actual fact they determine a transformation in the general conditions.

Technological innovations do not only affect the production of goods but as new consumer products spread changes in lifestyle can be engendered and the social differences that already exist emphasised. In this respect, reflect on how in the past technical innovations had a collective nature, whereas today they are predominantly of an individual nature. Think of the city transformations due to public lighting, the organisation of collective means of transport (from the tram to the underground), and the construction of underground sewerage networks, etc., whereas in the current phase innovations occur in the supply and quality of individual or family property. One could basically say that while in the past the city presented a higher rate of technological innovation compared with families, nowadays the situation seems in a certain sense to be the reverse.

The city is not alone in being subjected to the effects of climate change, often devastating and which affect the various populations in different ways, in relation to how they have settled; they also however affect the general organisation of the city and limit its functioning, above all as regards coexisting populations. In this sense we could consider, too, the effects of the pandemic that has struck the world this year and generated a wave of negative attitudes towards the city, considered as the epicentre of the infection (without thinking that cities have been the principal focus for handling and fighting the epidemic).

It is possible to describe very briefly the new urban conditions relating to these transformations and to the growth of the population, above all due to the immigration processes (legal or illegal) of different populations from those originating in the place.

Starting with the crisis of 2008 and the restrictive policies put in place to which were added the effects of the pandemic, it could be said that the situation of cities has

worsened: growing unemployment and poverty, decrease in demand for consumer products, rise in the level of conflict between different populations (favoured by terrorism), increase in immigration defined as illegal, greater degree of ties and bans, etc. define a deteriorated situation of the general conditions in cities and above all deficiencies in interconnection between the different populations.

Relaxation of the ties placed on collective socialising due to a reduction in the expansion of the virus, seems to herald a return to what is defined as "normality". This "normality" is charged with positive expectations, a return to the past, revered as are all pasts, recalling a situation of urban coexistence that certainly cannot be considered optimal.

If we were to consider the conditions of inequality of what we have called vertical conditions, to which are added those defined horizontal, we would assume that in order to be fit to promote coexistence and interconnection between populations and individuals, the urban condition requires both prompt interventions and, in particular, the creation of a suitable political and social climate.

City and coexistence

In the past the city was the place where interconnection between the members of the population was at its highest, with a mostly homogeneous population from the ethnic, cultural and religious points of view, though the arrival of foreign populations caused conflictual issues to arise, with the newly-arrived not acknowledging "tradition". It is indeed on this theme that we wish to concentrate, having clear in mind what Camus wrote (1937): "a tradition is a past that falsifies the present".

The existence of abundant social capital, the facility of communication (a language) and the existence of not particularly evident religious differences, as well as a similar set of values and ethnic principles, were all elements that not only did not hinder interconnection, but actually assisted its development, in spite of the existence of notable economic differences between individuals, who were in any case assimilated into a "tradition", or, if not accepted, triggered conflicts to a certain extent codified (e.g. by trade unions).

In this situation the arrival of foreign populations (different race, religion, culture, values, etc.) resulted in the growth of processes of refusal and conflict.

The question that "politics" broadly asks itself and must do, is how to ascertain which conditions can facilitate coexistence and generate interconnection processes? Reciprocal alienation increases as the diversities of populations increase and does not help people to live together, however, not wishing to take on solutions of expulsion or

marginalisation (with the ensuing individual and collective conflict processes they generate), it appears complex to single out instruments not so much of integration but for fostering coexistence.

How, basically, should the stamp of conflictual diversity be eliminated in favour of diversities "able to coexist"? The most successful route is perhaps that of equality but it must be understood, this is not a case of eliminating the social differences generated by the social economic system but rather of granting the different populations equal rights (and respective duties). For it is often the refusal to promote this principle of equality, owing to identities characterised by strong egoism, that causes difficulties for coexistence. Besides, the process to achieve differentiated identity is neither instantaneous nor devoid of problems. Immigrant populations effectively bring their own identity, values and ways of living together that may prove unacceptable to the host populations, but which they themselves defend and which constitute instruments of "belonging" and in a certain sense of defence against the populations (unwillingly) hosting them. Fundamentally, awareness is needed of the fact that different populations that have settled in the same place but have not developed a reciprocal capacity for living together and communicating, set up social, psychological and cultural mechanisms of reciprocal refusal.

All ideas should be based on mutual interest being fostered between "arriving" and "host" populations, since those who emigrate want to escape from un unsustainable situation, both from the economic point of view (a genuine lack of food in some cases) and that of actual safety and survival in war situations. These populations undertake terrible journeys and are subjected to violence, insecurity, etc., while they aim for the mirage of the countries dreamed of, hoping they will accommodate them. Whereas, on the other hand, the host countries are interested in populations arriving that might be able to improve certain critical situations (from the natality crisis to the availability of employment in specific spheres, such as "carers", farmworkers or labourers, etc.). Altogether this reciprocity should, in an abstract sense, make coexistence simple but to these interests are added prejudices, differing interests for single groups, inability to communicate, and bitter disagreement on habits and values, etc., which make coexistence difficult, to say the least. Yet live together we must, and it is useful.

City and citizenship

In the past European cities experimented with separating a "different" population from the natural one, a system that on the one hand emphasised the usefulness (the issue is more complicated) of this different population for the host city, but on the other showed the refusal of

coexistence in favour of cohabitation. The Jewish ghettoes were the clearest episode of this phenomenon in the past. A solution that I think should be rejected. On the other hand, in many cities more dynamic immigrant populations tend to create homogeneous residential or commercial places (restaurant zones or commercial areas of a particular ethnic group, etc.) that are the expression of a certain desire to separate or more often of careful attention to marketing. But it is also a case of "spontaneous" solutions, in the face of public indifference and general interest on the part of users. These are diverse issues that the coexistence of different populations brings into play.

It would seem more useful, in my opinion, to include immigrant populations throughout the city; it is only in the city that different populations can meet the populations that have already settled, can perceive differences and look with a critical eye at their condition (both of departure and arrival). It is well known—evidence exists—that immigrants "placed" in small centres find it easier to live together, but less easy to assimilate different cultures. Situations of mutual affection can be created between the different populations, but resistance to change increases.

We are not maintaining the need of a process of assimilation on one side or the other, but of subtle smoothing down of the most controversial points and zones of attrition of one or other, without expecting the hosting party to necessarily predominate over the guests; we must bear in mind that very often we are not speaking of temporary guests, but rather of permanent ones, able to be influenced but also to influence (suffice it to think of how eating habits have changed).

Let us assume that the settlement of a population different from the original one causes processes of attrition, varying in their degree of violence, for both parties. At the same time, we must consider the foreign population weaker from many points of view, "different" from the natural one, but above all alienated, as it does not take part in the social life of the city, while it feels excluded from many benefits the natural population enjoys.

The departure point cannot but be, nevertheless, reciprocal participation in coexisting, as already maintained. By nurturing reciprocal egoism, perhaps coexistence will prove easier.

In modern times most States have developed the concept and mechanism of "citizenship" in connection with the respective rights and duties. These have increased over time, are guaranteed for each citizen and are characterised by universality, equality and redistribution. Benefitting from these rights (to education, health, housing, assistance, justice, etc.) It is not guaranteed by the social market mechanism that all will benefit from these rights (to education, health, housing, assistance, justice,

etc.), therefore the State provides "services" – partially – that, as such, have an important influence on the city; their diffusion and uncomplicated accessibility (spatial, administrative and procedural) are a deciding factor for the quality of the city. It is indeed the city of services that we know, where each "citizen" possesses the rights of citizenship; this relationship between the individual and the rights of citizenship determines the collective or common tone of the city. An individual need fulfilled through collective organisation reasserting an individual right. The same may be said of the ensuing duties.

This "optimal" situation is not stable. A variety of material (public expenditure) or ideological reasons (the irreducibility of the single individual to each collective project) lead to a reduction in the public services available and to a selection of the populations that can have access to them. A part of the native population is also excluded (hypocritically it is said "they self-exclude") from the entire or partial benefits of the services offered (for economic reasons but also due to ignorance), while foreigners are almost completely excluded.

This mechanism in fact starts up a situation of exclusion (that may also determine conflict situations); in particular one of the main characteristics of the city of coexistence and interconnection enters a crisis, one we might define urban colloquiality, which produces a relationship not only of cohabitation, but also of coexistence and reciprocal communication between all the inhabitants of the city regardless of race, religion, culture, etc.

If the issue were to save both the nature and characteristics of our cities simultaneously and to include the newly-arrived, illegal or not, in our "civilisation" (for reciprocal benefits), then some specific political, social and economic practices would need to be singled out to enable this objective to be achieved. We are speaking of a set of provisions that could give substance to what we might call a coexistence policy, or strategy for coexistence.

Let it be clear that such a policy does not eliminate controversies, refusals or conflicts, as these actually have their roots in our beliefs, culture, faith and indeed psychology, but could help create non-conflictual situations of coexistence (generally speaking it is forgotten that our society is full of conflicts between individuals, groups, professionals, etc.).

Only the outcome of debate and collective commitment can lead to outlining such a policy, and we emphasise below in the form of an aide-memoire some points it ought to contain.

Citizenship should be granted to people who arrive and settle in a country, except for the cases in which motivated reasons for refusal exist. This holds all the more for unaccompanied minors. Citizenship will thus define the

rights and obligations involved. Though it may not be a measure balancing out the negative situations that characterise those who settle in a country without perhaps knowing the language, habits, values, customs, etc., it nevertheless gives the feeling of a positive welcome. The immigrant is helped to consider him/herself part of the host country, a little less alien.

The measure should, however, be accompanied by a cultural policy for the original population, that would bring out the benefits of hosting not in "moral" terms but in relation to mutual material interest. A policy which would highlight the "diversities" that, to not be elements of conflict, need on one side to be smoothed down, and on the other to be accepted (except in cases where customs and habits have a negative impact on natural rights).

The lack of availability of economic resources in fact determines marginalisation of the subject finding him/herself in this condition. Citizenship must therefore be accompanied by a policy on employment and effective economic support for the new arrivals. So as not to become a stamp of alienation, this support must not be different from that granted to the populations that have already settled. Thus, the extension of the citizenship income scheme to immigrant populations constitutes a significant case of inclusion.

Whenever possible and based on specific policies, housing availability is another inclusion factor. Immigrants must be accommodated in the city in a non-selective way, though knowing that accommodation may constitute an element strongly contested by the local citizens.

It goes without saying that the preceding measures are not privileges for immigrants, but only an instrument of equalisation between the local and the immigrant population.

School attendance for all children and young people is a fundamental element of coexistence. If, on the one hand, the presence of the two different populations may represent a factor of attrition and conflict, on the other, it is the material basis for reciprocal knowledge and appreciation.

To avoid the conflict and friction that this situation might create, teachers must be trained to focus and develop systems of mutual awareness in the schools. Schools can be the settings for either coexistence or conflict—the result hinges on three elements: the matter of language (not in regards to substitution but rather of integration), the matter of behavior (which is often very different and in some cases rejected by the other) and the general matter of attitude towards studying, etc.

It is imperative that the host population not adopt an attitude of cultural micro-imperialism.

Young people should have access to vocational training courses that prepare them for a job market free from the worst exploitation practices ("caporalato").

Basically, what we want to argue is that the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from other countries must be considered, as already mentioned, a positive thing for the host nation, but it must be clear that specific policies are fundamental. The idea that 'time' will eventually fix everything is dangerous and can lead to serious negative consequences. An immigration policy that addresses these various issues is essential to achieve the desired positive results from the arrival of these populations.

It seems to me that, in accordance with what has been argued above, we must exclude the construction of special places (ghettos) or the placement of foreign populations in small centres. The centers would be more beneficial and useful resources if the host community provided the help needed to welcome the immigrants without the intended goal of assimilation.

Declarations

Competing interests
The author declares no competing interests.

Author details
[1]Università Iuav, Venezia, Santa Croce 191 Tolentini, 30135 Venezia, Italy.
[2]Department of Architecture, Design and Urban Planning, University of Sassari, 07041 Alghero, Italy.

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