

The multidisciplinary PhD course: A history and a way forward

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to trace the last three decades of the PhD in Regional Planning and Public Policies (RPPP) at Iuav, Venice. The programme started in 1985; fifteen years after Giovanni Astengo established an undergraduate course in urban planning at the Iuav Venice University of Architecture. Astengo was a leading authority on urban planning in the twentieth century, and the founder of the first graduate urban planning program in Italy. On the national level he was a vigorously active urban planner, who contributed both to the drafting of several Italian laws concerning the protection of the territory and landscape, (DOES "protection of the territory and landscape" simply mean 'the environment'?) and a number of far-reaching plans. Astengo was the honorary president of the Italian National Institute of Planning (INU) from 1986 to 1990. He also re-founded the magazine Urbanistica, the magazine of the INU in 1949 and directed it for almost three decades.

Another significant pioneer, Pierluigi Crosta who coordinated the course for two decades, was, and still is, a leader in the theory and development of the discipline. Professor Crosta had a clear vision which he communicated to his students. In 2010, Crosta retired and many changes came about. A new coordinator was appointed with a new teaching plan.

This paper has two objectives. First of all, it will aim to trace the contributions of Crosta to development of the subject at national level. Secondly, it will try to reflect the viewpoints of some of the PhD candidates who experienced the transition after Crosta, as a way to improve the methodology and organizational structure. Finally, it will speculate on the possibility of establishing a research centre at Iuav for the advancement of studies on contemporary cities.

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to trace the last three decades of the PhD in Regional Planning and Public Policies at Iuav¹, Venice, looking at the training it provides and how it is organised. A significant influence was the main coordinator for twenty years, Pierluigi Crosta. It will be important to explore his most significant contributions to the subject at a national level. With this in mind, an interview with Crosta was arranged on July 18th 2015 in Milan and a review of his publications was carried out.

This aim is linked with examining the *raison d'être* behind establishing such a course in the first place. In addition to Crosta's

¹ It was established in 1926, the second in Italy after Rome, as university institute in architecture in Venice. Since 2001, it became Venice University of Architecture. Alongside architecture, the university offers training in planning, design and arts. The university was directed by prominent Italian architects and it gained its national and international fame thanks to the scientific contribution to the architectural and spatial discourse through prominent scientific journals led by a number of Iuav professors. Source: <http://www.iuav.it/Ateneo1/chi-siamo/Presentazi/la-storia/index.htm> [accessed 3 November 2015].

interview, a written interview and a consistent exchange of emails with Paolo Ceccarelli² took place between August 24th and October 1st 2015 to fulfil this aim.

Further, the paper assesses the transitional phase which took place after the retirement of Crosta in 2010. A case study was set and a questionnaire was dispatched to the former PhD candidates, who experienced that specific phase. The XXIV, XXV and XXVI cycles represented the full transition. The academic year of 2011-12 saw the launch of a new phase from the training and organizational viewpoints for the students of these three cycles. This case study reports their experiences, and suggests what can be done in training and organization to improve the experience for future students. It also makes some general comments on how other coordinators and scientific boards could tackle their own programmes.

Finally, this paper addresses the aim of establishing a research centre in collaboration with a number of national and international universities. This centre would contribute to, among other issues, the debate on the need for a South-Eastern theorization (Yiftachel, 2006). This discussion is supported by participation in a number of Iuav “city portrait” conferences and the resultant debate.

² Prominent Italian Urban planner. He was the rector of Iuav 1982-1991 and he founded in 1992 the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Ferrara, of which he was dean until 2002. He prepared several master plans internationally; the last was the master plan of Jericho, Palestine. He has extensive international experience of teaching and he is the President of ILAUD, International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design in Milan. Ceccarelli is UNESCO Chair in Urban and Regional Planning for Sustainable Local Development at the University of Ferrara. He is the coordinator of the Red Alvar network which brings together 12 Latin American Faculty of Architecture and four European universities.

THE INFLUENCE OF PIER LUIGI CROSTA

The first cycle of the PhD in Regional Planning was launched by three universities in 1985, the Iuav Venice University of Architecture, the Polytechnic university of Milan, and the Polytechnic university of Turin. Prominent Italian scholars such as Alessandro Balducci³, Cristina Bianchetti⁴, Luciano Vettoreto⁵, Stefano Boeri⁶, and many others in the field of planning graduated from this joint venture program. The first coordinator was Paolo Ceccarelli. He believed that the PhD programme of the three universities continued the themes that had always been basic to the Venetian and Milanese group who worked at the ILSES Lombard institute for the economic and Social Studies (Istituto Lombardo di Studi Economici e Sociali) based in Milan. When he started teaching at the Iuav Venice University of Architecture in 1968, Ceccarelli, who is well known for his multidisciplinary approach, organized a working group composed, of young specialists from various universities - sociologists, economists,

³ Alessandro Balducci, Full professor of Planning and Urban Policies at the Polytechnic university of Milan. He is Deputy - Mayor for Urban Planning and Agriculture of the City of Milan. As a scholar in the urban studies and planning he has been responsible of European and National research projects.

⁴ Cristina Bianchetti is Professor of Urban Development at the Polytechnic university of Turin. She is member of the editorial board of the Italian cultural journal "L'Indice".

⁵ Professor of technical and urban planning at Iuav and representative of the rector in activities related to research. His research privileged initially analysis of methodology in urban planning, housing and territorial studies, in relation to changes in the forms and processes of decision. Subsequently, his work focused on the relationship between forms of knowledge and forms of public action, with reference to the fields of planning theory, analysis and design of public policies of the territory and the effects of the territorial policies of the European Union.

⁶ Professor of Urban Design at the Polytechnic university of Milan. He is the founder of Multiplicity (www.multiplicity.it), a research group devoted to the study of territorial transformations and of the different ways of observing and representing the city in a multidisciplinary approach.

and political scientists such as Chiara Saraceno⁷, Francesco Indovina⁸, Gian Enrico Rusconi⁹ and Bernardo Secchi¹⁰. According to Ceccarelli, this experience provided a plan for the construction of the undergraduate degree in Urban Planning. Subsequently, another exceptional scholar Bernardo Secchi, also an ILSES academic, took over leadership of the course. In 1990, yet another ILSES academic, Pier Luigi Crosta, became the coordinator of the PhD program. He worked at ILSIS from 1962 to 1964 initially under the planning section directed by Giancarlo De Carlo¹¹ and subsequently in the

⁷ One of the most renowned Italian sociologists. Her research areas are family, women's issues, poverty and social policies. She held institutional positions in Italy and numerous academic positions, nationally and internationally.

⁸ A renowned Italian urban planner. He taught Territorial Analysis and Planning at Iuav and Alghero University in Sardinia. He made outstanding contributions with his research on the processes and urban sprawl and he is a distinguished advocate and practitioner of the interdisciplinary approach in the study of the city and the territory. He's co-founder and director of the journal *Archivio di Studi Urbani e Regionali* (ASUR).

⁹ Professor emeritus of political science. He is expert on religion and secularism, on German society and history.

¹⁰ Bernardo Secchi (1934-2014) was an Italian urban theorist, renowned urban planner, Emeritus Professor of Urban Planning at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura (IUAV) of Venice and Dean of the Faculty of Architecture at the Polytechnic of Milano. For almost half a century, he was a central figure within European and Italian interdisciplinary debates on the contemporary city and urban design. His research was located within the wider discourses of space and societal transformations, influenced by post-'68 French theorists and nourished specifically by a wide investigation of European urban territories. In his practice, he developed plans and visions for small and large cities in Italy and Europe. In 2008 he was amongst the ten architects selected to develop a vision for Grand Paris. He treated urban transformations with vivid, lucid and contemporary analyses that utilized theories as productive investigative tools to elucidate society and space rather than as merely self-referential intellectual gestures" (Boano & Astolfo 2014).

¹¹ Giancarlo De Carlo (1919-2005) was one of the protagonists of architecture and urban planning in Italy after the war. Famous for his critical exhibitions and writings of modernist formalism. He's renowned internationally as a key figure in the discourse of participation in architecture, for his militant architecture conceived

sociological section directed by Alessandro Pizzorno¹². His first battle was to sharpen the scientific focus and to establish the course at a single university. According to Crosta, although the experience of the three universities was enriching it consumed significant amounts of time and energy, especially because it required regular internal and external mediation between the scientific boards. Similar in appearance, between the three universities in reality there was little contact, apart from Milan and Venice¹³. With this in mind Crosta proposed renaming the course: “PhD in Public Policies”. The proposal was, however, rejected by the vice president of the CUN Consiglio Universitario Nazionale (the Italian National University Council), because it was, allegedly, not related to the urban planning disciplinary area. A compromise title was adopted, “PhD in Regional Planning and Public Policies”. Professor Crosta later managed to achieve his aim when he introduced the PhD program at the Iuav Venice University of Architecture, with significant support from Paolo Ceccarelli, the rector, and Marino Folin¹⁴, the Head of the department at the time.

as a political profession not separated from its context. He was the founder of the International Laboratory of Architecture and Urbanism (ILAUD). His most famous works internationally are the master plan of Urbino, and the social housing in Terni and Matera.

¹² He is an Italian sociologist and political scientist of international fame. He taught at Italian and international universities and he conducted research in sociology and economic policy, especially on trade unions and on class conflict, Italian politics and its aspects, the relationship between political and economic systems in industrial societies.

¹³ Interview to Pier Luigi Crosta, 18 July 2015. Translation to English by the author.

¹⁴ Rector of the Iuav from 1993-2006. He initiated and achieved the technical passage of Iuav from institute to university of architecture. Currently he is the president of the foundation Iuav.

The changing orientation of policy over the twenty-year period can be better understood by examining the research career of the coordinator. Pierluigi Crosta was influenced by Giancarlo De Carlo's work at both national and international level. During his work experience at the ILSES, he conducted research into two important areas. The first explored the various forms of settlement of the immigrants in the so-called "Koreas". The term "Korea" refers to the informal structures that southern immigrants established in the years of the East Asian conflict in the municipalities of the Milan belt such as Cinisello Balsamo, Bollate and Cologno Monzese. The second research area shed the light on the residential settlements of private initiatives in the same area. These two cases of informal planning on small and large scales were further investigated by Crosta throughout the '70s and extensively used as case studies in his lectures and seminars. They were considered significant mobilization of urbanization agents, "unprofessional and non-institutional social subjects".

During his fellowship at MIT and Harvard, Crosta followed the courses of James M. Beshers in sociology and development, Matthew Edel in Development Economics, the seminars of Albert O. Hirschman¹⁵, and Loyd Rodwin's "SPURS" (Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies of developing areas) at MIT. His American study period was also influenced by the people with whom he shared the same "corridor": he became a good friend for instance with Kevin Lynch. Another influential associate was Donald A. Schon (1967), who had just published his seminal economic study. He also met and was influenced by John Friedmann (1995; 1996) and Lisa Peattie.

¹⁵ Some years after his American experience Francesco Indovina has proposed the translation of Albert O. Hirschman's *Development Projects Observed*, which was published in Italy by Franco Angeli in 1975, and which became a cornerstone of his academic orientation and teaching.

In 1968, he was asked by Ludovico Quaroni¹⁶ to join a cultural and technical cooperation project between Italy and Algeria. This involved him teaching three courses in urban planning at the Ecole Nationale d'Architecture in Algeria for two years.

Carlo De Carlo's conversion to advocacy planning, which he introduced publicly in a seminar in 1970 at the Lido in Venice, became a decisive moment for Crosta, one of the keynote speakers together with Robert Goodman. This seminar made him reflect on the social role of the planner and on popular participation in the planning processes. It was this stimulus that motivated him to publish "l'urbanista di parte. Ruolo sociale del tecnico e partecipazione popolare nei processi di pianificazione urbana".

Pier Luigi Crosta's analysis contributed to the opening of a debate in the 1970s at national level on the political role of the planning discipline. Francesca Gelli¹⁷ argues that in the period following Fascism Italian political scientists underemphasized the extent to which the urban environment influenced the political process.

"The political dimension of the city as a terrain for the formation of politics had no place on the agenda. The analysis of urban policy and the local political system have been largely focused on parties, elections and voting patterns, or on statistical surveys designed to

¹⁶ Ludovico Quaroni (1911-1989) was one of the protagonists of architecture and urban planning in Italy after the war and Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Florence. He was the vice president of INU from 1947 to 1951. In his numerous writings he addressed the relationship and interdependencies between architecture, planning and sociology.

¹⁷ She is the current coordinator of the discussed PhD program. She has been teaching policy analysis and public administration at Iuav since 2006. In her books and essays she addressed the themes of local policy, democratic theory, federalism and research methodology.

gather demographic trends of rural/urban population, without serious consideration for policies¹⁸ⁿ (Gelli 2012:5).

Crosta argues that planning is political, its assumptions are political and its outcomes are political. Indeed, to date, this is the only doctoral programme in Italy that develops a policy approach in the field of urban planning and spatial studies. It has been described as a programme that aims at exploring policies as “processes of social interaction and practices of use of the territory, a use that have an effect on the production and reproduction of space” (Gelli 2015).

During his long academic carrier, Crosta dedicated his time to research. He further probed the role of the planner and stood up for a radically revised training of the architect¹⁹. During the 90s he addressed this topic a number of times in *Ca’Tron Cronache*, (a small journal dedicated to the Venetian institutions with headquarters at Ca’Tron, Iuav,) *Territorio*, a quarterly journal of the Department of Architecture and Planning at the Polytechnic university of Milan, and *Urbanistica*, a journal of the National Institute of Planning (INU). Crosta's writings updated the Anglo-Saxon model which had been discussed and supported in those years at the yearly conferences of AESOP (Association of European Schools of Planning). This was his second major contribution nationally.

To strengthen his teaching methodology, Crosta put into practice solid theoretical frameworks such as those developed by Charles Lindblom and Cohen (1979) who explored extensively the relation between knowledge and action. Later he embraced the theory of Ivan Illich on the effects of incapacitation as a consequence of professionalization (Crosta 2013). His meticulous analysis of case

¹⁸ Translation to English by the author.

¹⁹ He was the president of the undergraduate course in territorial planning at Iuav from 1988 until 1994.

studies as a result of research-in-action, an empirical research methodology which features improvisation and diverse theoretical sources, is considered the third theoretical contribution of Crosta at the national level.

ESTABLISHING A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PHD COURSE

The foundation of this course is the thesis that policies have multidisciplinary approaches which build around retrieved problems in history. It is specifically here that the debate on skills and professionalization come into play. Therefore the process of policy/decision making is not seen merely as negotiation between residents and authority, but as a constantly adjusted interactive process between many people, in which the everyday maker plays a decisive and active role. The multidisciplinary approach is reflected in the constant debate about concepts, arguments, theories and reflections without disciplinary prejudice or fear of theoretical “eclecticism”. For example, when the course addresses the “public” it refers mostly to French and North American scientific bedrocks such as John Dewey, the Groupe de Sociologie Politique et Morale (GSPM), such as Laurent Thévenot, Daniel Cefaï and Luc Boltanski but, and the Italian sociologist Carlo Donolo (1997) who discussed this theme in general terms. Dewey (1927) is used also for introducing the concepts of inquiry, interactions/transactions and apparatus. The multidisciplinary approach is also mirrored in the diverse scientific composition of the academic board and in the various geographical and disciplinary origins of its candidates. A central role has always been given to doctoral candidates specificities and their policy interests. Their multidisciplinary background further enriches the exchange and the opportunity to learn from one another. For instance, researchers who graduated between 1994-2013 from this PhD course came originally from the following disciplines (Table 1):

Table 1 – Background studies of PhD candidates 1994-2013

Undergraduate studies	
Architecture	38
Communication	1
Economic studies	
<i>Public administration economy</i>	1
<i>Economic and social disciplines</i>	3*
<i>Business</i>	3
<i>Finance and control</i>	1
Planning studies	
<i>Town planning</i>	4
<i>Regional and urban planning</i>	17
Engineering	
<i>Civil Engineering</i>	3
<i>Construction engineering</i>	2
Political studies	
<i>Political economy</i>	4
<i>Political science</i>	7
<i>European union policies</i>	1
<i>Cooperation, Local and International development</i>	1
Modern literature	1
Psychology	2
Sociology	3
Total	92

Source: Iuav, PhD Yearbook 2014.

This eclectic mixture makes it possible for unexpected research fields to emerge. For example, a recent candidate presented a thesis entitled: "musical participation policies". At first glance, this title might sound incongruous, and one might wonder at the link between music and participation policies. This thesis divided the scientific board. Some believed that it had nothing to do with this PhD program and in planning in general, while others argued that this thesis was relevant to the programme especially because of its empirical and participatory character. According to the first group, the study appeared to be out of place because it had nothing to do with physical space, plans or policies. The second group welcomed research which would embrace diverse theoretical knowledge from a number of disciplines, especially sociology, musicology and urban planning.

According to Crosta, who was part of the second group, this thesis should be considered one of the most interesting recent theses of the course. Crosta who navigates with extreme confidence between a vast spectrum of humanities disciplines, can confidently face and lead such a challenge with an unpredictable outcome. In this regard, one of the interviewed PhDs said: "Crosta was great not only for his impressive knowledge but also for his ability to stimulate reflection and for his leadership...I am not referring to the ability to "control", but instead the ability to give meaning and motivate, to make things go in a certain direction and to stimulate you to be yourself and follow your own way²⁰".

Tommaso Napoli, explored the role of music in regenerating the social fabric of the city. He theorized that "musical participation is a boundless field of results of interactions of different type, use and reuse of different routines and re-contextualizations of individual and collective actions". This thesis presented three critical case studies:

²⁰ Questionnaire participant from the XXVI cycle, 28 September 2015.

England which, according to Napoli (2014), is one of the few countries to have a long tradition (commencing with the Settlement Houses) of interventions in disadvantaged areas through programs of musical socialization; the system of the Venezuelan orchestras which were conceived as a participatory tool for development; and the third and last case which was completely empirical, based on Napoli's practice of "experimenting" with musical participation experiences in Italy.

In discussing policies, much attention is paid in the course to the Hirschmanian (1967) concept of "unintended knowledge" and how the effects of such policies can be exchanged. A leading argument is that there is no point in criticizing policy in terms of consistency between objectives and effects because many of the effects that are usually attributed to a certain policy might be a product of another or even a combination of policies. Policies must be explained purely in terms of their context.

There is no doubt that the research perspective revolves around the "actor". PhD candidates are therefore encouraged to probe the processes of urbanization in which the individual is an "actor" who, in an inconsistent and non-continuous way, performs roles and functions normally/ institutionally attributed to subjects who profess embedded professional skills. What really matters is the capacity to become an "actor" in the sense of managing a body of knowledge which could be partly considered professional knowledge. However, what is important when navigating at a certain level of diverse knowledge is the need for a historical context.

This PhD course demands predominantly the development of a multidisciplinary scientific research approach. It requires the elaboration and practice of solid theoretical frameworks. Analyses of case studies as research methodology are particularly valuable. Case studies are by their very nature empirical tools for probing, observing and conducting disparate areas of research in the real world.

Why the case-study approach? It encourages “problem chasing” by using various tools and especially by adopting the theoretical bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1966), which means to be able to exploit and implement theories not only from the planning discipline but from a broader scientific spectrum. It is a learning research-in-action process during which the researcher applies interactive practices of probing. Improvisation (Weick 1995) is the bedrock of this research-in-action since the researcher has to code and decode encountered practices, drawing from not only professional knowledge but, most of all, from the ordinary and local established knowledge. The interest in adopting a certain theoretical framework is in the outcome of its use. As a result, PhD candidates are allowed considerable scope in using theories that apply to their case studies from diverse disciplinary areas. What really matters is how theory is put into practice. Effective use of theories justifies the choice of using some tools and discarding others. Researcher and theorist are one. In fact, this course does not request candidates to specialize in depth in one of the principal procedural theories of planning: the rational-comprehensive approach, the communicative approach, the advocacy approach, the equity approach, the radical approach and the humanist approach. There is a non-formulaic approach to case-studies. The course invites candidates to build up a unique area of knowledge from the various disciplines according to their research-in-action findings. The rational-comprehensive theory is, however, explored at the beginning of the course in order to highlight the “problem definition model” and the figure of the “technician” as the opposite subject of Donald Schon’s (1983) “reflective practitioner”. Thus, this theory is used as a mean of access to introducing the role of the planner and of the discipline itself.

REVISION OF THE COURSE AFTER CROSTA

In 2010 Crosta retired and the transition proved to be a difficult one. The PhD candidates had to report to a new coordinator and to a scientific board which they had never met before. They also had to manage new organizational procedures. In order to explore this period from the point of view of the candidates' training and organizational issues, the XXIV, XXV and XXVI cycles were invited to compile a questionnaire about the overall experience. The questions required the evaluation of the following aspects: professional training including the seminars; opportunities to meet and invite international scholars; opportunities to participate in seminars and conferences; literature and research methodology; mentoring during the exploration phase, research abroad (if any), and while writing. Unfortunately, only five people out of twenty two took part. Although the questionnaire was very simple and specific, the answers brought the investigation to a different outcome: not an evaluation of the transition as such, but putting forward a number of suggestions, some of a general character and very few regarding this specific PhD program. From the training viewpoint, there was unanimous agreement on two points. The first was the need for a dynamic disciplinary exchange with the scientific board during the PhD cycle. It was felt that the desired relationship should not be limited to unofficial meetings during thesis advancement presentations. This point was raised from the graduates of the XXV, and XXVI cycles. During the 2014/15 programme, however, it seems that some of the scientific board professors have been actively engaged in the seminars. The second was the need to dedicate at least one seminar to addressing research methodology and peer reviewed scientific papers.

From the organizational viewpoint, the need for a general course guideline was put forward. It would be a guideline in which the

requirements for a successful completion of the course would be clearly stated, as for example delivery, deadlines and publication of articles. It should also clarify the degree of autonomy of the PhD candidates in relation to: organizing seminars, use of the allocated budget, and study periods abroad. Since the vast majority of candidates come from distant Italian regions or even from abroad, it was suggested that there should be a list of Iuav potential available services, for example residences. More importantly, perhaps the "commuters" might be advised to move, at least for the first year, to Venice. Paolo Ceccarelli argues that the lack of available services and adequate information provided to students and especially foreign students makes the Italian universities less competitive and not attractive at international level (Ceccarelli 2015).

The questionnaire examined the wide spectrum of PhD courses in general terms, more particularly the psychological aspect, placement and teaching experience. The first feature addressed the experience as both intensely rewarding, and traumatic. The combination of solitude and the continuous exploration of the "right trajectory" can exacerbate the drudgery of many doctoral candidates. Therefore, it might be productive and supportive to address the "psychological issue" of the doctorate through specific meetings and permanent support. Such services already exist for the undergraduates, so they could simply be extended to doctoral candidates.

It was suggested that the small number of available placements could be increased if the university could offer/suggest "placement" in the format of internships, fellowships and post-docs, for recent PhD graduates either in Italy or abroad. Finally, the feature of teaching opportunities was addressed. To teach and to interact with undergraduates could be a course requirement. The exchange could be fruitful for the candidates in terms of literature knowledge deepening and in gaining experience in public speaking.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This PhD offers significant multidisciplinary possibilities. In its last twenty years, many case studies on practices have been researched worldwide. In spite of the course continuing to produce academic or research oriented graduates, the limited vacancies in Italian universities have provided modest opportunities to work in academia or in research centres in Italy. In addition recent university reforms have further reduced funding and the possibility of research. It would seem that the current economic recession will continue to limit universities severely. Table 2 below shows that out of ninety-two PhD graduates between 1994-2013, only twenty-six graduates managed to find a job in academia (18) or in the field of research (8) in Italy.

Table 2 – Job positions of PhD Graduates between 1994-2013

Position	#
Academia in Italy	18
Academia abroad	5
Research in Italy (research centers, foundations or companies)	8
Research abroad	4
Other fields	8
Planning field	22
Planning field abroad	2
Professional consultants	25
Total	92

Source: Iuav, PhD Yearbook 2014.

In 2010, the school of doctoral studies launched a series of conferences entitled “city portraits”. This series analyses cities worldwide from a multidisciplinary perspective. Each two-day conference is hosted by a PhD candidate, or a group of candidates and researchers. The programme includes a workshop dedicated to the presentation and discussion of a number of selected case-studies by PhD candidates or researchers who have conducted research on a relevant city. Different professional figures are invited to explore the living texture of the city from architectural, urban, artistic, sociological, economic and political angles. The series aims to present a multidisciplinary perspective to an international audience interested in developing and deepening knowledge of these cities. However, this series also provides opportunities for scholars, practitioners and “everyday makers”, to describe their life and how they perceive their own space, as well as reporting on how their cities are presented abroad. Currently, twelve²¹ cities have been studied at palazzo Badoer, the venue of the school of doctoral studies. These conferences are usually attended by scholars, students, and practitioners from various fields from Italy and abroad and are broadcasted live on the university website.

The experience of a number of Iuav “city portrait” conferences and the resultant debate suggests that instead of irregular meetings and exchanges of knowledge, these productive, wide-ranging and intense ventures should be linked in a joint research center drawing on a network of universities. All eight PhD programs of Iuav

²¹ 15-16 December 2010 Beijing, 19-20 April 2011 Saint Petersburg, 29 November 2011 Sao Paolo, 29 February & 1 March 2012 Istanbul, 15-16 May 2012 Jerusalem, 28 November 2012 Mexico City, 19 March 2013 Madrid, 09 April 2013 Mumbai, 24 & 31 October 2013, 26 & 28 May 2015 Shanghai, 25-26 June 2015 Johannesburg, 22-23 October 2015 Astana.

school of doctoral studies could be part of such a research centre where the RPPP course could play a significant role in practices and policy analysis. Such a research hub could attract local and European funding and could therefore offer fellowships and post-docs opportunities as well as consultancies

Were such a research centre to exist, it could investigate practices from areas such as the South Eastern cities of the world. Yiftachel postulates that the leading NorthWestern theories are not universal and there is a real need for new epistemological speculation based on case studies from the South Eastern countries of the world. He argues that “it is high time to conceptualize from the “South East” (the wide range of non-western, non northern societies), and create meso-level theories which would genuinely engage with the framing realities of various south-eastern regions. Such theories would avoid the pitfalls of false and domineering universalism; reject the postmodernist retreat from substance and values, yet offer meaningful generalizations to guide and inspire students, scholars and practitioners” (Yiftachel, 2006:212)

The research centre could also study the territory in which each university is located from different aspects, for example from the different spatial practices of its new citizens, the refugees. Following recent armed conflicts and civil wars in the middle-east and Africa, thousands of desperate men, women and children are looking for a safe refuge in western countries. These people practice a new social production of space: their Lefebvrian “lived space” is where their imagination seeks to change and appropriate space. Researching these case studies might be an interesting point of departure not only for academic purposes but also as a tool for helping the local administration better understand how European cities are evolving spatially and how decision makers alongside “everyday makers” could sketch out a more inclusive and representative space of needs and aspirations.

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