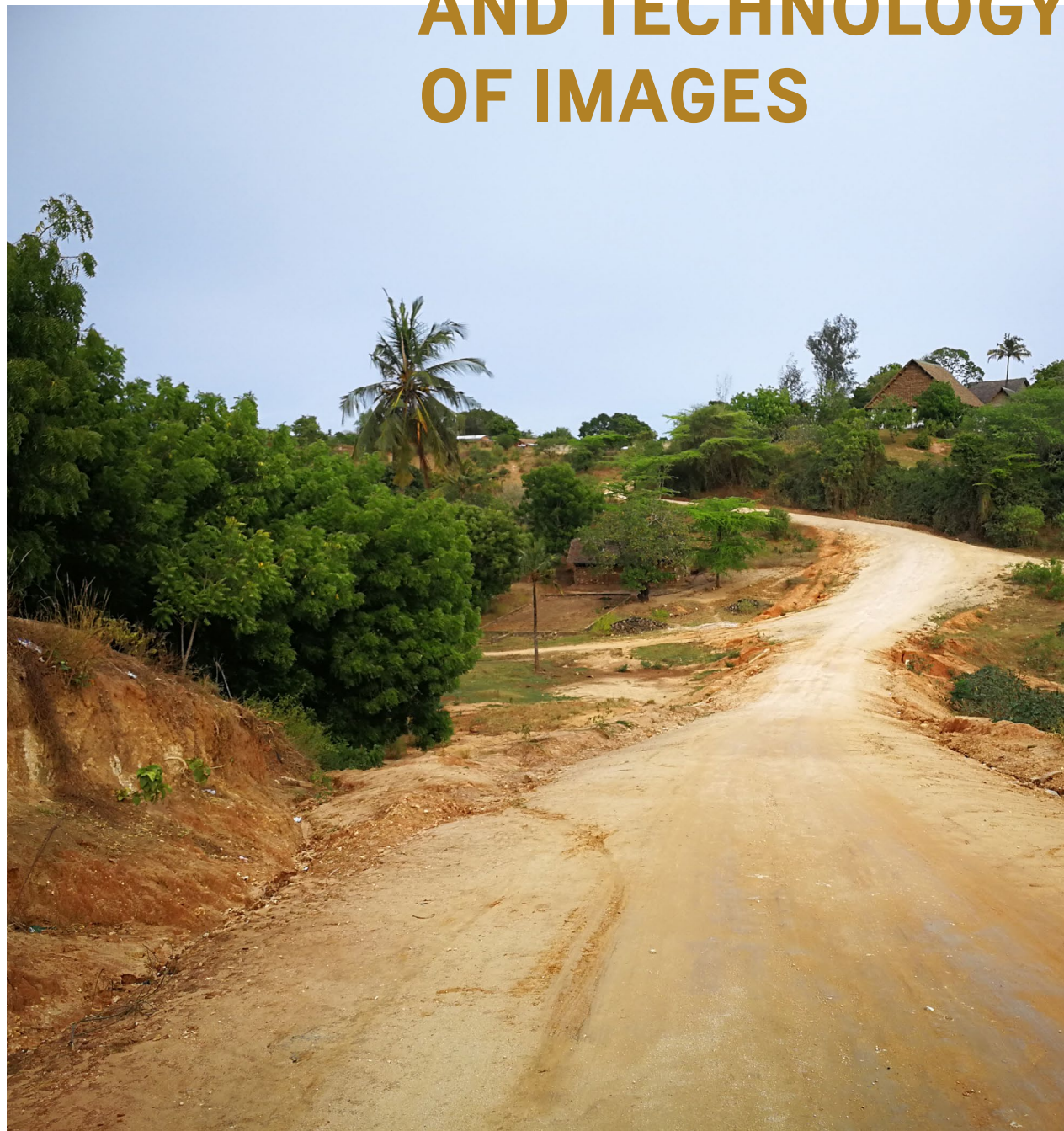


# URBAN VISUALITY, MOBILITY, INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY OF IMAGES











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**Szczecin 2020**



**WYDAWNICTWO  
AKADEMII SZTUKI  
W SZCZECINIE**

# URBAN VISUALITY, MOBILITY, INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY OF IMAGES



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## Keywords

urbanization  
visuality  
interculturalism  
dialogue  
visual education  
visual literacy



# Urban Visuality in Intercultural Perspective

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## Abstract

The essential migration from rural to urban areas has had various consequences for human lives, creating a specific kind of iconic sphere or environment in which one of the basic means of communication is visual communication. The ubiquity of images and their multitude in commerce, politics, mobility, safety, education, and entertainment require the development of literary skills within visual communication. Interpreting perceived images, understanding them, acquiring the ability to approach them critically, redefine them and construct one's own visual communiques in an intercultural perspective are contemporary needs.

The need for intercultural visual literacy should be fulfilled by educational programs at all levels, starting from kindergarten and continuing to the university level. These programs should be developed, and the main goal of the TICASS project is to elaborate a set of recommendations for the task of considering visuality in the intercultural perspective, which allows one to search for similarities and differences in perception and interpretation of images across different cultures.

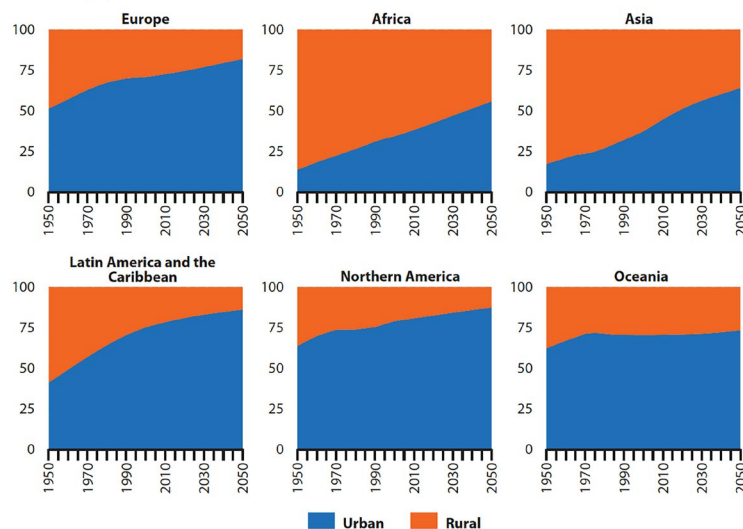


## Urbanization Processes Worldwide

The essential migration from rural to urban areas has had various consequences for human lives, creating a specific kind of iconic sphere or environment in which one of the basic means of communication is visual communication. Visual communication strongly affects practical urban life, although of course not the world's population lives in cities or is solely visually urban. Visuality is the sphere in which we are immersed in various circumstances and conditions because it is one of the basic modes of reality available to us and which we experience sensually. However, urban visuality is specific, different from the rural experience. It is much more condensed, brighter, more aggressive, and more hectic, although there are essential variations between its modulations in various countries and continents (as, for example, between Nairobi and Oslo or Szczecin). This urban visuality is the everyday environment of a large share of the population living in urban areas nowadays.

Urbanization processes are occurring worldwide though there are important differences in urban development between various continents. The largest segment of population living in urban areas is in North America with 81.6%, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean with 79.8%, according to statistics presented by Eurostat in 2016. The share in Europe is also high, with 73% of Europe's population living in urban areas.

Figure 1: Share of urban and rural populations, 1950–2050 (%)  
(% of total population)



Il. 1 Share of urban and rural population, 1950-2050. Eurostat (2016). Urban Europe. Statistics on Cities, Towns, and Suburbs. European Union 2016, p. 8.

Currently, 3.4 billion out of 6.9 billion people live in the countryside, and world urbanization prospects foresee that approximately two-thirds of the world's population will be living in an urban area by 2025 (Statista 2019). According to Eurostat:

This rapid pace of change is projected to be driven primarily by changes in Africa and Asia, as the focus of global urbanisation patterns continues to shift towards developing and emerging economies. The pace of change in Europe will likely be slower, with the share of the population living in urban areas projected to rise to just over 80% by 2050 (Eurostat, 2016, p. 9).

In analysing processes of urbanization on different continents, it becomes obvious that there is not only more than one pace but also multiple patterns of urbanization. Urban structure and spatial distribution in Europe, Asia, and America (as well as Africa – not mentioned in the study) differ considerably.

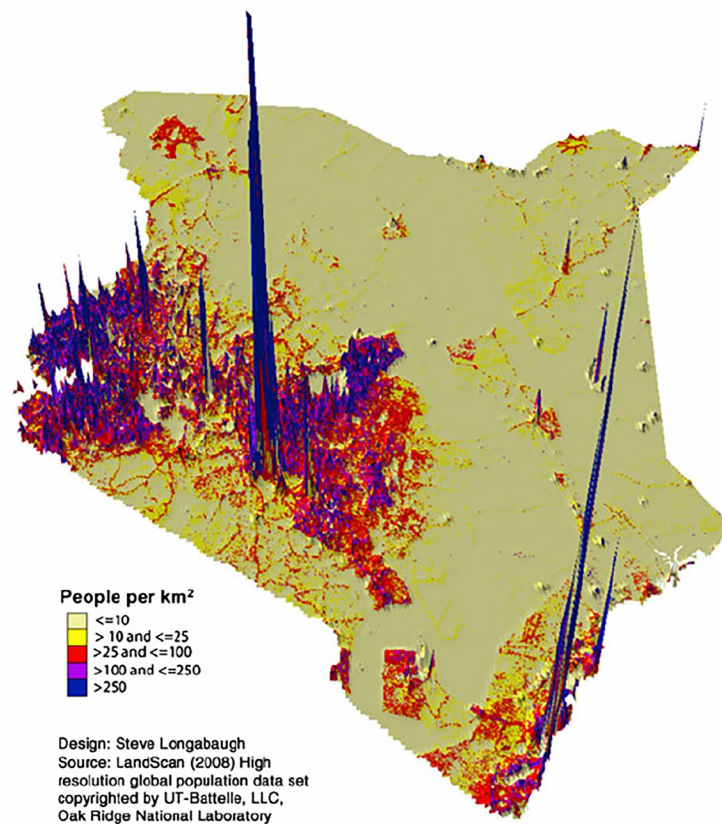
Europe is generally characterised by a high number of relatively small cities and towns that are distributed in a poly-centric fashion; this reflects, to some degree, its historical past which has led to a fragmented pattern of around 50 countries being spread over the continent. By contrast, in some parts of Asia and North America, a relatively high proportion of the urban population is concentrated in a small number of very large cities (Eurostat, 2016, pp. 9-10).

The situation of Africa is also special; despite the continuous growth of urbanization in Africa since the 1950s, when over 80% of the population lived in rural areas, most of the populace is still there: in 2015, 59.6% of Africa's population was living in rural areas. Kenya's situation is in accord with the general African one; according to World Bank data from 2018, in 1960, 93% of Kenyans lived in rural areas while in 2017 it was 73% (The World Bank, 2018). That means that in a little over 50 years, 20% of the population had moved from rural to urban areas (which, however, still does not reach the rate in American or Asian megacities).

Internal migrations in Africa bring changes in traditions, practices, customs, forms of mobility, and languages, in part because of the influences by various tribes on each other. Of course, these influences are at play in Kenya too. This is not my focus, but I shall note that they are both positive and negative, depending on which level of social life we examine. It is not only culture that is influenced by migrations but also economics and the very fabric of society. The general value of this statement allows one to analyse the migrations – for example – of wealthy and educated persons from the centre of Kenya to the Indian Ocean coast, or of workers from Central and Eastern Europe to the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries.



Migration in Africa is mostly from villages to big cities. In Kenya the population is heavily concentrated in the west, along the shores of Lake Victoria and in Kisumu (1,118,000); other areas of high density include the capital of Nairobi (3,375,000) and in the southeast along the Indian Ocean coast and in Mombasa (1,200,000).



Il. 2 Population density in Kenya in Jayne, T. & Muyanga, M. (2012)

Migrants are mostly young people, as the Kenyan population is generally young, with a median age of 20 years: more than 40% of Kenyans are under the age of 15 because of sustained high fertility rates, early marriage and childbearing, and an unmet need for family planning (CIA, The World Factbook).

## Visual Communication and Visual Order in Cities

Cities are different environments from rural ones. The higher prevalence of technology, as well as economic, political, and cultural institutions, transform ways of living, everyday routines, traditions, opinions and worldviews, and modes of communication. The necessity of combining various social, political, cultural, and ethnic groups in one area and of implementing order (which in most cases is neoliberal nowadays) requires effective and quick communication, both mass and individual. For this purpose, visual communication serves very well.

By "visual communication in urban spaces" I predominantly mean indicative signs, traffic signs, information boards, advertisements (commercial or social), legal and illegal stickers, and paintings on buildings (like murals or graffiti); as well as, to some extent, online visual communication with a smartphone as it very often manages human mobility in cities by being a medium through which to arrange meetings with other people and through various applications for public transport (applications with bus/tram/metro/train timetables, or connections to other buses or transport lines, Google Maps, and a GPS system). Starting from the smartphone in our hands, through traffic signs, advertisements, digital screens, and posters, we find ourselves immersed in the iconosphere around us, the sphere of images. Of course, the level of technological development of different cities varies so the iconosphere may be more or less dense, but it is inarguably an integral part of the contemporary urban environment.

Younger generations are generally more well acquainted with visual communication because its growth has been accompanied by neoliberalism and technological development; the latter can be traced back to the beginning of 20th century, marked by Henry Ford's first mechanized Detroit factory in 1903, and the invention by Oskar Barnak in 1913 of the 35 mm camera (Leica), which led the way to massive photographic production and reproduction. Contemporary technological development has accelerated the filling of urban spaces in many countries with screens and digital imagery, eye-catching, hectic, and consumeristic: as in Times Square in New York and Piccadilly Circus in London.

Some smaller, usually more sustainable, cities try to limit and control visual communication so that it does not predominate the basic human need for clean surroundings, visual order, and light. Such positive practices govern the control of commercial signs in public spaces and malls, not allowing large billboards to cover important parts of the city or the landscape: take for instance Scandinavia, which is visually well-organized in a modest but developed way (interestingly, QR codes are popular in cities like Oslo, connecting one with historical information about the place, its buildings and statues, or with transport information).



Negative practices result from neglecting the human need for cleanliness, order, and light – often preferring quick financial profit. Completely covering bus windows with commercial stickers or graffiti prevents natural light from entering or prevents the opening of them (as still happens sometimes in Poland). Following strong social critique of such practices in the media in 2010 and 2011, large ads slowly started to disappear due to the changing contracts between municipal communication institutes and advertisers in each city. Another bad practice is covering a building façade with advertising during the process of renovation when it is still occupied, where residents are in this situation cut off from light by the advertisement: this was also a case in Poland, banned by regulations implemented by the Ministry of Infrastructure in 2009.

Covering blocks of flats with huge advertisements goes against the personal right to privacy, the inviolability of the flat and the right to rest. The issue was discussed publicly after one Warsaw citizen claimed that her rights were being violated before the court. An advertisement was hung 20–30 cm from the building, shutting out the view as well as sunlight. At night, bright lights shone on the ad, also illuminating the inside of the flat and impeding the occupants' sleep. This claim, and a following case, brought about changes to the regional regulations concerning technical conditions regarding buildings and their locations, demanding that "spaces dedicated for the stay of people must have guaranteed daylight, customized according to its purpose, shape, and volume" (PAP, 2009).

It is important to think about visual order in cities and the people's quality of life; their neglect shows the social divisions imprinted in the urban tissue. People who have less access to clean air, daylight, comfortable living spaces, and pleasant sounds and smells are separate from those who have access to them every day. The spatial division of sensory order and pleasant atmospheres in cities expose social and class divisions. This point was inspirationally exposed by Arnold Berleant when he wrote about negative aesthetics (Berleant, 2010) in the cities of late capitalism, filled with oppressive smells, sounds, images, and spaces. Analysis of these sensorily experienced factors of urban social life brings Berleant's claim for social justice from the point of view of everyday sensory experiences and the common environment. Sensitivity is common to all humans, and it requires freedom from oppression that results in abuse, social inequalities, and poverty in many contemporary cities – especially mega-cities.

The driving processes of urbanization and urban management in various countries and cultures should be consequent to learning from others' experiences and mistakes in order not to repeat them all, but there are shortcuts towards sustainable urbanization, friendly for individuals and groups, creating the possibility for free and peaceful cohabitation. This is the direction shown by strategic international and European documents on urbanization processes, prospects, and management.<sup>1</sup> The United Nations

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<sup>1</sup> For example: The United Nations "supports [...] planning and building a better urban future through

and the European Union realize the importance of creating and maintaining a friendly environment in cities, places with very dense populations in many countries around the globe, and propose that urbanization should be managed with concern for the quality of life in cities. Friendly urban environments are inclusive for various social groups and should be understandable in terms of structure and communication; offering the possibility to live well, a respite from aggressive advertisements, disorder, and dirt. Urban visuality is an important part of the urban fabric, which should be concerned in the processes of its – hopefully sustainable – development.

## ***Kenyan Urban Visuality***

Visual order in public spaces in Kenya is considerably different from European countries; some may call it disorder but I would rather claim that it is in a way organic.<sup>2</sup> It proliferates with little control, responding to the individual needs of persons, or institutions and companies. On different levels of social life, it varies: 1) on the community level, it is based on body language, facial expressions, and textiles (gestures, faces, *leso*<sup>3</sup>); 2) on the local commercial level, it is based on hand-painted iconic representations; for instance, painted fruits indicating the market, a menu on the restaurant wall, or a car battery painted on the gate of a car workshop; 3) on an international commercial level, it depends on large billboards with photographs.

Newcomers to a Kenyan town or city must learn the visual strategies of the place in order to understand and produce meaningful visual expressions: in everyday gestures and in work with children, youths, and adults as an educator. This is a need for visual literacy, the ability to understand and produce meaningful and creative visual communications. This ability, like language, is conditioned culturally – as we deal with 6500 spoken languages in the world today, we must consider many visual languages in connection with perspectives on the world and cultural backgrounds, expressed in everyday activities and their forms.

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support for economic growth and social development, while targeting reductions in poverty and social inequalities," especially within UN-Habitat programme (Eurostat, 2016, p. 17.) For more than 20 years, European Union urban policy has been directed towards sustainable development, aiming at bettering human life conditions and making cities pleasant places to live. "Urban areas have the potential to play important role in the EU's renewed sustainable development strategy, which underlines how to deliver sustainable development commitments, while reaffirming the need for global solidarity, in order to achieve smarter, more sustainable and socially inclusive urban development [...] recognized as a key element in the Pact of Amsterdam" (Eurostat, 2016, p. 20.)

<sup>2</sup> The fact that traffic and transport in towns and cities lack municipal visual ordering is charming to some extent, but it is also the cause of a high death rate in Kenya – which in 2017 was 2750 persons dead as of 21 November 2018: 2509 (NTSA.)

<sup>3</sup> Kanga or *leso* is a pure cotton cloth that originated on the East African coast in the mid-nineteenth century.

## Historical and Cultural Roots of European Urban Visuality

The European iconosphere is structured and deeply rooted in the culture, the reason being that its contemporary technological development is controlled and organized in a rational way, while the African iconosphere is more spontaneous and organic. This has some historical basis – Europe, since ancient Greece, has favoured the sense of vision over other senses, connecting sight with truth, knowledge, and reason, and discarding the other senses as connected to primal biological nature, which has been tamed by culture. By the time of Plato, sight was considered the foundation of philosophy (Plato's highest state of knowledge was the contemplation of ideas [Plato, 1959]). For Aristotle, empirical, rather than idealistic, vision was taken as the clearest of the senses (Aristotle, 1961). The importance of sight and its connection with knowledge was further developed by Galileo, Locke, and Descartes.

This importance is visible in the artistic and functional modes of visual organization in place throughout history. Ancient Greeks valued symmetry and the golden mean, reflected in forms of human representations (head is 1:8 to the body), in the structures and elements of buildings like temples and columns (of Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian order, proportionately).<sup>4</sup> The harmony of the whole was built on the individual formation of each part, along with the particular balanced composition of these elements. Contemporary visual structures may be deliberately unbalanced, especially in the field of contemporary art. However, in public spaces for citizens and visitors, visual communication in Europe is usually measured.

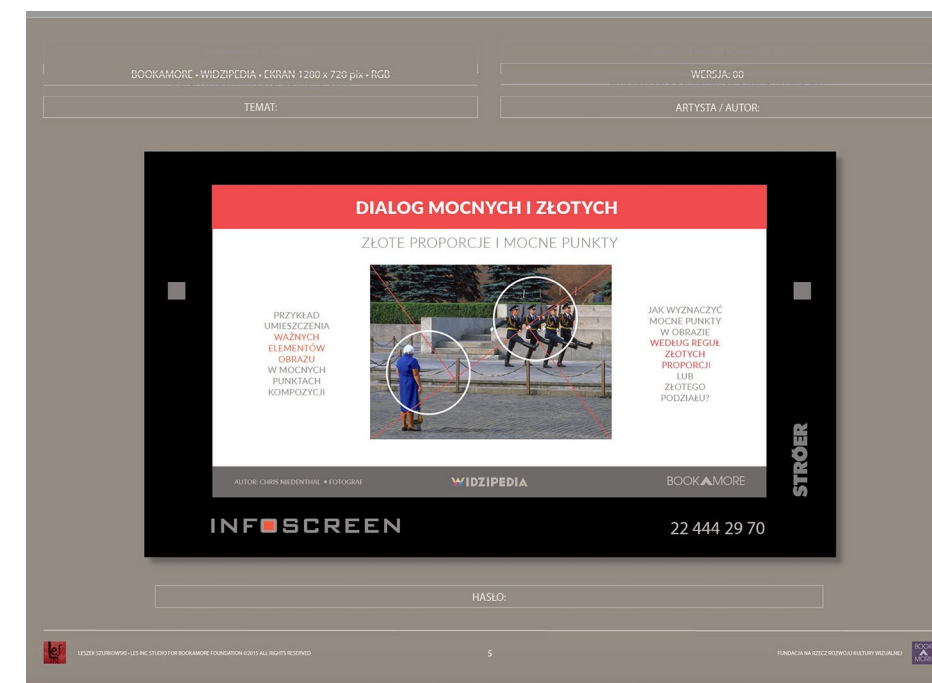
## Visual Education, Urban Aesthetics, and Interculturalism

In order to make visual communication effective and friendly, it should not "shout too loud" or infringe the basic human need for light, a clean environment, and not being disturbed. In many European countries, regulations are in place regarding advertisements and political propaganda in public spaces and elsewhere, lest they proliferate. These practices are based on European cultural canon, containing rules managing the aesthetic – predominantly visual – environment. However, neither laws nor canon are always obeyed, resulting in ineffective, abusive, unhealthy, or unsafe environments: this demands, as a remedy, visual education and visual literacy.

<sup>4</sup> Doric (1:4-1:8), Ionic (1:8-1:9), Corinthian (1:10.)

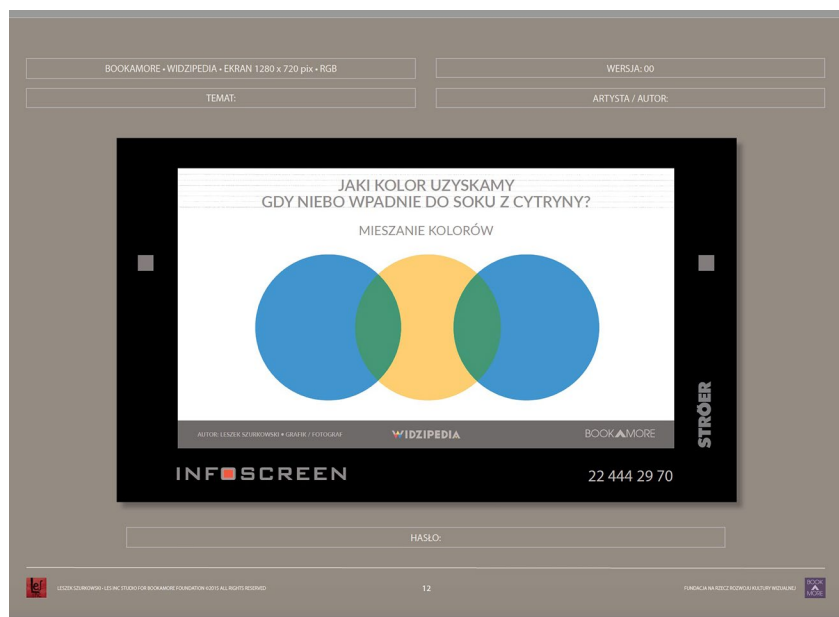
In this field I would like to mention one educational project "Visionpedia, that is how to look in order to see," initiated by the Foundation for Development of Visual Culture BOOKAMORE. Within this project, artists, illustrators, designers, and architects (among them: Chris Niedenthal, Allan Starski, Leszek Szurkowski, Adam Pękalski, Jakub Szczęsny, and Victor Gad) are creating a physical book and online encyclopaedia of rules governing visuality; they believe that the quality of public and functional spaces and the appearance of objects and aesthetics of the surroundings all influence human lives and minds, our decision-making, and how we organize time. Within the project illustration boards are created, each referring to an issue of colour, composition, perspective, or history of art and design.

One drawback of this project is the lack of contextualization to European culture. The project might benefit from opening up to intercultural perspectives by including recognition of other visual languages (for example, symmetry in Japanese aesthetics is boring and oppositional to beauty, which should give a sense of permanence and the possibility of different continuations, accounting for different structure in Japanese cities). Intercultural perspective is obligatory in our contemporary world when dealing with urbanization, urban management, visual management, sustainable development, and visual order.

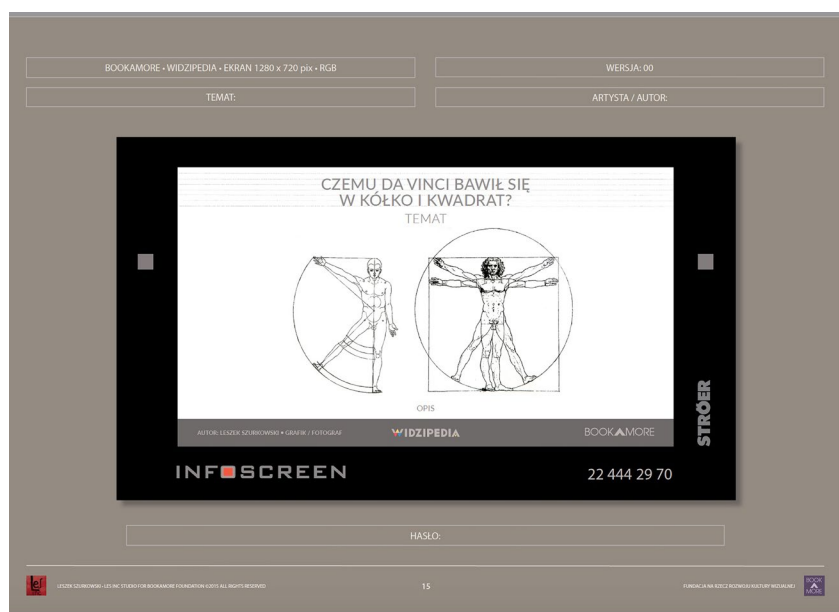


Il. 3 Preliminary screen for Widzipedia (Visualpedia) Warsaw Metro Project. Leszek Szurkowski (Creative Director).





Il. 4 Preliminary screen for Widzipedia (Visualpedia) Warsaw Metro Project. Leszek Szurkowski (Creative Director).



Il. 5 Preliminary screen for Widzipedia (Visualpedia) Warsaw Metro Project. Leszek Szurkowski (Creative Director).

Consciousness of the essential cultural conditioning of one's worldviews, knowledge, ideas, concepts, vision, images, relationships, practices, and so forth, has been constructed from a philosophical background deprived of privileged transcendental standing: one must accept relativism in cognition and in ethics. This drives one toward multiculturalism (recognizing cultural variety) and interculturalism (targeting dialogue between cultures).

Interculturalism as an approach needs to be developed theoretically and practised in everyday dialogue. The need for dialogue is ever more pressing, in part due to the waves of migration from Africa and the Middle East into Europe. Apart from dialogue on social and political levels, it is useful to conduct research into the different forms of visibility and symbolism present in different cultures in order to be able to form friendly and effective methods of visual communication in cities for recipients from various cultures. This research may be useful in the process of designing visual communication systems in public places, in which should be considered such variables as cultural background and level of physical and/or mental ability, as expounded by Radosław Nagay (2018, pp. 186-209).

The ubiquity of images and their multitude in commerce, politics, mobility, safety, education, and entertainment around the globe require the development of literary skills within visual communication, which are oriented intercultural. Intercultural readings of European, African, and Asian urban spaces may bring us closer to a common understanding, which should not mean imposing one order on another but rather mutually opening up to and learning from each other, keeping in mind that there are also some evolutionary preferences and modes in perception (Luty, 2011).

Interpreting perceived images, understanding them, having the ability to approach them critically, redefine them, and construct one's own visual communiques in intercultural perspective – this intercultural visual literacy should be realized by educational programs at all levels, starting from kindergarten and continuing to the university level. It is important that these programs are developed, and the main goal of the TICASS project is to elaborate a set of recommendations for the task of considering visibility in the intercultural perspective, which allows one to address similarities and differences in perception and the interpretation of images across different cultures.

In this book, there are articles by TICASS researchers investigating images and visual communication in urban public spaces, their cultural roots and contemporary challenges, their historical contingencies, forms, and social as well as educational functions from various perspectives. It is divided into four parts: Part I. Perceive, inhabit, understand, and transgress urban spaces. Visual readings between Kenya and Italy; Part II. Intercultural perspectives on visual communication in urban settings in Europe and in Kenya; Part III. Visibility in education and visual literacy; Part IV. Visual urban spaces in social-community life.

**Part I. Perceive, inhabit, understand, and transgress urban spaces. Visual readings between Kenya and Italy** contains chapters by Italian scholars considering intercultural forms of experience (Flavia Stara, *Images of cities and invisible landscapes*), focusing especially on visual experience and asking for ways of creating intercultural understanding (Stefano Polenta, *Image and place. Which relationships?*), and for critical distance in approaching images and visual communication, which should result in visual literacy critical education (Raffaele Tumino, *Force of images and critical distance*). The closing chapter draws our attention to characteristic image production in artistic and public spaces along the Kenyan Coast (Giuseppe Capriotti, *In a savannah of images. Artistic production and public spaces along the Kenyan Coast*).

**Part II. Intercultural perspectives on visual communication in urban settings in Europe and in Kenya** focuses on various special cases of visual communication in societies in Kenya, Italy, Germany, and the Czech Republic. The opening chapter by Rosita Deluigi introduces a broader understanding of human-environment relations, which results in leaving more or less temporal visual traces by people in various settings (*Intercultural trespassing: Educational errancy between urban spaces and relational places*). Other papers analyse precisely the visual communication system of public transportation in Berlin (Grazyna Czubinska and Roman Mazur, *Visual communication in the urban spaces of Berlin for the future transportation solutions evolving out of TICASS as an academic project supported by the EU*); the historicity of a city, as a mental image of its inhabitants, in the case study of the North Bohemian city Most (Tomas Pavlicek, *Visual aspects of the architectural development of public space on the chosen urban cases*); and the visual communication realized with textiles used in everyday life in Kenya (Aurelia Mandziuk-Zajęczkowska, *ConTEXTile. Fabric, its functions, meanings, and ornaments as the universal non-verbal language*).

**Part. III. Visuality in education and visual literacy** contains various works on competences in visual literacy and its institutional, social, political, educational, artistic, and critical functions. The first chapter considers the division between visual messages that are inclusive and exclusive, from the perspective of ideals put forth by Habermas on public space and public debate (Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak, *For whom and what are visual signs in an open urban space. Their functions of inclusivity and exclusivity*). Others are based on analyses of empirical research, as in the case of a descriptive survey of Kenyan librarians in regards to visual literacy in academic libraries at Pwani University and the Technical University of Mombasa (Michael Maua, *Rethinking information competency in academic libraries in Kenya*) as well as an analysis of historically contingent meanings of monuments in public spaces in Szczecin (Lidia Marek, *Monuments in urban public spaces as visual messages – An ethical perspective*); and in artistic communicative strategies

used in contemporary art in Czech Republic (Ales Loziak, *The visual (photographic) literacy of an individual in a public environment*).

**Part IV. Visual urban spaces in socio-community life** closes by focusing on social, political, economic, cultural, and religious aspects of specific imagery: on neoliberalist visual imagery in Nairobi proving its anti-humane aspect (Lukasz Skapsku, *Public space and economic liberalism. Diagnosis based on urban visual messages*); on post-socialist visual transformations in the ex-Yugoslavian, present-day Croatian city of New Zagreb (Lea Horvat, *Post-socialist readability of socialist mass housing estates: Examples from ex-Yugoslavia*); and on historical transformation of the public approach to the HIV/AIDS epidemic issue in Africa and its exemplification in visual messages in public spaces in Kenya (Stephen Muoki, *Imaging AIDS in Kenya: A historical analysis of public and visual messages on HIV and AIDS epidemic between 2011-2018*).



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- Il. 1 *Share of urban and rural population, 1950-2050*. Eurostat (2016). *Urban Europe. Statistics on Cities, Towns and Suburbs*. European Union 2016, p. 8.
- Il. 2 *Population density in Kenya* in: Jayne, T. & Muyanga, M. (2012). Land constraints in Kenya's densely populated rural areas: Implications for food policy and institutional reform. *Food Security*, Vol. 4. DOI: 10.1007/s12571-012-0174-3.
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## Keywords

landscapes  
heterotopias  
perception  
understanding  
meanings



# Images of Cities and Invisible Landscapes

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## Abstract

This article analyses the perception and understanding of the visual environment in reference to research carried out in the coastal Kenyan territory. The focus is on the visible and invisible landscapes revealed to a transient inhabitant. Visual space becomes a living space that is both an area of passage and an internalized reality: a place in which personal visual spaces are connected and reckoned from a distance that enhances the comprehension of the dimensions of otherness. Referring to Foucault's concept of heterotopia, this is the space that one can enter and exit based on subjective decisions, a space-time filled by dialogue. This article will examine how some visual features in cityscapes relate to the definition of cultural identity and to the structuring of a mental urban setting. It will consider the quality of imageability (Kevin Lynch), which attributes to a physical space a high probability of evoking feelings in any given observer. The shapes and colours of a lived environment relate to pre-structured representations of meaning. Hence the paper explores how through the category of legibility, or visibility, it is possible to recognize three spaces: physical, mental, and social. Each type of space takes on different developments of meaning expressed through the dynamic association of elements perceived, conceived, and lived.

## Urban Landscapes as Heterotopias

The comprehension of visual messages and meanings internalized by coming across different habitats carries with it a critical awareness of what occupies the space and how. This process of recognition takes place through the appreciation of the layers of meaning revealing the environmental settings, socio-cultural fabrics, sensory phenomena, and production of imagination, such as projects and projections, symbols, and utopias.

Urban landscapes are possibly the largest and most social of human constructs and are efficient symbols for creating a kind of mental topography. They are highly visual; they are large and concrete, so that we may move within them; they seem to comprehend the whole of human experience in an encyclopaedic fashion and they enter into a dialectic relation with humanity: people shape cities, and cities shape people. A transient inhabitant observes and dwells in the physical and cultural space in which they are placed by combining possible phases of representation and interpretation of natural and built-up areas with interior invisible landscapes and untraced urban paths. The in-transit inhabitant ascribes to local morphology an unsuspected centrality, exploring all the features in a non-habitual fashion. The person in transit experiences a given urban space, applying a system of reference codes which are simultaneously known and under modification. From this encounter emerges a hyper textual city that offers properties and resources based on a temporary stability. The relationship with time becomes relevant to understanding the evolution of the representations of spaces. Being in a transient and uprooted living status induces internal territorial narratives. The visualization of individual mental maps gives shape to invisible cities, outlining a new design of the hosting space.

This experience can be meaningfully construed with reference to some conceptual schemes elaborated by scholars who have dealt with the phenomenology of the relationship between individuals and the visual-physical space they occupy. Considering the concept of heterotopy studied by Michel Foucault, the absolutely other space allows us to understand the mechanisms through which we project ourselves elsewhere without a precise place to locate ourselves. Foucault introduces the term *heterotopia* to define a fragment of fluctuating space that is closed on itself but at the same time in connection with the world. The perception of heterotopy is an experience of estrangement while remaining in contact with reality. It may also be understood as a space that one can enter or exit based on subjective decisions and personal projects. Unlike utopia, the non-ideal and unrealized place, heterotopy is an "other" place that produces a state of interference and restlessness, providing a sort of mirror in which the identity reflects itself and tries to comprise itself from the outside (Foucault, 1998).

In light of these considerations, it is possible to connote as heterotopy the space-time experienced in coastal Kenya by the authors of the present book: a space-time lived in a state of separation and belonging;

a condition in which inner personal visual images are evoked and reckoned to build new frames of understanding. This experience of dialogue generated by internal and external visual and acoustic stimuli in continuous succession includes a subtle alchemy of connections among space settlements, urban morphology, cultural models, and expressions of economic and political power. Individuals are actors in the space and interact with it according to their frequencies. The notion of heterotopy reveals its heuristic value through the reciprocal reflection of cultures.

The present text is the result of a fieldwork research project in the Kenyan county of Kilifi, which offered to the author the opportunity to intercommunicate in a specific natural and cultural visual environment. The condition of being dissociated from one's original place and placed elsewhere solicits a fertile adventure of imagination, since as a traveller one feels that something important is happening, that they are taking part in an experience in which they are at once witness and creator.

In accessing the real and imagined Kenyan coastal space, the first element encountered is light: strong light, intense sun. Then there is the urban setting without refined architecture, simple constructions plastered together, with small and cramped mud houses. Thence appears endless constellations of vegetation, an exuberant green of palms, baobabs, and forests that signals a biology which produces and flourishes tirelessly. Then one meets the traffic and the noise of the streets: people spend the day outdoors, moving freely and naturally in the rhythm imposed by climate and tradition. The natural and anthropic landscapes form an inseparable and harmonious whole, identifying the one in the other. The traveller, who at times seems a spurious, incongruous, dissonant element in this environment – often in the grip of fear of everything that moves, from mosquitoes to snakes – eventually plunges into the light and traces their paths of recognition (Kapuściński, 1998).





Il. 1. Małgorzata Szymankiewicz, *Visual Document Analysis Card* according to H.D. Lasswell 2/4-18. TICASS research materials.



Il. 3 Adéla Machová, *Visual Document Analysis Card* according to H.D. Lasswell 2/2-8. TICASS research materials.



Il. 2 Flavia Stara, *Paths and Encounters*.



Il. 4 Monika Zawadzki, *Visual Document Analysis Card* according to H.D. Lasswell 2/4-4. TICASS research materials.



## Inside the Landscape

In *The Image of the City* (1960), one of the most representative works in urban design studies, Kevin Lynch describes a new approach on how to read the visual forms of cities. The image of urban spaces can be explained as "a picture especially in the mind," a sentimental combination between the objective city image and subjective human thoughts. A two-way process, between the observer and the observed, influences the productions of environmental images. The observer, with great adaptability and in the light of their own purposes, selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what they see. The image of cities is a dynamic and ever-changing object; it may differ not only in scale but also in viewpoint, time, and season. To understand the role of environmental images in our lives, we must keep in mind their strengths and weaknesses as we are able to select, remove, and increase various elements to organize our representations of the city. Therefore, what we can pursue is an open and constantly evolving figure rather than a fixed description of an urban space. The term visible, which Lynch calls legible, is a visual quality connected to temporal and social factors within a network of space, power, and knowledge. Environmental images can be analysed in three components: identity, structure, and meaning. The forms and colours of a lived environment are connected to representations of pre-structured meaning. Identity is the recognition of an object that implies its distinction from other things. Secondly, the image must include a positional relationship between the observer and the other objects. Finally, this object must have a meaning for the observer, be it practical or emotional. The first and second components are the most readable/visible of the physical elements in urban spaces while the third is linked to the symbolic heritage of cultures.

According to Lynch, the criterion of *imageability* is built around five feature types that give a qualitative measure to navigation around a place:

**Paths:** channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves. For many people, these are the predominant elements in their representations.

**Nodes:** junctions, a crossing or convergence of paths, may be simply concentrations, which gain their importance from being the condensation of some use or physical character, like a street-corner hangout or an enclosed square.

**Landmarks:** point-references external to the observer. They are usually rather simply defined physical objects: a building, a sign, a store, or a mountain. Their use involves the singling out of one element from a host of possibilities. Some landmarks are distant ones; other landmarks are visible only in restricted localities and from certain approaches.

**Districts:** relatively large city areas with common features which observers can mentally explore. The physical characteristics that determine districts are thematic continuities, which may consist of an endless variety of components: texture, space, form, detail, symbol, and so on.

**Edges:** boundaries which separate two districts with visually predominant and continuous forms. While continuity and visibility are crucial, strong edges are not necessarily impenetrable. Many edges can be defined as unifying seams rather than isolating barriers; some of them are often paths like highways and rivers, which become effective orientation elements as well (Lynch, 2018, pp. 23-33).



Il. 5 Rosita Deluigi, *Visual Document Analysis Card* according to H.D. Lasswell 2/1-17. TICASS research materials.





Il. 6 Rosita Deluigi, Giuseppe Capriotti, *Visual Document Analysis Card* according to H.D. Lasswell 2/1-18. TICASS research materials.



Il. 7 Aleš Loziak, *Visual Document Analysis Card* according to H D. Lasswell 2/2-6. TICASS research materials.

Henri Lefebvre, in his work *The Production of Space* (1974), observes that space is fundamentally bound up with social reality, so space does not exist in itself, it is produced (Lefebvre, 1974). Edward Soja also explores this concept in his theory of *trialectics* of space, where spatiality is explained through the investigation of three different levels of identification: the first space (perceived space), the second space (conceived space), and the third space (lived space) (Soja, 1996). The interrelatedness of these three orders of space creates the meaning of a place, which is studied through the quality of human activities, particular stories, and people's perceptions/conceptions of the environment where they are dwelling. Each order of space has a different focus in the attribution of meaning. The perceived space is what Lefebvre calls space practice. It is a human physical space, or space that can be understood through the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching (Lefebvre, 1974). Perceived space has various names, such as physical space, natural space, and space practice. This type of space is a real space that relates to everyday life: routes, places of work or business, schools, etc. In contrast to this physical space, the second space is conceived space, which is a conceptualized space, commonly known as mental space, metaphorical space. It also includes the spaces that are acknowledged by people with specific competence such as architects, city-planners, artists, and geographers (Soja, 1996).





Il. 8 Flavia Stara, Districts ( Kilifi, November 18th, 2018, 2.32 pm).

The third space is the lived space, which connects perceived space and conceived space. In the lived space there is inscribed the tangible and intangible heritages of a given socio-cultural context. Thus, in this kind of space a subjective interaction is created between the real space and the imagined space. It is important that these spaces are understood together and not in a rigid categorization since they are interconnected, inseparable, and interdependent (Soja, 1996). In the understanding of visual messages and their meanings, internalized when one comes across different habitats, it is necessary to have a critical awareness of the phenomenology of the lived-in space, with reference to the layers of historical and cultural past expressed by environmental settings.



Il. 9 Flavia Stara, Landmark (Mombasa, November 4th, 2018, 10.36 am)



Il. 10 Flavia Stara, Third Space (Aboseli, December 2nd, 2018 8.54 am)

## Visible and Invisible within Landscapes

There is a short temporal separation between action and reflection; that is, a small gap between action and the insights derived from being spectators of that action. One encounters a landscape and becomes the actor and spectator of different actions. We allow the visual impressions to permeate us, or we try to understand through a semiological approach what the landscape can reveal about the people identifying with it. Therefore, it is essential to explore different symbolic languages in order to play out a dialogue with a landscape.

The ways in which urban imprinting is transmitted are the most diverse and unexpected, and have to do with the imagination, with educational background, and with the stimuli gathered through the five senses. To belong to a place is not a personal condition but a shared feeling, the result of the conscious construction of human ties with a cultural heritage.

Any urban landscape can be experienced as the place where everything is possible, a place where the individual frees the imagination towards visualizations of desires and memories, translating them into various and possible reconfigurations of the space itself. Therefore, it becomes a place for creative and acted experimentation. Crossing or stopping in a specific geo-cultural space is always intertwined with the expectations of the individual. Roads, buildings, and natural elements are charged with a precise meaning for the temporary inhabitants. Each individual projects into a momentary habitat their own needs, and in so doing conceives an imaginary city that overlaps with the real one. So, the lived-in space becomes familiar: the sense of belonging is generated through the reciprocity within an implicit and explicit urban life. Any urban space is only apparently exterior to the dweller: its structure is interior to the inhabitant, both as a personal assimilation of shapes, colours, and volumes as well as a personal reconstruction of the visual images. Reality is decontextualized and re-contextualized within a new framework of individual mental categories or sensorial alphabets. The dialectical dynamic of visible/invisible is related to one's own symbolic heritage, projections, and contingencies. Thus, landscape is a palimpsest of visual layers that express the practical uses of the physical environment and convey the paradigms of the cultural background. In recent decades, new technological developments have opened new ways of depicting, accessing, and theorizing space. Especially with the rise of digital media and the omnipresence of screens, meaning can be created, extended, altered, elaborated, and finally obliterated by the merest touch of a button (Schmid, 2008). The metaphor of landscape as text and spectacle has a well-established position: through the most diverse places and in a juxtaposition of distant cultural representations, beliefs, and rituals, various historical scenarios alternate in their tangible expressions. Volumes and architectures expand in a myriad of visions in search of languages for a deeper understanding of the existent, looking for possible interpretations, towards an orientation for future projects.

The suggestiveness of Kilifi County, along breath-taking ocean views and congested market roads, calls for an encounter that overcomes the expressions of globalization, the visual techniques of reproduction or a polished persistence of colonialism. Intense emotions affect memory and creativity in the production of different narratives. The historical outlines – impressed dramatically or peacefully – both in the urban planning and in nature, express tensions and evolutions that reveal unexpected tangles of fortunate and unhappy situations in the incessant human dwelling. Ideology, politics, and culture merge in urban life into a complex, vital design of old and new representations of innovation and transition. The visual experience enables elaborating a theory of the gaze that sees, describes, feels, and criticizes the core of images in the continuity of their movement: thoughts oriented toward future space configurations.

European knowledge of African heritage is mostly based on the experiences and codes of Western geographers, historians, and anthropologists. The same did not occur to Kenyans, who – under the economic and cultural dominion of Europeans – are only in recent times approaching their cultural heritage according to their own perspectives. Yet the interpretations given by indigenous peoples, who have not had exposure to European paradigms, of their territories diverge from the European views of appreciation. Still, the look of the foreigner may transform and rediscover landscapes wrapped in the mist of the obvious. The foreign gaze as perceived by the inhabitants leads them to behave like actors in a way, original enough to arouse the maximum of curiosity and admiration. The landscape is the background, the theatre in which everyone plays a role, becoming both an actor and a spectator (Turri, 1998). Since our environment is created for the sake of abstract ideas and the functioning of society with dedicated places for what is considered necessary, we ultimately need to realize that we become a product of that space. We become what we are, as social beings, through our body's reaction to the environment (hearing, tasting, touching, being emotional, or rational), which extends far beyond the mere perception of what the environment is. The visual impact connects internal and external spaces, personal languages with universal symbols, history and spirituality with the socio-economic context, allowing a constant mediation between dimensions and parallel universes. What landscapes reveal also contains traces of what is not seen: that is, the production of mindsets and social structures (Turri, 1998).

Kilifi County features a great variety of forms, reflecting both the complex history of the populations inhabiting the Kenyan coast and their adaptation to the different environmental conditions, as well as the creativity and originality of each tradition. For example, the influence of religious beliefs in the design of architecture, or the practice of customs that determine lifestyles and means of production, or the diversity of customary laws related to family ownership and territorial fragmentation systems. Orientation and disorientation, danger and salvation cohabit in these places which narrate memories and historical periodization.

The search for territorial imprinting is carried out in a visual laboratory where environmental and anthropological issues, social psychology and economics, education and ethics are intertwined. Interpreting Kenyan coastal urban space calls for the abandonment of Western brand urbanization as it requires an attentive evaluation of the socio-economic dynamics of the specific realities, often characterized by the contemplative and socializing dimension of the village where customary ties play a fundamental role (Turri, 2004). The specific informality of towns like Kilifi and Malindi, in addition to their intrinsic dynamism, means that they are placed outside the rigid dichotomy that splits urban from rural. Attention to the processes that characterize the urbanization in Kenya leads to consideration of the individual towns as settlements, each with their cultural autonomy and their particular way of producing space. The landscape is the visible, the perceptible: but as the visible does not express the whole, likewise the landscape expresses only part of its potential visuality.

The visible is interwoven with the non-visible. The visible reality, the space that lies within the scope of our perception, is both a geo-cultural expression and a space of potentialities. Places and non-places fit together like the tesserae of a mosaic in the coexistence of fragments of past and future events, of non-permanence of signs, of enigma and magic.

*[...] Dawn had broken when he said: "Sire, now I have told you about all the cities I know."*

*"There is still one of which you never speak."*

*Marco Polo bowed his head.*

*"Venice," the Khan said.*

*Marco smiled. "What else do you believe I have been talking to you about?"*

*The emperor did not turn a hair. "And yet I have never heard you mention that name."*

*And Polo said: "Every time I describe a city, I am saying something about Venice."*

*"When I ask you about other cities, I want to hear about them. And about Venice when I ask you about Venice."*

*"To distinguish the other cities' qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice."*

*(Italo Calvino, The Invisible Cities, VI)*



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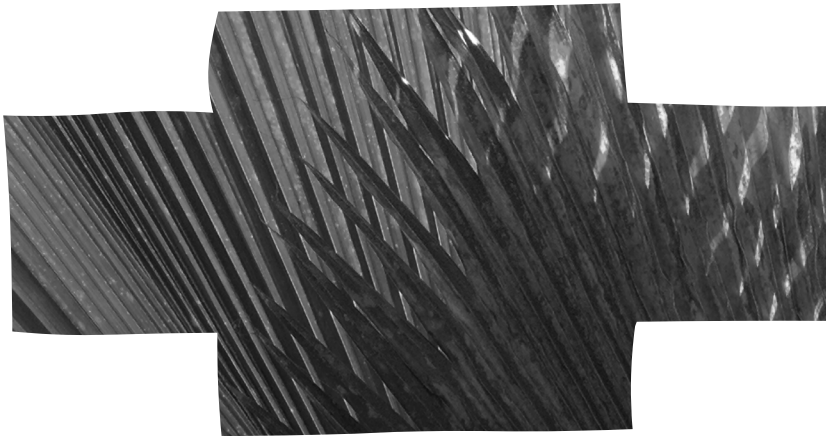
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## Keywords

public space  
local and global  
place identity  
community maps



# Image and Place. Which Relationships?

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## Abstract

This contribution aims to deepen the two following questions:

**1.** Is there a link between images and places? and **2.** Can images be a way through which communities self-represent their identity and a condition for their growth? The paper proposes to understand a place not as an "empty container," totally manipulable by the influences impacting it, in particular the economic ones, but as a "highly complex living organism" in which images are the expression of the internal history of a place, and then of its identity.

Moreover, as images must be seen as a basic level of community self-representation, the paper proposes to activate a "workshop on the images of the place" in which the participants, using loosely structured methodologies, try to elaborate the deep symbolic and emotional meanings present in the territory identity. As the images are capable of capturing the feeling of a place, they can express its potentialities. In this way, the workshop is an opportunity to allow the growth of the place and of the community, and a way to predict the future by making the past speak.

## Decline or Rebirth of Public Space?

Technical and scientific progress have caused a diminution of public spaces, advantaging "functionality" but sacrificing streets, alleys, and neighbourhoods as "places of living." The examples are immediately visible: the street, "public space *par excellence*, place of mixture and contact between different peoples (Berman, 1982) has been reconceptualized by mass motorization" (Cremaschi, 2008, p. 6); and commercial distribution buildings that are an expression of capitalist society encourage a decrease of public space. We live more and more in spaces made "for" something: spaces for leisure, for care, for work, for transport, for consumption, spaces that are always functional, finalized, and "saturated" with meanings, as in Purini's "equal city" (Petranzan & Neri, 2005). It is worth considering the institutionalization of some places and moments of cohabitation and human growth when education becomes "public education"; health becomes "hospitalization"; and circulation becomes "viability" (Cremaschi, 2008, p. 6).

Open and less structured spaces, the spaces of crossing and contamination, spaces of unsaturated and non-formalized languages, which are the spaces of meeting and creativity, are diminishing. In a research institute they are the corridors, the canteens, the internal halls, and the works of art in passing rooms to admire and be inspired by. In historic cities they are the squares, the wide avenues, and the places of passage; and, more generally, it is the very configuration of the city which – as a work of art itself (Romano, 2008) – functions as a large public space. "The air of the city makes us free," goes a medieval German saying.

In a city increasingly packed with functions and directed activities, public space loses its *raison d'être*. The idea of a city without public spaces, "full" of only discrete activities, induces claustrophobia: life needs a balance between the full and the empty, between "compressions and spatial dilatations" as it happens in historic cities; in this way the city acquires a "character of organic irregularity," making it seem the result of "an almost biological evolution" (Purini, 2007). The metaphor of a city that appears integrated and balanced, even in the multiplicity of its spatial dimensions – as though it were a biological organism – has an evident aesthetic value.

Many romantic and neo-romantic artists have denounced the impact of the industrial revolution and capitalist modernization as transforming the city into a mechanical device. Consider the gear-man of Chaplin's *Modern Times*, of the hatred felt by D. H. Lawrence for the city hostage to the mines, or of Dickens' description of Coketown, in which every qualitative aspect is transformed into something quantitative and urban planning loses its organic space and time through repetition:

[Coketown] contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the

same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next. (Dickens, 2007, p. 25)

Open spaces and empty spaces are indispensable to the activity of thought and to psychic equilibrium, and they must be foreseen in the urban planning of cities. The building is, at this point – like a political forcefield of action – uncontrollable; this is not so for the void: it is perhaps the only field left in which some uncertainty is still possible (Lucan, 1991, p. 114).<sup>1</sup> The success of public spaces in recent decades is proof that the hypothesis (if not the utopia) of being able to build a city and a territory starting from empty spaces is not only achievable but also the most suitable tool to reconfigure the difficult relationship between architecture and urban structure (Mosco, V.P. 2010, p. 186). Emptiness is perhaps the dimension that allows us to get closer to what today is the unconscious: the *polis*, as suggested by J. Hillman (1994).

Where is this unconscious today [?] Certainly childhood, family, sexuality, symptomatic anomalies, feelings, relationships, arcane symbols – that stuff is on every talk show, in every self-help manual [...] the *polis* is the unconscious. We have become superconscious patients and analysts, very aware and very subtle interiorized individuals, and very unconscious citizens. (Hillman, p. 30.)

But what kind of public spaces do we need today? What are the "images" characterizing it?

As a first step there is the public space in the physical sense, which – according to Jürgen Habermas (1962) – was the privileged place for formation of public thought, still considered a precondition for democracy by many authors (Low, 2000). The disappearance of this specific (and often idealized) idea of public space – threatened by the recent privatization processes – should however be related to the increasingly "reflective" functioning of our society, as claimed by Anthony Giddens (1990; 1991), whose complexity is based on the "disembedding of social systems" ("the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space") (Giddens, 1990, p. 21). Modern social institutions need a "generalized public trust" based on "civil indifference" (Giddens, 1991, p. 47). For example, we "trust" the functioning of schools and hospitals and the "expert systems" of knowledge on which they rely without personally knowing anyone. It is a trust in the organizational functioning of society and of the actors animating it, which is radically different from that of "intimate" relationships. This reflexivity, for Giddens, also concerns

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the Italian edition.



the intimacy of the self (Giddens, 1991). For this reason, the postmodern subject risks losing contact with the fundamental existential problems that distinguish the life of a human being. This growing lack of meaning, which Giddens defines as "sequestration of experience" (Giddens, 1991, pp. 144-180), can be related with the growing demand for public space and, more generally, for places conceived not as mere physical spaces but as networks of complex interactions in which man and territory dialogue co-evolve.

Therefore, the understanding of the idea of public space should also take into account the weakening of "belonging of the bonds of proximity that supported the nation and groups identities," today rethought in relation "to the crisis of modernity" that allows "a more extensive re-articulation of the social identity" (Cremaschi, 2010, pp. 9-10). Then, for some scholars, public space should also consider the radical reflexivity of contemporary social life.

With respect to the political space full of identity memory [...] the emerging spaces [...] no longer coincide with the space of the streets, the paced public space of the medieval cities [...]. In the 21st-century city, new containers are set up to give these emerging activities full effect. They are hybrid containers, complex machines, focusing on the free use of time and experience. Once upon a time, they would have been simple cinemas, bookshops, cafés: now they are called theme parks, shopping centres, but also cultural centres and urban parks full of attractions and activities (Cremaschi, 2010, p. 10).

However, this rethinking of social identity and public spaces does not entail – as shall be further specified – a "surrender" to a supposed fragmentation of postmodernity, the renunciation of planning the development of cities, already out of control, leaving them in the hands of "large private speculative initiatives." In this context, "public space [...] is considered outdated, if not reduced to a real waste produced by cities' growth. In most cases, it is considered a simple consumer appendix, good only for hosting its rituals and extending its mythologies" (Purini, 2008, pp. V-VI).

We need, instead, to find a balance between "intimacy" and "reflexivity," between local and global, between physical and virtual, and between multiplicity of uses and overall planning. For example, the ever-increasing digital space of our cities should not be thought of as disjointed from physical space, as we tend to believe. Rather, "the cities that are ahead in the realization of the smart city combine the technological innovations (open data, digital automation, etc.) with the creation of physical meeting and exchange places: from training centres and start-ups widespread in the neighbourhoods to HUBs on an urban scale for the meeting between creatives (Manchester)." (Spada, 2014, p. 1)

## Local vs Global

It is interesting to observe that Anthony Giddens – who was the leading theorist of the Third Way of Tony Blair, convinced of the possibility of realizing a "capitalism with a human face" driven by the processes of globalization – is today unfavourably impressed by the growing inequality. In his opinion, the guilt is of the technological innovations, interfering in the process of globalization (Giddens, 2018). For other authors, however, the growth of inequality depends on the way in which globalization has been conceived and implemented as a way for capitalism to spread to the whole planet. With particular reference to the relationship between globalized capitalism and territory, Bruno Amoroso (1999, pp. 19-20) believes that the main characteristic of globalization is the "deterritorialization" of production systems: that is, with globalization, economy can be transferred everywhere. It does not have a territory of belonging.

Therefore, with globalization, territories are forced to obey the needs of capital expansion, which is not interested in taking the cultures and the specifics of the place into account, interpreting the territory as a physical space and the populations as resources to be exploited. This has obvious repercussions on the urban fabric, where the quantitative perspective of the "exploitation of resources" replaces the qualitative dimension of the places. Places and cities are no longer the result of endogenous organizational processes. The form of places and cities, suffering from the impact of capitalist rationalization and the consequent exploitation of the territory, ceases to be the result of a growth governed from within. So, in the cities, the *metropolitan form* (Soja, 2000; Magnaghi, 2010, p. 26; Perrone, 2012, pp. XIV-XVI), the consistent application of the Fordist capitalism, prevails. In the metropolis city, the *inhabitants* cease to have a relationship of qualitative continuity with the urban and rural environment and become *residents*; that is to say, users of resources and services, not people who take care of the place where they live by engaging in exchange and relations. In this context we can observe the dissolution of public space.

The inhabitants are dissolved and spatially fragmented in the sites of working, leisure, fruition of nature, consumption, care, reproduction, and therefore they have no more "places" to dwell in which to integrate and socialise all these functions; they have no longer a relationship of exchange and identification with their living environment. [...] Open space, understood as a public space, is no longer designed; it is reduced to a connective space of functions. (Magnaghi, 2010, p. 35)

For Amoroso (1999, p. 25), an alternative model is thinking of development as something "polycentric," capable of enhancing the characteristics of different cultures. In this way it is possible to give back

the territory and the cultures inhabiting it the possibility of organizing on the basis of endogenous and self-organized methods of settlement and planning, which give value to people, cultures and local specificities of production. This does not exclude, of course, the mutual *openness* between cultures and production systems. The problem is to rethink the relationship between *local* and *global*, overcoming the clumsy attempt to synthesize the two poles by the concept of *glocal*, where the global dimension finally prevails (Amoroso & Paloma y, 2007, p. 28; Magnaghi, 2010, p. 94).

In this context of redefinition of the local – both theoretically and “from below,” starting from the initiatives of the individual global citizen – we feel the need for a “return to places.” In fact, nowadays the trend towards a reduction of public space is being replaced by an unexpected phenomenon:

the increase from below of the demand for public spaces, which is today object of a strong popular interest. It is ultimately the most evident symptom of a desire for appropriation of the surrounding environment by the public: a trend that was once confined to a circumscribed area, almost of neighbourhood, and which appears today to embrace the entire urban area. (Mosco, 2010)

It is as if the demand for a more liveable future city forestalls offer. The image of a more welcoming and fair future city seems to be spreading from the bottom, from the people who are changing, expressing new aspirations and desires. (Lino, 2014, p. 112)

More generally, there is a “return to the territory” (Beccattini, 2009): people are becoming more aware that the reduction of the territory at this economic cycle moment has eliminated the qualitative dimension of place, their identity, their *genius loci*, alienating the inhabitants from their places of belonging. In this context it is possible to develop a new idea of public space: let’s see how.

First, territory can be defined as a “highly complex living organism” (Magnaghi, 2010, p. 25). This concept can be interpreted in the light of epistemological complexity for which a living organism (including a city or a territory) is a complex system with self-organization, capable of developing its own identity, irreducible to the sum of its parts. This identity is a qualitative *proprium* of places that can be expressed by terms such as *genius loci*, *milieu*, or simply as the identity of a place. Therefore, such a concept of a place must not be identified reductively with that of physical, objective, genetic, and geometric space. “The geometric space is homogeneous, uniform, neutral [...] The geographical space is unique; it has a proper name” (Dardel, 1952/1990, p. 2).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from the original French edition.

When we speak of the identity of a place, we do not refer, therefore, to its presumed “genetic” or structural characteristics or of the peoples inhabiting it (conceptions that nourish nationalism and racism) but to the history of cycles of civilization in the area, to the specific way in which a culture has historically occupied a location, producing all those infrastructures (buildings, monuments, cities, ports, terracing, channels, etc.) which constitute the personality of a territory (Turco, 1984; Dematteis, 1985; Magnaghi, 2010).

One of the most interesting signs of the return to places is the rediscovery of their aesthetic value. On one hand, in contrast to modern functionalism, we feel the need to escape the “obviousness” of public space by accommodating “the work of art or the aesthetic event” (Morteo, 2006, p. 58): the public space becomes an expression of “environmental culture” that enhances the image and the pleasure it can transmit (Belfiore, 2014, pp. 241-242). The urban planning culture of the city seems “more than ever committed to responding to a question of beauty and attractiveness [...] proposing captivating models of transformation of places and [...] powerful symbolic architecture (Bravo, 2010, p. 46). This is a consequence of the fact that the city becomes reflective: it becomes a hypertext (Bravo, 2010, p. 43), a *metapolis* (Ascher, F. 1995), that is to say, a meta-level, if compared to a multiplicity of heterogeneous and not necessarily contiguous spaces in which each subject traces its own preferential path, including the aesthetic ones. The city thus lived and reorganized reflexively from each individual becomes a subjective city, which does not necessarily correspond to the “real” city. On the other hand, in a more collective way, the aesthetic value of the place must be understood as a characterizing quality of every completed experience and as a successful adaptation of people in their environment (Dewey, 1934). As a sign of the achieved harmony of people in their environment, “beauty [...] is not a supererogatory element, but a substantial one” (Chenis, 2000, p. 21); it is a producer of collective themes, of symbolic universes, of democracy (Romano, 1993; 2008). For James Hillman (1996/2006) aesthetics have political relevance. The defence of the aesthetic value of places can then become, as suggested by Anna Lambertini (2013), a “practice of resistance” for the preservation of the value of places.

The need to find new mediations – between local and global, between the preservation of identity and its openness to the outside, between tradition and innovation, between physical and virtual – represents a challenge to the conception of public space with implications also on the educational side. In fact, if the square can no longer be a privileged place for meeting and sociality (given the radical reflexivity of postmodernity, and the presence of computer tools introducing us to many “virtual squares”), it remains true that, for complementarity, this gain in extension requires a similar strengthening of people, places and cultural characteristics. This strengthening should be understood not as opposition and contrast to the increasing spread of relational networks on a global scale but as the condition for their further development. In fact, a system is much more than

its "parts," and subsystems are differentiated and equipped with functional autonomy. Therefore, diversity is a condition of development in a strongly interrelated global system. The "preservation of the complexity" of places (Dematteis, 1995, p. 41) thus becomes a central value. Complexity is the result of a double movement: the "closing" in of places on themselves to safeguard their identity and their "opening" to renew it.<sup>3</sup> As opening and closing are two sides of the same coin, for Roberto Gambino (1997) it is necessary to talk about "innovative conservation."

The balance between closure and openness, between homologation and diversification, is probably one of the central challenges of our time and can be found at different levels: from the political level to economic and educational levels. There can be no real education where there is a push to conform to a unique cultural model that implies adherence to standards imposed from the outside. Therefore, some people and cultures begin to "resist" this hetero direction, claiming their right to self-organize, to be autonomous, to take back the design of their living spaces, starting from the places they live in. The theme of public space must be placed in this scenario.

## Images are not just Surfaces

The concept of territory as a living organism with high complexity also includes the idea that it is pervaded by a "field" of forces (Weiss, 1973) reverberating on all its aspects. Therefore, the relationship between "that" territory and "its" characteristics is intrinsic, as happens in a work of art where a single aspect organically expresses the overall sense of the work. Even the city can be seen as a work of art (Romano, 2008). Thus, the image is always an image of the territory it belongs to. As a self-organized living system, between the parts and the whole, between images and identity of the territory, there is therefore a relationship of mutual co-implication, unless these images obey extrinsic logics, typically of globalized capitalism and of the consumer market. There is continuity between form and content, between the culture of a people and the images expressing it. "The whole territory represents itself" (Dematteis, 1985, p. 110).

Obviously, in a globalized world – as we said above – experiences far from ours are opportunities to produce reflexivity and nurture the process of self-awareness for people and communities. No doubt the images of other worlds are an opportunity to grow. However, we should not be naive: these images often represent not only genuine opportunities for intercultural

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<sup>3</sup> For the concepts of "closure" and "openness," see Ludwig von Bertalanffy's classic book *General System Theory* (1968).

growth but also contain a persuasive intent the broadcaster wants to convey (Aronson A& Pratkanis, 2001). In the process of contamination characterizing any process, therefore also the growth of places, it is necessary to understand whether the "dialogue" quality is included. In the balance between self-organization and hetero organization, between local and global, which is the prevailing pole? Is there a balance between these moments? Is an auto-hetero-organized activity allowed or does the contact with what is external take the form of a passive reception, if not of abuse and exploitation?

What we said can also be applied to the images of public space. Cultures are self-hetero-organized processes; they can and must change but through a reorganization process that – even if stimulated from the outside – is capable of rewriting an internal history, otherwise they suffer an expropriation of their own identifying characteristics. When an image ceases to be connected to an internal way of feeling and thinking (proper to the cultural tradition in which a society writes its own path of subjectivation), it loses its profound symbolic meaning and adheres to exogenous criteria which "de-subjectivate" the place, preventing the constant hermeneutic work that allows people to grow in the places they inhabit. In this sense Eric Dardel spoke of the "Earth as writing to decipher":

To know the unknown, to reach the inaccessible, geographical anxiety precedes and carries objective science. Love of the native soil or search for a change of scenery, a concrete relationship is formed between man and the Earth, a geographicity of man as a mode of his existence and destiny. (Dardel, 1952/1990, p. 2)<sup>4</sup>

When it is not reduced to a mere resource by economic quantification, the relationship between people and their territory includes a fundamental emotional relationship.

Geography does not designate an indifferent or detached conception; it concerns what matters to me or primarily interests me: my anxiety, my concern, my good, my projects, my attachments. (Dardel, 1952/1990, pp. 46-47)

## Workshop on the Images of the Place

From the above considerations, we can conclude that change and innovation are always in continuity with the past and tradition, constituting a non-passive moment of adherence to the new but also a rethinking of what

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<sup>4</sup> Translated from the original French edition.



is already potential in the identifying characteristics of the territory. Continuity is indispensable; change is indispensable. The territory can change only on the condition that it remains itself; and, conversely, it can remain itself only as long as it changes.

It is therefore appropriate to think of *workshop paths on the images of the place* giving voice to all the actors present in the territory – from institutions to citizens – to elaborate the future by drawing on the potential of the past. The past is the identity of the territory, made up of the wealth of territorialization acts, sedimented in the "feeling" of that territory. But the past is alive only as it pushes out to the future otherwise it falls into self-congratulation and self-celebration. The past is a treasure that can be drawn only if it is separated from nostalgic contemplation; it is necessary to preserve identity through evolution (Dematteis, 2005).

Magnaghi (2010, p. 150) recalls the importance of such moments of sharing territorial resources, such as community mapping: "actions aimed at promoting the role of inhabitants in the construction of maps able to represent the values of one's lived space, through techniques generally with a weak formalization, in a communicable and meaningful way." In this regard he mentions the *Common Ground Network* and the drafting of parish maps in Great Britain (there are more than a thousand such experiences in villages, especially in Scotland). The parish maps

are usually prepared through the involvement of the local population, with the help of local artists, historians, teachers, school pupils, etc. and they represent – in an evocative and symbolic form – the identity elements and the patrimonial values the inhabitants consider to characterize their place of life. The parish maps – although drafted in a not formalized form of representation, with a poetic/celebratory character – have the peculiarity of constructing identity images and "visions" of a community future.

In Italy there are the experiences of the "community maps," borne from the context of the eco-museum path and developed<sup>5</sup> in both landscape planning and the participatory organization of the territorial statutes (Magnaghi, 2010, p. 151).

The proposed "Workshop on the images of the place" should be the preliminary moment of a wider discussion on territory planning. The construction of "statutes of places" coherently developed in terms of strategic scenarios, of plans and implementation projects, should follow the representation of the territory identity in terms of images. For example, municipality "cards of values" (Aragona, 2014, pp. 10-13) should point out the territorial qualities to be promoted, the public objectives to be pursued and the priorities related to the implementation of the interventions.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.mondilocali.it](http://www.mondilocali.it) [Accessed 6 October 2019].

In my opinion, the "Workshop on the images of the place" – which foresees the participation of the different actors of the territory (professionals and artists, housewives and students, and representatives of institutions and associations but also ordinary citizens) – should never be completely abandoned. It represents a precious opportunity to become aware of the characteristics of the place because it allows poetic, imaginative, weakly formalized, and archetypal elements<sup>6</sup> to interact with a more reflective and conscious thinking, constituting an indispensable moment of connection between feeling, thinking, and doing. "The representation of the identity characters is a much more complex analytical apparatus than functional analysis. The need to progressively construct a 'thick description'" (Geertz, A. 1973) of local places, societies and milieu – stratified and close to the worlds of life – "imposes a continuous displacement of the point of view, a transdisciplinary nomadism of observation and reading, the incorporation of the interpretative gaze into the 'structure of feelings' of places and territories" (Magnaghi, 2010, p. 141).

It could be further argued that the global, organic, interconnected, autopoietic, emotional, and imaginative vision that can be reached through such workshop methods of narrating identity of place – together with the progressive articulation and clarification of such "visions," in the light of a clarifying rationality that allows the progressive articulation of the emerged contents in more cognitive and planning terms – represents the alpha and omega of a self-educational process of local identities, combining the "romantic" perception of community with the ability to develop the meaning of "enlightenment."

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<sup>6</sup> It is possible to compare the images of a territory and its identity to the archetypes of the Jungian collective unconscious. The archetypes are universal paths of the psyche with a strong emotional value, which guide us in the change. We can affirm that, in the complexity of its history, even the territory possesses these sense matrices. These archetypes, however, can be an aid to change only if there is a desire to grow and design the future; otherwise they captivate a subject and a people in an unconscious symbiosis, taking on the face of regressive ideologies and mythologies, such as Nazism (Jung, 1918/1970). Therefore, the "archetypes of the territory" should be used not to self-congratulate but for responsible designs of the future.

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## Keywords

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# Do not be Seduced by Images. A Critical Approach and a Pedagogical Perspective

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## Abstract

Images run faster than words (which need time to be written, spread, read, and understood). They are at the same time fixed and changeable, native-born and nomadic, capable of communicating history, hope, belonging, expulsion, abuse, and redemption in an immediate way. We may not remember many facts that led to the short student revolt in Tiananmen Square in China in 1989 but we can never forget the image of the protesters standing in front of a line of threatening Chinese tanks. If we have seen these images, we remember them not only because they are highly emotional but also because we have thought about them in our minds *through* words. Images are *presentative* and have their own syntax: in a photo, for example, the term or idea is expressed through purely visual qualities: shapes, lines, colours, shadows, proportions.

However, visual communication (Lester, 1995, 2006) is built not only by technical means and their mastery; it also requires a process of cognitive and emotional processing by those who produce the image. Those who are involved in education are questioning the value and the functions of visual communication, and this implies the task to determine the meaning of the signs within and through different cultures; to study the communicative effects of signs in a person and in communities. Therefore, it is important to favour a critical distance that can restore the authenticity of our "anthropological abodes" against any form of media abuse and promote the *encounter* between cultures. In the following paper, I will take up these issues in the context of the Kenyan Mathare SLUM TV, a film *Soul Boy* directed by Hawa Essuman, and the recent developments in ethnographic research.

## Premise

The task of the pedagogist is to promote the educational experience in terms of the growth and improvement of the person in different areas of learning: formal, non-formal, and informal (Dewey, 1916). The success of this path, which is not without obstacles, is the achievement of autonomy by learners, hence their responsibility and their freedom. However, a persistent and problematic tension exists between authority and freedom, between teacher and student, between being and having to be, between history and utopia, which makes education fascinating and irreducible. Nietzsche taught us that sometimes we need to get rid of history to build something new (Nietzsche, 1976). And in the wake of the German philosopher, Banfi and Bertin remind us to "free your soul as a young man from the old, free your education from any form of determined pedagogy" (Banfi, 1922, p. 21). Banfi and Bertin's lesson is of extraordinary relevance; in particular, Banfi's theory of reason does not pretend to "grasp and define the Absolute" (Banfi, 1926, p. 48) but it is only an instrument that challenges every dogmatization of experience, a transcendental principle that allows us to grasp and understand reality in the complexity of its various determinations.

The objective of "critical rationalism" is not to offer knowledge of the objectivity of the real but to describe the complex dynamics of the world of culture according to a methodical principle in which reason and experience are the terms of a dialectic that never finds a uniquely definitive solution. Philosophy, therefore, is "the consciousness of relativity, of the problematic, of the lively dialectic of reality" (Banfi, 1959, p. 713). The transcendental activity of thought – in the forms of philosophy and science – does not entirely exhaust the experience but rather allows us to unveil its infinite richness. The theory of education that does not intend to expropriate the educational experience in the "history" between teacher and pupil derives from this dimension of thought, and so opens the experience to new horizons, waiting to receive meanings from the teacher and the pupil (Banfi, 1961). There is room for speech, for dialogue, for face-to-face communication. The Socratic demon comes back despite everything; despite the civilization of computerization, despite the pressing "culture of images" capturing us in a spiral of immediate consumption, despite the speed and consumption of images that do not allow us to distinguish even artistic images from advertising images. The statues of Daedalus comes to mind: because of their scattered and inhomogeneous position, due to their extreme mobility, these statues do not allow us to contemplate them in order to know them (Plato, 2015).

Such an approach to visual communication can be described as modernist and read in the ample context of the TICASS project (*Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art, and Social Sciences*), oriented towards the interpretation of images in urban public spaces in an intercultural perspective. Reading and rereading analyses of visual

communication, I have the impression that we cannot do without critical thought because specialists on the subject also use criteria keys of reading from semiotics, aesthetics, and histories of art that should be critically reviewed. Lester's theory of visual communication cannot renounce a theory, as is expressed in the adoption of various theoretical approaches in personal, historical, technical, ethical, cultural, and critical perspectives. Also, one of the principles of visual communication – that the contents of the messages reside more in the memory of images accompanied by verbal communication (Lester, 2000, p. 18) – seems to confirm the irreplaceable presence of critical thought through speech.

Aiming to overarch fields of aesthetics, art, and complex cultural phenomenology (Paci, 1965), I advocate critical rationalism to propose the need for an interpretive grid in constant weaving. This grid is composed of cultural history, semiotics, anthropology, and ethnography, as – because of their methodological implantation – anthropology and ethnography play an important role in reflection and the pedagogical theory in the current multicultural setting characterizing our world, and in which, once again, the image is able to unify or accentuate the differences.

The interpretive grid presented on the following pages, comprised of semiotics, anthropology, and ethnography, is used to interpret the experience of SLUM TV and SLUM TV Cinema in Nairobi. The aim is to propose the development of a "laboratory of images" that can give us back our sense of wonder in, and belonging to, this world.

## Why Anthropology and Ethnography?

We must recognize that we come from a certain theoretical and epistemological orientation, in many respects, puritan and very tempted by iconoclasm. The image, which today plays such a strong role, continues to arouse an archaic terror, which all great critics of the civilization of the image – from Debord to Baudrillard, from Adorno to Habermas – have evoked, denouncing it as a "mortuary culture" (Debord, 1990, p. 59; Vercellone, 2013, pp. 96-97; Vercellone, 2016, p. 23). Before the advent of visual studies, it was difficult to circumscribe the world of images in a peculiar and stable field, autonomously characterized by philosophical and scientific points of view. The advent of visual studies has allowed us to recognize that images are forms endowed with a peculiar grammar, and an autonomous ontology of their own hermeneutics (Lester, 2000).

The image exerts an incomparable power in our world and at the same time it is fundamental to our learning process. We may not remember many of the facts that led to the short revolt by the students at Tiananmen Square in China in 1989 but we can never forget the image of the protesting students standing in front of a line of threatening Chinese tanks.

We are dealing with a flow of images that are conveyed, in particular, by the internet, and that are very often completely similar to a formal or structural point of view, despite the many differences in the content crossing them. An image is a vehicle of meaning to profoundly convey various content, from arts to medical investigations, from politics to advertising to the media, thanks to its extreme adaptability to the most different contexts and its ability to vary its own medium. It thus forms the cornerstone of a new identity that is no longer plural (common), like traditional identities, but unique (individual, singular), even if capable of self-differentiation thanks to its own technological media. Thus, it includes the differences between cultures, presenting a variety of faces of the world; the image tends to change into the world itself. If the image, with its grammar, tends to change itself into the world, how many opportunities do we have to not be seduced by the image?

In research projects like TICASS (*Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art, and Social Sciences*) and in the particular approach to public spaces through images, the contribution of anthropology and ethnography can be valuable, perhaps even decisive. Until now too little attention has been given to visual perception or to "eye work" (Belting, 2014; Marazzi, 2015). Yet it is through visual representations that human cultures have expressed their religious ideas as well as their ethical and aesthetic ideals throughout history. It is through mental visions that take the shape of magical beliefs, shamanic journeys, and ecstasies. The power of sight is expressed in different cultures through the production of paintings, sculptures, and artefacts of various kinds; the widespread use of icons by political and religious powers; interpretations of the meaning of visions; and the importance attributed to images or the fear they create, causing their censorship – iconoclasm. The "anthropology of the image" would be a study adapted to the different ways of seeing, aware of the various forms of cultural representation visually expressed and interpreted. The attention to "eye work" is particularly important in today's world where visual communication through images often lacks an interpretative grid to take into account both the "history of the gaze" and the vision in the Western world – which claims to radiate throughout the whole world, trying at all costs to homologate different points of view on an image, to cancel the cultural specifications of different ways of seeing.

Consider a paradigmatic example drawn from Hans Belting: the visual perception of a traditional painting. Western civilization is based on the gaze, on the primacy of the eye and the sovereignty of the observer, then a cognitive function predominates it; in contrast, Arab civilization privileges the light, faithful to the non-iconic graphism of ornamentation and therefore is more emotionally inclined to feel divine presence. The "vanishing point," essential for perspective painting, offers the observer a position in front of the image by defining the absolute horizon, addressing the opposite front, summoning the observer and giving them a fundamental dignity and role. Compare this to the two-dimensionality of Arabic decorations (like the Muqarnas), without depth or perspective, reflecting the status of the Islamic religion in which

the subject is lost in faith: "a mosaic of individual signs, before which our perception becomes unstable and uncertain, an uncertainty accentuated by the distance from which we look" (Belting, 2010, p. 46). Through perspective, in the West, the gaze becomes the domain of art which "transforms the world into a glance at the world" (Belting, 2010, p. 54). In this way, artistic images began to stage the gaze itself; that is to say, the world becomes an image, emancipating the human subject celebrated for the first time as an individual.

This thesis was supported in the nineteenth century by Jacob Burckhardt when he identified the revolutionary moment in the history of the West not so much with the official Renaissance as with the "proto-Renaissance" of the Late Middle Ages, or with Dante and Giotto, for example, who were the first to be recognized as subjective authors and who projected their own subjectivity onto their immortal creations (Burckhardt, 1960, pp. 32-56). The degeneration of the subject's active role occurs within the cult of "reality" and "live" television culture of our days, when the image becomes a consumer good, dependent on the individuals.

Yet, although these two different ways of looking coincide with two different conceptions of the world and of being (Western and Arab), on some occasions, history has created encounters and intersections deserving further study. For example, as Brian Rotman claimed, we should think of the theoretical and conceptual as well as scientific relationship entailed in the invention of the vanishing point in comparison to the introduction of "zero" in Arabic numerals (although the contribution of the discoveries and inventions of Alhazen – an Arab philosopher, mathematician and scientist who created the first "darkroom" prototype – is even more decisive [Rotman, 1993]). Belting dedicates an entire chapter to this revolutionary character, in which, among other things, two central aspects emerge. In the economy of this work, however, we can dwell only on the first element, related to the application of geometry to writing and artistic representation, a central subject in Alhazen. Belting says:

Writing is in fact a geometric construction as much as the ornament. Unlike Western art, here the ornament is not purely decorative, but it is a semantic instrument like writing and, therefore, bearer of a message to decipher where a real cultural training is essential [...]: training eye and spirit serves to decipher the structure of the world, which the Creator has codified in many ways. (Belting, 2010, p. 72)

In the closing of the quotation, one can grasp the (pedagogical) invitation to train both the eye and the spirit. The fruition and production of images, both physical and mental, place people at the centre of interest as a cultural entity; the complex interaction between inner and outer images and the conception of the mind as an integral part of the body provide Belting with arguments challenging the rigid dualism between spirit and matter typical of Western thought (Belting, 2010, pp. 95-99).



The author recognizes that the figurative power of the media is not separate from the commercial and political interests directed at social control; in the potential of digital media awaits a "referential crisis" based on simulation dominating the virtual worlds. Rather than dismissing the question with an alarmist definition, Belting states with clarity that "when the current situation of euphoria, or the sense of the end of time, has subsided, we will find ourselves faced with the task of reconsidering the discourse on images and the figurative nature" (Belting, 2010, p. 29), a subtle warning that has the merit – if nothing else – of retaining the ability for critical thought.

Therefore, people are "naturally" places of images. From this consideration Belting affirms the need for contemporary reflection on the question of the image: "the question must urgently be directed towards an anthropological foundation of the image in the territory of the human gaze and technical artefact" (Belting, 2011, p. 30). It is therefore a question of rethinking the status of images by immersing it directly in the perceptual and factual experience they create and convey. It is not true that – as often static and irrelevant spectators – we release our phantasms and fantasies only through a projection. Our body plays a part in this directionality by creating a triangulation made up of three elements: the image, the medium, and the body. Then, our gaze on this work creates a triangular space in which the three agents vivify an already medial art, showing the reciprocal implications in logic where the Cartesian duality of subject-object falls apart. There is no longer an omnipotent subject who looks at an inert object but a system where each element acts on the other, so much so that this complex cannot be evaluated except as a whole.

The temptation to confuse the image with the medium/work of art is strong, so every day we use the words painting, photograph, opera, film, video, and frame, or, in general, "pictures" to talk about images, helping to feed a widespread confusion, awkwardly looking for a viable way to untangle ourselves from the ambiguities of meanings hidden in language. If "the history of images has always been a history of figurative means" (Belting, 2011, p. 31), Belting focuses on the essential distinction between image and medium, a paradigm that later allows an understanding of to what extent the body – which he defines significantly as a "place of images" – is central to the discourse on the visual. The long shadow of iconology as presented by Aby Warburg looms over the reflection developed here: it is projected to us and, through its majestic thought, continues to illuminate our history of culture (Gombrich, 1986; Warburg, 1999). As Belting seems to be telling us, the latter is foremost a history of images in relation to humankind, in relation to the gaze, and in relation to culture (Belting, 2011, p. 49).

There are two more reasons that can be put forward in favour of an anthropological and ethnographical grasp on image and culture, leading to the anthropology of image and culture. I also consider them fundamental for the project on the laboratory of images.

The first reason is the methodological importance attributed to the use of images in the form of reportage or documentary cinema that allows learning about cultures and people by challenging the self-referentiality of the gaze, ethnocentrism, and Western cultural evolutionism (Loizos, 1995). It is sufficient to recall Leroi-Gourhan (1993), Piaux (2000), Rouch (Stoller, 1992), and David and Judith McDougall (1988): their works on image lead us to reflect on the theme of the representation of diversity, on the construction of the image of the Other, on stereotypes, and visual resistance. From the first ethnographic films of the early twentieth century to the precursors of visual anthropology such as Dziga Vertov and Robert J. Flaherty; from an ethnographic film of pure observation such as Gregory Bateson's to a participatory "cinéma vérité" such as by Lionel Rogosin (Chiozzi, 1993), the evolution of the cinematographic experience reflects questions of representation and ethics in the relationship between the observer and the represented subjects, from a vertical position to an increasingly equal collaboration, acquiring more and more awareness of the variety of points of view.

The second reason is the contribution that anthropology and ethnography can make to better understand the process of transnationalization of cultures and, on the other hand, to foster new ways of educational interaction among all individuals. This analytical and operative model is called "transculturalism" and overcomes the limits of the intercultural paradigm. A great invention of Western pedagogy is that interculturalism has sustained and supported capitalistic economic globalization. Interculturalism is the habit of Western tolerance towards other cultures (Demorgon, 1998; 2004). The term transcultural refers to the idea of crossing all cultures in transit, on a continuous journey, without leading to the creation of a synthesis "at all costs" that would add to those already sadly known. In transculturalism – hoped for by transnational anthropology, ethnography, and ethnopschoanalysis – every experience, whether it is a person's or a stable or migrant community's, is enhanced through narration of life stories, autobiography, and diaries. The narrative device has various forms: from the oral tale by the "griot," preserved in the memory of Berbers, Dongo, Wolof, Jie and sub-Saharan people (Calame-Griaule, 2002; Brugnatielli, 1994), to migrant literature (Frank, 2008; Durante, 2014); even to the tales in pictures (Marazzi, 2015), regardless of aesthetic judgement. A hermeneutic awareness of these different narrative experiences allows us to grasp the similarities, differences, and contaminations (Amselle, 1998) happening between them.

## The Laboratory of Images. Experiences in the Field

In such a synthetic framework, it is not inappropriate to question the chances of the image. In front of an image that is sometimes lost in its own plasticity – which is also the capacity to self-reflect – different opportunities can be created. The wise use of an image could show and denounce the state of abandonment in the slums of a metropolis, but it can also return the beauty of places, bringing us the value of “living together”; the aesthetic experience becomes an educational experience.

This happened through Slum-TV, founded in 2008 in Nairobi. This street television project recounts the life and identity of this city within the city, according to a point of view foreign to Western media and with the idea of using inexpensive and basic technology to circulate the training, self-narration, and development of a self-financing economy. Visual communication (Lester, 2000) and “visual ethics” (Lester, 2018) can have an impact on the perception that each individual has of the world, but they cannot change the world; this is the task of education.

The purposes of Slum-TV are various:

1. to give the people of Mathare the opportunity to document their lives rather than subjugate them to outsider imposition with its pre-established mental structure;
2. to preserve a documentation of life in Mathare; 3. to build a digital archive with some of the stories of the valley; 4. to organize safe projections into public spaces, which would be more an exception than rule in the neighbourhood

Slum-TV should be seen also in the context of “new media art” because it is made with simple economic technology but also with new technology – as a medium of construction, self-representation and self-narration, within a combination and contamination of the media, without a passive acceptance of involvement in the “new media milieu” focused in particular on instruments. In its 10th year Slum-TV launched a major film festival for young people, which is not a simple revue – there are no catwalks or red carpets, there are no stars, there are no icons to be immortalized but there is a real “image lab” in which we can learn not only cinematographic or documentary art but also participation, sharing, and discussion.

Keeping this example in mind, it is worth asking whether we can build an “image laboratory” through which we can exercise our gaze on what surrounds us. What learning environment could be used? Who should be involved?

I would begin to answer these questions starting with who should be involved: these should be children, youths, and adults, as is the case for Slum-TV, and their learning environment should surely be the city. Photographic or filmic documentation requires making cognitive walks to discover neighbourhoods, roads, natural places, abandoned places, forgotten places, in order to rethink and redesign the territory, and then returning to take care of it, starting from our observations. In addition, it allows us to make paths from education to emotions, relationships and dialogue through theatrical elaborations, festivals of emotions and any other initiative promoting the emergence of individuals' deep feelings.

In conclusion, the “image laboratory” stands as the “anthropology of the gaze,” which is precisely capable of “seeing” the world in order “to change” it. Other activities of this “image laboratory” should be the following:

1. analysis of different languages and styles of narration, through the vision of various documentary films: deconstruction of the projected work and identification of the narration – making formal choices,
2. activities of “waiting, listening, observation, research” on different forms of truth as far as television, internet, and/or cinema may be concerned,
3. critical activity on the thin border between truth and fiction,
4. production of video makers or short films.

The film *Soul Boy* by Kenyan director Hawa Essuman, tells the story of Abila, who helps her sick and delirious father, a victim of Mama Akinyi, nursing him to complete recovery by recovering his soul. This is a true modern fairy tale expressing a great metaphor of the human post-modern condition: we are buried under a pile of images and we must recover our souls.

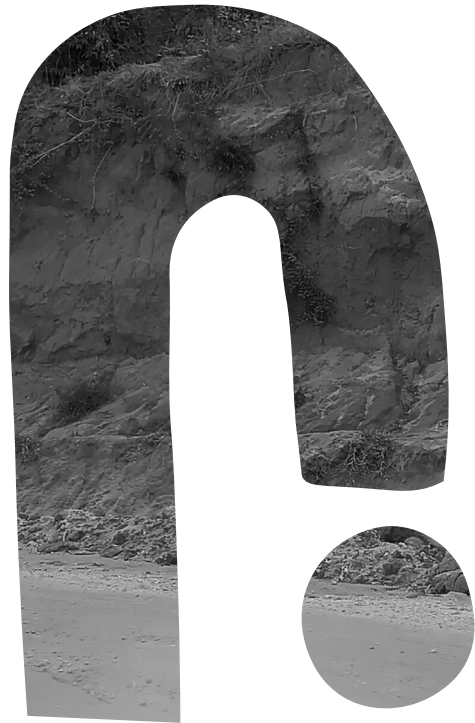
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## Keywords

tourist art  
popular art  
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# In a Savannah of Images. Artistic Production and Public Spaces along the Kenyan Coast

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## Abstract

One of the most interesting aspects of the culture of the Kenyan coast, between Malindi and Mombasa, is the extraordinary production of images that inhabit and invade urban spaces. Most of the shops, restaurants, and hotels are characterized by images created by three types of decorators: the brand painters at the service of Kenya's major companies, who fill the walls of the city with hand-painted advertising; the artists painting hotels and restaurants for western tourists, who mainly realize decorations of high technical expertise with African animals and safari scenes ("tourist art"); those who paint signs, for shops and homes of local people, who produce figures characterized by a language that is more cursive and elementary, but equally effective in communicating the message. The images created by this last category of artists are particularly ephemeral, as they are subject to destruction, depending on the rapid change of destination of some spaces. All these artists tend to sign their works by calling themselves "artists" and leaving the telephone number to be contacted by new customers. Most of them prefer to work for large companies or for European clients, who are able to understand the artistic value of their work.

Through the analysis of a sampling of images and of interviews with those who act in the complex artistic situation of the coast, the purpose of this paper is to define the role of "artists," "clients," and "users" in building, within a context made intercultural by tourism, peculiar and typical urban spaces, sometimes halfway between store and market, where the traditional western categories of "inside" and "outside," "domestic," "private," and "public" are redefined.

## An Art Historian in Kilifi: Brief Methodological Notes

One of the most impressive aspects of the culture of the Kenyan coast, between Malindi and Mombasa, is the extraordinary production of images that invade and inhabit urban spaces. The coastal area of Kenya is characterised by many urban centres that have existed since the pre-colonial period (Obudho, 2000). In this geographical area most shops, restaurants, hotels and even schools are decorated in a surprising variety of images. The town of Kilifi provides a significant case study, as it is a microcosm of the political, cultural, social, and historical factors acting on the broader region of Kilifi county. Today, this area is in a delicate equilibrium between traditional African culture and growing westernisation, driven by European tourism.

The interest in this phenomenon obliges an expert in Renaissance and Baroque art to revise his usual approach, and turn towards "visual studies" (Mitchell, 1987; Elkins, 2003; Pinotti & Somaini, 2016; Mitchell, 2018), following the methodology proposed by the German scholar Horst Bredekamp (Bredekamp, 2003). Going beyond traditional art history and incorporating Anglo-Saxon "visual studies," the German *Bildwissenschaft* ("image science") analyses different productions of images (not only those with an aesthetic value, but also non-artistic images) and combines the methodologies of numerous disciplines (like art history, history, anthropology, sociology, semiotic, cultural studies, religious studies, visual communication studies, media studies, and so on), to analyse the broad and varied field of the visual world (Pinotti & Somaini, 2009).

This perspective of analysis is useful for understanding images in the coastal area of Kenya, because some pictures are created as traditional "works of art," while others are produced purely to communicate a message, deliver content and persuade the audience, with no aesthetic intent. However, the producers of these pictures still define themselves as "artists" and sign their works as such.

This article is the result of a preliminary survey conducted in 2018 between Malindi and Mombasa, which I hope to better scrutinize in future. For the moment I have decided only to briefly illustrate some typologies of "artists" that I found along the Kenyan coast, then concentrate my analysis on the case of Castro, an artist from Kilifi.

## Typologies of artists and images in the Kenyan Coast

According to Jan Vansina, four typologies of art have existed in Africa since 1935 (Vansina, 1999): traditional art, linked to village life and rituals (for instance masks and ceramics); tourist art, which followed the growth of tourism and which is characterised by exotic themes for foreign patrons and bought by tourists as souvenirs; popular art, consisting of murals that decorate urban housing, and sign painting for shops, restaurants, vehicles, and public spaces; academic art, established through academic institutions and schools of art, which are very close to the Western tradition. However, there are other types of artists working along the Kenyan coast, including European artists conducting their own research (Wakhungu-Githuku, 2017); I will concentrate on four typologies of images that I found existing in public spaces. I will deal, in particular, with cases of popular and tourist art, mostly made by artists who have never received formal academic education. These four typologies of artists are: painters for shops and restaurants that serve local people; painters of brands and logos; painters of *matatu* (a local means of transport); painters for westerners. The boundaries of these categories are easy to blur: even though some artists specialise in a specific typology of images, they occasionally produce other typologies when necessary.

### ***Painters for Shops and Restaurants that Serve Local People***

The first category of images consists of signs and murals for shops and restaurants that are used by local people. Although the artists who paint these images sometimes use a simple and elementary language, they are very effective in communicating a message. Even if it is difficult to classify this image production, created by popular artists for a popular audience, on the problems of so-called African popular art there are many studies already (Barber, 1987; Jules-Rosette, 1987; Arnoldi, 1987). The images, which are paid for by the business owners, are particularly ephemeral because the buildings they adorn frequently change use as part of Kenya's urban renewal. I met and interviewed two artists who are representative of this production of images: Mohammed, who lives and works in Mnarani, a poor and mostly Muslim suburb of Kilifi,<sup>1</sup> and Safari, who lives and works in Chumani (within

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<sup>1</sup> Mohammed Omar Bwana was born in Kilifi in 1982. He is the son of a fish seller and did not receive any art education, having only attended primary school. After the death of his father, he decided to abandon the fish shop and dedicate himself to art, which is now his exclusive job. He lived in Tanzania in a workshop with many other artists working together. In Kilifi he collaborated with Safari and then



Kilifi county).<sup>2</sup> Mohammed's *naïf* style (Il. 1) is an effect of his lack of formal artistic education and a response to the demands of clients who live in a marginalised suburban area (Mazrui, 2000). Safari, too, produces images for shops, responding to the demands of local people (Il. 2), but he is also able to paint effective pictures for tourists, like those for the "Jawamu Tours & Safaris" office in Mnarani.

All artists in this category of images tend to sign their works, calling themselves "artists" and leaving their telephone numbers to be contacted by new customers (Il. 3). This is an effect of the change since 1935, when

the place and role of the artist in the society from artisan to cultural diviner progressively expanded, and artistic production multiplied thanks to new patrons and commissioners (not only the government, but also owners of bars, shops, restaurants, and schools). (Vansina, 1999, p. 582)

The increase in demand for images has created a stable role for artists.



Il. 1 Mohammed, *Fish shop*, Mnarani, Kilifi town © Giuseppe Capriotti and Rosita Deluigi

with Castro. He normally uses images from the Internet as an inspiration for new ideas.

<sup>2</sup> Safari works as an artist, but to help his family he cultivates corn in his field, where he also grows cannabis for personal use, to help his artistic inspiration.

In some cases, the invasion of images on exterior shop walls, in particular of painted products that one can buy inside, redefines the European categories of "inside" and "outside." These depicted objects virtually transform the shop into a market stall (Il. 4), with the images creating a new and peculiar urban space (peculiar for coastal Kenya), halfway between a store and a market.



Il. 2 Safari, *Fish shop*, Chumani, Kilifi county © Giuseppe Capriotti and Rosita Deluigi



## Painters of Brands and Logos

The second category of images is the hand-painted adverts that cover city walls, produced by painters at the service of some of Kenya's major companies. The companies control the image production, selecting painters and telling them which logos to paint. Normally, the artists use a plastic stencil with a pounced drawing (the same method as a medieval *cartone*). The stencil has small holes through which the drawing can be transferred onto the wall (like the ancient technique of *spolvero*). The painters then colour the surfaces that have been outlined by the stencil. The same technique has been used for the advertising of Faida Feed (Capriotti, 2018).

In Kilifi, July 2018, I met Simon Kinuthia (from Nairobi) and Dan (from Mombasa), both brand painters who work for a Kenyan advertising agency named "Up Country Limited."<sup>3</sup> I observed them as they painted an advertisement for Tuzo Milk on the wall of a private house in Kilifi (Il. 5). In such cases, the company pays the city government a fee, while the owner of the property needs only give his/her verbal permission for the wall to be used, receiving no money but benefiting from having their wall refurbished and decorated. As we can see, the European border between "public" and "private" space is thus renegotiated: on the wall of a private house, the image creates a public space, the space of an advertisement.

## Matatu Painters

*Matatu* are small buses that provide one of the most common forms of transport across Kenya. In Mombasa, more than in Kilifi, painted *matatu* have become a popular phenomenon. In Bamburi I met Tonnie Rebel,<sup>4</sup> who explained to me that each *matatu* in Kenya has a personal name and that its decoration is linked to this. One *matatu* Tonnie had painted was called Zary, the name of the first wife of Diamond, a Tanzanian singer popular in Kenya (Il. 6). The owner of the *matatu* is a fan of Diamond and so he decided to dedicate the depictions on his *matatu* to the singer, the singer's wife and to Tanzania (represented by the colours of the Tanzanian flag). On both sides Tonnie has painted portraits of Diamond with his first wife. The writing "Sumu" (poison, in Swahili) is a memory of the vehicle's former name, before it became Zary. Unsurprisingly, such eye-catching depictions on the *matatu* work as a business strategy, attracting young clients who share the same taste in music. Popular music is indeed very important in the political and cultural life of Kenya (Wafula Wekesa, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sortlist.com/advertising/kenya-ke> [Accessed January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019]

<sup>4</sup> Tonnie Rebel (real name Antony Mwangi Kariuki) was born in Nakuru in 1977 and now lives and works in Bamburi. He received an education in art design at secondary school, then started to work in Mombasa in a workshop that specialised in *matatu* art. Later he began to work on his own as a freelancer.



Il. 3 Signature Art by Ali, Malindi, Kilifi county © Giuseppe Capriotti and Rosita Deluigi



Il. 4 Ali, Shop, Malindi, Kilifi county © Giuseppe Capriotti and Rosita Deluigi





Il. 5 Touzo Milk, Kilifi town © Giuseppe Capriotti



Il. 6 Tonnie Rebel, Matatu Zarry, Mombasa © Giuseppe Capriotti

This vivid *matatu* art market has been damaged by the recent Michuki law,<sup>5</sup> brought in to guarantee the safety of people in the *matatu* and on the street (the law forces people to wear seatbelts and prohibits overcrowding of the vehicle). The law also forbids the playing of music and TVs in *matatu* and bans all art on the outside of the vehicle, except for a simple declaration of the destination. This has created an enormous struggle for *matatu* artists, who risk losing their livelihoods. To promote their work, they have a Facebook page<sup>6</sup> and a website<sup>7</sup>.

## Painters for Westerners (but also for Local Commissioners): The Case of Castro

Next are the artists who decorate resorts and restaurants for Western tourists and produce paintings for the tourist market. In general, these are very skilled painters, able to create high quality decorations thanks to their technical expertise. The subjects of their paintings are African animals, safari scenes, wildlife, and Maasai life.

The case of Castro, a painter from Kilifi, is interesting because today he mostly produces quality decorations for resorts and framed paintings for Western clients, but he has previously made remarkable cycles of paintings for local institutions.<sup>8</sup> Castro prefers to work for westerners, who recognize the artistic value of his artworks, rather than for local clients, who pay him on an hourly rate or according to the dimensions of the surface to paint. His production of framed paintings for the tourist market could be included in the common phenomenon of "tourist art," on which there is a vivid and on-going debate. Only recently has 'tourist art' started to be considered a relevant and interesting form of artistic production (Jules-Graburn, 1979; Rosette, 1984; Jules-Rosette, 1986; Graburn, 1984), with specific studies also on the Kenyan situation (Mahoney, 2012). Anyway, it is possible to buy Castro's paintings in tourist souvenir shops as well as from his workshop.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. <https://www.tuko.co.ke/291425-michuki-traffic-laws-road-rules-kenya.html#291425> [Accessed January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019]

<sup>6</sup> <https://web.facebook.com/matwanaculture/> [Accessed on 24.01.2019]

<sup>7</sup> <http://matatujournal.blogspot.com/> [Accessed on 24.01.2019]

<sup>8</sup> Castro Osore Khwale was born in Kakamega in 1980 and is the son of an accountant. He studied for only two years at the Department of Arts at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, without finishing the course for economic reasons. Particularly skilled at sketching in his childhood, he started to work as a painter in resorts thanks to European clients and investors in Kenya, who recognised his value. One of them, Leslie Rampinelli, has an extremely rich collection of Castro's paintings.



In his early paintings Castro used the models and atmospheres of the great exponents of international Orientalism and primitivism (respectively Osman Hamdi Bey, il. 7, and Gauguin) or he reproduced the style of artists like Kandinsky and Dali. He then began to add elements of African culture (animals, trees, characters) to this European grammar. Over time, Castro freed himself from forms of cultural subalternity towards European models to arrive at his own personal style, in which African elements take over (Il. 8). Castro frequently depicts his traditional culture: nostalgic representations of African life with women carrying children on their backs or jars on their heads, and male and female characters with big feet and hands, holding work tools. This art, in which Castro identifies himself as an artist, is characterised by subjects that European clients perceive as exotic: an exoticism created by a Kenyan artist for European customers. There is no doubt that his painting can be considered an effect of globalisation and the connection with Western clients, created through tourism (Mazrui, 2000). Indeed, most of the large tourism enterprises (from which the local painters work)



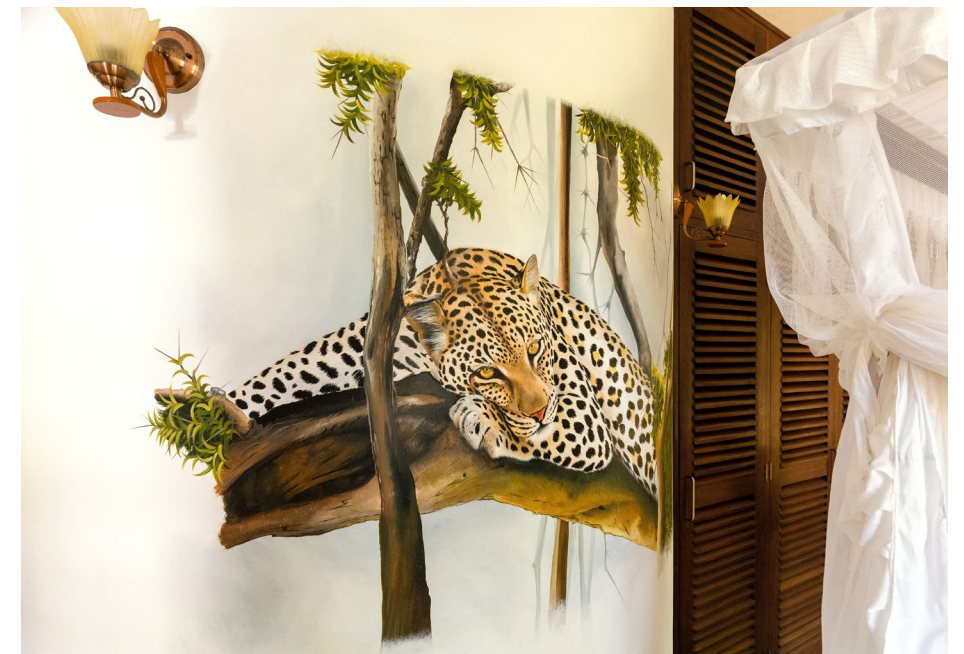
Il. 7 Castro, *The Tortoise Trainer*, copied from Osman Hamdi Bey, Kilifi town, Leslie Rampinelli collection © Giuseppe Capriotti



Il. 8 Castro, *Maasai woman*, Kilifi town, author collection © Giuseppe Capriotti



Il. 9 Castro, *Zebra house*, Maison Müge, Kilifi town © Aleš Loziak



Il. 10 Castro, *Leopard house*, Maison Müge, Kilifi town © Aleš Loziak





Il. 11 Castro, *Zebra house*, Maison Müge, Kilifi town © Aleš Loziak



Il. 12 Castro, *Antelope house*, Maison Müge, Kilifi town © Aleš Loziak

are owned, managed, and controlled by foreign or national interests with little participation by indigenous people (Sindiga, 2000). In any case, as Sidney Littlefield Kasfir stated, the encounter with the Western world, like every form of contact between cultures, caused transformations in artistic production and in the meaning that each society gives to art. Nevertheless, the new art system is always the effect of a negotiation, not an imposition, generating original and unexpected results (Kasfir, 2007). Castro's art is a response to the demands of Western customers, but done in a personal manner, which he has found through years of individual research.

As an example of the decorations that Castro creates for resorts, I propose the case of the Maison Müge, a resort owned by a Swiss couple in Kilifi. Each room or small apartment of the resort is dedicated to an African animal (elephant, zebra, leopard, antelope, dolphin, pelican, swan). The 'zebra house' and the 'leopard house' are decorated with hide patterns of their respective animals painted on some architectural elements and furniture, while the bedroom in each house contains a large and superb depiction of the animal (Il. 9-11). The 'antelope house' is also unusual thanks to a mural showing antelopes galloping across a savannah populated by wild animals like elephant, rhinos, lions, and buffalo (Il. 12); in the same room the seatback of a sofa is decorated with the "big five" of Africa in a savannah landscape, in which the artist has incorporated the natural lines of the wood. The iconography of this cycle was chosen by the owners of the resort, who asked the artist to produce some sketches as proposals, from which they selected the final pieces. Castro used photographs as a source of inspiration, comparing these with his observations of live animals to make the composition effective.

In addition to his pictures for westerners, Castro also paints for local commissioners. In Kilifi he created two interesting cycles of paintings on the walls of different schools. In both cases, the commissioner gave the artist a written story, which the painter developed into the cycles by mixing images and writing. Both cycles are dedicated to the protection of the sexuality of the female schoolchildren and thus reveal the position of girls in the society of coastal Kenya (Mitullah, W.V. 2000).

The first cycle has been painted in the "youth friendly corner" of the MTG, a sports school for girls. The cycle consists of two paintings and depicts the problems of prostitution and HIV. The first painting is presented as a comic with Swahili writing in speech bubbles (Il. 13). It is dialectically divided in two parts: on the left, the natural African world (with trees in the background), on the right, the wealthy, westernized world (a street with cars, bars, and a nightclub). On the right a black man in Western clothes (with a tie and an iPhone), is trying to seduce two young schoolgirls with money. His sexual proposal is made explicit in the Swahili writing in his speech bubble: "I love you so much beautiful girl. Take this money you'll use for shopping and here is my phone contact so that you can call me." On the other side two girls are refusing his approach, saying: "We have principles! We don't want to have sex" and "I'm delaying sex because I am at an age when I cannot support



myself. To achieve my life goals, I don't want your money." In the other mural there is a hospital scene, with a smiling doctor administering an HIV test on the finger of a young girl (Il. 14). The writing on the label underlines the importance of HIV testing.<sup>9</sup>

The other cycle is on a wall that joins the classrooms of "Mnarani Pry Scholl" secondary school, again in Kilifi. In this case the paintings thematise the problem of rape, telling in five murals the story of a girl raped by a *boda boda* (a motorbike driver). Again, the images are accompanied by writing, sometimes in comic strip bubbles. As declared in writing above the first painting, the image shows "A girl being raped at an age under 18" (Il. 15): the girl is crying on the right saying "Boda boda, why have you done this to me?" whereas on the left the driver, with his belt still unfastened, says: "You are very beautiful. Stop crying. Don't I usually carry you for free?" At this moment a red arrow (used in all the images to indicate the direction of reading) shows where to continue the cycle in the following image, where an introductory heading says: "I am the solution" (Il. 16). In this picture things to do and not to do are shown in images and words: "Don't shower so that you have evidence / Don't wash the clothes as they are evidence / Store the clothes of evidence using newspaper but not nylon paper." Crosses and ticks help to reinforce what should be done in case of rape. In the following picture we have three scenes with letters to indicate the sequence of events (Il. 17). Writing is used to clarify the meaning of each episode: a) "Go to the hospital nearby"; b) "Go to the CREA W office for help"; c) "Report to the police station and fill out P3 receipt."<sup>10</sup> The following episode suggests the girl "get advice from an expert" to receive psychological help: in the image the girl is talking to a counsellor (Il. 18). The final picture is divided into two episodes: "The accused being arrested" and "Going to court for case hearing" (Il. 19). In this last episode, in particular on the face of the *boda boda* driver, some of the colour has been lost. We don't know if this is a simple problem of conservation, or the lack of colour is due to scratches, perhaps done by observers who wanted to punish the guilty criminal and carried out their retribution on the image. This vandalism of images should be studied in greater depth as part of the anthropology of images: the image could have a magic value (Gombrich, 1948), in substituting the real presence of depicted person and in bringing what is absent into the present (Vernant, 1983; Auge, 1988). Here the observers have substituted the image of the criminal for the body of the criminal; they have damaged the image to punish the real person, as it happens in a series of similar phenomena (Freedberg, 2009, pp. 557-625).

<sup>9</sup> "Importance of testing / Live without worries / Your health, your life / Be a good role model to the community."

<sup>10</sup> The CREA W is an office that helps girls (as also specified on the label of the officer with the writing "Officer of cooperation of CREA W"; the P3 receipt is a report to fill in for the police.



Il. 13 Castro, Cycle at the "youth friendly corner" of the MTG, Mnarani, Kilifi town  
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Il. 14 Castro, Cycle at the "youth friendly corner" of the MTG, Mnarani, Kilifi town  
© Aleš Loziak





Il. 15 Castro, Cycle at the "Mnarani Pry Scholl" secondary school, Mnarani, Kilifi town  
© Aleš Loziak



Il. 17 Castro, Cycle at the "Mnarani Pry Scholl" secondary school, Mnarani, Kilifi town  
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Il. 16 Castro, Cycle at the "Mnarani Pry Scholl" secondary school, Mnarani, Kilifi town  
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Il. 18 Castro, Cycle at the "Mnarani Pry Scholl" secondary school, Mnarani, Kilifi town  
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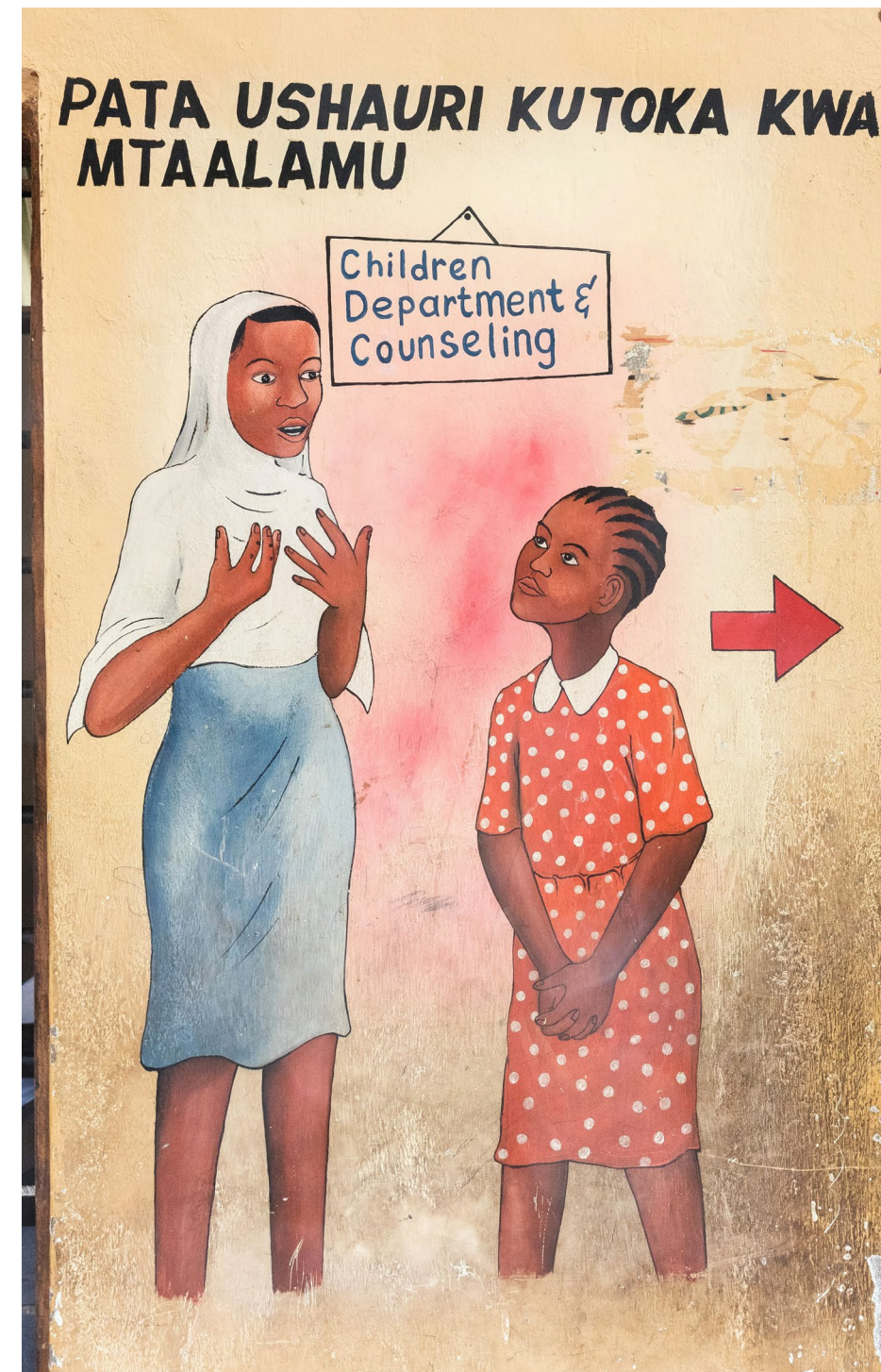
In the public space of two schools in Kilifi, these two cycles have been commissioned and produced to raise a new sensibility and drive behaviour change in the female observers. Given the ability of these images to modify a pre-existing reality, they could be approached using categories proposed by Horst Bredekamp in *Theorie des Bildakts* (Bredekamp, 2010). In these cases, we can talk about the "performativity" of images: they are pictures that perform a real action on those who look at them; they are pictures whose strength depends on how they were made by the artist. Using a style entirely distinct from his tourist art, Castro creates an audience-appropriate language, easily understandable (also thanks to the Swahili words), to produce a real effect on the female observer, to convince her to protect her sexuality.

## Provisional conclusions

Through the analysis of a sample of images and thanks to interviews with those who act within the complex artistic situation of the Kenyan coast, I can propose some provisional conclusions.

I have pinpointed peculiar and typical urban spaces, sometimes halfway between a store and a market, where the traditional western categories of "inside" and "outside" are redefined (as in the depictions on the walls of shop entrances). I have also identified peculiar urban spaces in which the traditional Western categories of "domestic," "private" and "public" are redefined, thanks to the negotiation between company, government and building owner (as in the case of the Tuzo Milk logos).

In addition I have tried to define the roles of "artists" and "commissioners" within a context made intercultural by tourism, and in some cases I have also identified the position of the "users" of the images: the target audience of the school cycles are the girls who must learn how to protect their sexuality; sometimes these observers can become active, in this case reacting directly to the surface of the painting and damaging the image of the criminal's face.



Il. 19 Castro, Cycle at the "Mnarani Pry Scholl" secondary school, Mnarani, Kilifi town  
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## Keywords

urban exploration  
relational architecture  
intercultural perspective  
nomadic permanence  
imprint and traces



# Intercultural Trespassing: Educational Errancy between Urban Spaces and Relational Places

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## Abstract

Visual communication can act as an organizer of urban space between delimitation and structuring. To become part of the information code in urban life, it requires accessible and readable styles. An information level that can be perceived immediately, on the surface, allows us to know and acquire codes and communication languages. To examine this in depth, we need a nomadic permanence that crosses fields of experience, interpreting and modulating symbols and meanings, articulating shared reflections, and developing community actions.

Information becomes a passage to access pre-existing contexts and start creative processes that lead to new paths of discovery of oneself and others. Therefore, we can talk about the educational wandering between information and messages that populate our daily life and require us to be dynamic subjects. The wandering and the journey allow us to search for plural meanings, interconnections, and interdependencies. We must then build, deconstruct, and reconstruct links, relationships, languages, and shared information, designing and implementing practices of cross-border and intercultural revision.

This paper aims to question the visual elements that indicate the human presence in the urban sphere. This presence, more or less persistent, will be investigated in relation to the forms of interaction made visible by the urban and "human-relational" architecture, and by the traces that remain in the places of sociality. The "human-urban" approach allows us to understand how each subject is represented and configured in the environment, in a spiral

of reciprocal redefinition between presence and absence. The research on which I am basing my observations took place in two cities involved in the TICASS project – Macerata and Kilifi – and involved experiences of “urban-relational exploration” to narrate various plots of the social fabric, defined by images that testify some ways of crossing and inhabiting the city in an intercultural key.

When walking through the streets of an unknown city, we look for reference points to orient ourselves and get to know the space we are exploring. The images, road signs, symbols, and icons we find within built-up areas help us to understand how to move around and which directions we should go to reach pre-arranged points. At the same time, if we want to wander around and get lost in a place, without reaching a pre-arranged point, we can deliberately ignore the signs and proceed in a less systematic way. In this case, our eye must be more trained to be curious and, especially, we need to have time at our disposal to discover new streets, shortcuts, links, subways, pedestrian tunnels, and crossings.

The ethnographic approach I chose to use in the TICASS project required a careful observation of the context and was aided by being located in the experiences, exploring familiar places and meeting people who guided me in discovering unknown environments (Augè, 2000; Clifford, 1987; Clifford, & Marcus, 2016; Geertz, 1973; 1983). The numerous stimuli I collected created the need to deal with a large quantity of information conveyed by different media and languages. Consequently, it was necessary to rework an interpretation that might restore, at least in part, the complexity of the intercultural trespassing experienced, starting from the images and the sets of images that originated along the research path.

## Images and Urban Spaces among Permanencies and Collective Transits

Visual communication can act as an organizer of urban space, between delimitation and structuring. To become part of the information code in urban life, it requires accessible and readable styles. Images can communicate functions of the space with a code considered valid in the context in which the message is placed (Lester, 2011; Mitchell, 2005). Sometimes messages are clear for multiple subjects with different backgrounds. One example would be road signage (which nevertheless has its variations). At other times, however, the images need an interpretation deriving from the knowledge of the place in which they are located while retaining a level of ambiguity for those who do not have the same cultural baggage as the subjects for whom the messages have been designed. The signage that requires language as well as symbols will not be legible for everybody; nor will the use of different colours to indicate danger or the use of different shapes to show specific functions of public spaces.

The more codes used to compose a message, the greater the level of difficulty for subjects in reading and understanding them. Parts of the same message may reach different target groups but, on the other hand, a process of extreme iconic synthesis also requires the observer to have the tools for interpretation. Contents that for an expert reader of urban images seem to be “obvious” and legible to everybody, may contain parts which are not immediately codifiable. An international airport may become a source of uncertainty for an inexperienced traveller, just as the signs in an open-air market may be illegible to somebody who approaches these contexts with different codes.

The organization of space is conveyed by formal and informal communication architectures. Images may have a prescriptive or indicative function, but the responsibility and decisionality rests with the human being, the citizens who decide how to place themselves in these places and how to move through them. Icons and symbols that are conventionally used to organize the urban space (e.g. pedestrian crossings or road signs) are designed to be recognizable and to last over time, but in reality cities are studded with numerous “temporary” signs that appear for a certain period and are destined to disappear (e.g. graffiti or advertising billboards). The coexistence of numerous messages, sometimes even contradicting each other, characterizes cities and shows them to be complex places divided into several levels.

The various methods of negotiation, mediation, and transgression in the use of space allow us to generate new forms of organization, based on an agreement between the parties and the ways of (im)permanent communication. The temporary nature of the architecture and structure of spaces is linked to the different everyday lives experienced by people. The mere presence of images does not imply a homogeneous use of the space by the population, or a unanimous interpretation of them. It is in the human-image interaction that each subject decides how to react to the sign and how to use the information that is read. The sharing of several methods of response, organized by the citizens-community, will determine a shared and, at times, not very obvious code of behaviour.

The customary uses of some spaces may be understood also in the light of different methods of the use and generation of urban space; the TICASS project is focused particularly on the public space, its design and management, and its possibility to increase people’s quality of life. The urban space is sustainable and accessible if it is able to welcome the largest possible variety of different combinations of people without excluding anybody and in complete safety.<sup>1</sup> The more diverse those who use and give shape to public spaces are, the greater will be the possibilities for the meeting, exchange, and hybridization of ideas and cultures, and, therefore, the probabilities that this will generate in social and community innovation.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

In this respect, we may quote the placemaking approach, which inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. It develops a collaborative process by facilitating creative patterns of use, paying attention to several identities that define a place and supporting its ongoing evolution.<sup>2</sup>

To support processes of communication and sharing in the community, the information level in the urban space – the one that can be perceived immediately, on the surface – allows us to know and acquire codes and communication languages. Information becomes a passage to access pre-existing contexts and start creative processes that lead to new paths of discovery of oneself and others. This is not a case of an obvious, immediate passage, especially when we are immersed in unfamiliar contexts, and this is why we can talk about the educational wandering between information and messages that populate our daily life and require us to be dynamic subjects.

## The Challenge of Nomadic Permanence for an Intercultural Perspective

To examine a specific socio-relational context more deeply, we need a "nomadic permanence" with which we will cross fields of experience, interpret and modulate symbols and meanings, articulate shared reflections, and develop community actions. To move from the surface of the information to the multiple meanings of the messages, we have to perform an intentional, reflexive movement requiring a recontextualization of oneself and of one's own reference codes (Catarci, Macinai, 2015; Fiorucci, Portera & Pinto Minerva, 2017; Zoletto, 2011; 2012). In this way it will be possible to learn new itineraries of meaning and motivate an intercultural dialogue that is not limited to the mediation of mutual positions but that aims to produce innovative meanings to go beyond the starting viewpoints in a continual hybridization. Critical reflexivity must lead to a review of one single point of view, making room for the birth of new, unstable, temporary, and volatile trajectories on which to base the first steps of a knowledge that is in continual movement.

I use the expression "nomadic permanence" to describe the approach of a researcher who stays in social and educational urban contexts and questions continually, moving between experiences, between sources,

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2 "Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution." <https://www.pps.org/category/placemaking>

and between the opportunities offered by the surrounding environment and the initiatives promoted by the interaction with the differences. This conjunction of terms indicates the constant existential and professional movement that characterizes the ethnographic and research-action method containing the impatience of immediate comprehension and expanding it over time, opening up to the plurality of space (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Stringer, 1999). The proposed approach requires intercultural crossovers, inside and outside, and a constant dialogue with alterity to formulate new hypotheses and paths of research and intervention that might enable sharing and community action.

Nomadic subjects define their identity by tracing multiple transformations and ways of belonging according to the place they find themselves in and the references they are attached to; these subjects are open to new displacements and are able to manage contradictions and conflicts in terms of interconnections. They are considered as movable yet at the same time solid subjects, capable of recognizing and placing themselves in new realities by reworking their own affinities without losing sight of the numerous discoveries and knowledge acquired during the whole existential journey (Braidotti, 2011; 2012).

Nomadism requires the leaving of a sedentary style of life and thought, to venture out into the complexity that, as it generates uncertainty, requires orienting oneself towards plural forms of comprehension and thought production. The nomadic subject receives new, multiple, and plural identities, capable of building themselves into the relational logic of the dialogue. Nomadism needs to cross and to live in several spaces, discovering new shapes of community and new ways of migrant identities, able to cast off from known ports and sail along new relational routes (Cadei & Deluigi, 2019).

Performing intercultural dialogue requires interurban and interpersonal explorations in which the person discovers themselves as a nomadic subject interconnected with others and in which they open recompose lines of thought and interpretation that are too often turned onto a single reference reality. The disorientation deriving from this process may be mitigated or accentuated by the encounter with others and by relations with authentically plural and multiform reciprocities. The evanescence and volatility of these dynamics may leave us bewildered as we face the need for linearity and certainty but, on the other hand, only the unexpected and the untried – what goes beyond our immediate comprehension – lead us to cross boundaries and generate collective impact.

The wandering and the journey allow us to search for plural meanings, interconnections, and interdependencies. We must then build, deconstruct, and reconstruct links, relationships, languages, and shared information, designing and implementing practices of cross-border and intercultural revision. It is not an easy task since we must remain balanced and positioned between several dimensions, with the awareness that further uncertainty is being produced. Nevertheless, it is an acceptable risk in order to promote



new opportunities for learning and experience. Becoming travellers, going out to discover relational identities, also means creating wandering narrations that comprise a form of cultural capital in movement (Aime, 2005; Maffessoli, 2000; Marfè, 2012). The encounter between identity, languages, and idioms allows critical, open, and dynamic thoughts to be voiced in a form not previously defined, and for this reason they are revolutionary since they require one to move away from one's own egocentrism and ethnocentrism start up forms of dialogue based on the relational experience (Deluigi, 2016; 2017; 2018.)

The human presence in the urban space assumes countless meanings, and the city contexts can be explored on various levels. The images guiding us while we walk generate suggestions, show us the way to go, and lead us to places for socialization, or they misdirect our search into a continual vortex of interrogatives. When faced with closed gates and half-closed doors, we have to decide whether to erect a border or try to live in frontier spaces, to better understand the transits and changes that we perform daily (Chambers, 2018; Gandolfi, 2018; Giordana, 2018). Standing on the boundary enables us to see different scenarios, and while on the one hand this may generate anxiety, on the other it promotes an opening.

## Inter-urban Explorations: Information Surfaces and Meaningful Messages

There are several visual elements that indicate the human presence in the urban sphere. In the TICASS project, we have investigated this presence, more or less persistent, in relation to the forms of interaction made visible by the urban and "human-relational" architecture, and by the traces that remain in some public places. In public places we find different but interconnected architectures. Firstly, there is the actual architecture that is an art at the frontier of the arts since it is threatened with reality (Piano, 2013). With the passing of time, the urban context has to be mended and regenerated, especially if we think of the suburbs, in which the city's planning energy is condensed, and of the dimensions that buildings occupy and leave free (Piano, 2014). Secondly, we find human-relational architecture, the kind that inhabits the urban spaces, that describes the various movements, interactions, communications, and forms of organization that people attribute to the city. The traces of these dynamics are fragmented, informal, and decontextualized beyond the functions systematically attributed to the city.

Various types of time comprising the weave of an urban fabric in constant hybridization are condensed in the use of the space. In particular, with reference to the temporary architecture that modifies the uses and functions of urban space, we can easily find a parallel with the human-

relational architecture that describes social networks. According to Ali Madanipour, we can identify

three forms of temporality: instrumental, existential, and experimental. Instrumental temporality is characterized by a utilitarian approach to time, accelerating quantified time for higher productivity and profitability. Existential temporality reflects the intuitive understanding of temporality, the materiality of the city, which mediates this temporality, and the vulnerability and precariousness of the social and natural worlds in the face of globalization. Experimental temporality, meanwhile, is the view of the future, drawing on events as spaces of questioning, experimenting, and innovating. (Madanipour, 2017, pp. 4-5)

The coexistence of different temporalities allows us to analyse urban spaces by combining a variety of perspectives and to develop experiences of discovery and social exploration, generating plural traces of the paths this opens. In this way, numerous meanings and interpretations of contexts emerge, and it is interesting to analyse various forms of permanence and transit in public spaces as relational movements to define some portraits of identity and belonging. Every day we cross the spaces, we take hasty steps within the public sphere, and we trace trajectories that we often cannot remember. In the same way, we move in articulated relational spaces in which we meet people, tighten ties, and start relationships that can persist over time or last just for a while.

How should we build places in which we leave traces, share meanings, describe "other" directions, as well as undertake a migration journey and identity displacement? In the perennial weavings between the city's relational movements and what is left of them in the exchange between functional places based on the human presence and places generated by the same human presence, we can cross the thresholds of sociality, up to the borders of urban spaces, towards the suburbs. The greatest challenge is to learn to come out of ourselves, expanding identity confines to start up interdependencies that contain the challenges, fragilities, needs, and resources of each interlocutor. The images and representations of the city are reflected in the fragilities and potentials of the urban and human landscapes that we are able to outline. The human-relational architecture develops thus in a blended space, made up of permanence and connections that constantly interfere with each other in the modern complexity. In this respect, Scott McQuire describes "the media city" in which the relational horizons are broadened and "relational space is the social space created by the contemporary imperative to actively establish social relations 'on the fly' across heterogeneous dimensions in which the global is inextricably imbricated with the face-to-face" (2008; pp. 22-23). Presence and absence become categories on which to reflect and start up paths of research aimed at describing the relationship between alterities "here"

and "elsewhere," as interconnected elements characterizing nomadic identities.

The challenge of the intercultural approach centres on the need to be configured as subjects immersed in experience, placed in a specific space-time, in which each individual continues to be the guardian and bearer of countless memories and references. Generating opportunities to promote an exchange between cultures with porous boundaries (Amselle, 2010; Hannerz, 1992; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004) means designing new existential and social architectures. The human-urban interdependence allows us to better understand how each subject is represented and configured in the environment – in a spiral of reciprocal redefinition and interconnection. The fluidity of the interactions and the need to redefine oneself in the relational space requires researchers to observe and listen carefully to themselves, to others, and to the context, paying attention to the different codes (known and unknown) that emerge from the experience and outlining interpretative hypotheses aimed at narrating some horizons of meaning.

## Imprints and Traces among (im)Permanence and Imperfection

The research experience that gave rise to the reflections contained in this essay was carried out in two cities involved in the TICASS project – Macerata (Italy) and Kilifi (Kenya) – describing experiences of "urban-relational exploration" to narrate various plots of the social fabric defined by images of ways of going through and inhabiting the city in an intercultural key. Below, I will consider the imprints human beings leave on the urban space.

I have already demonstrated that the presence of several architectures in a city requires human beings to orientate and place themselves within several relational dimensions. The presence, the transits, the permanence of people – all make the city come alive and give it form, occupying spaces and times and comprising the social and relational fabric. My urban exploration was divided into spaces in which I tried to leave imprints with different outcomes. To document this activity, I created photographs and short videos recording 20 steps in the corridors of the university and in the old city centre of Macerata, and 20 steps on an unpaved road and on one of the beaches of Kilifi. For a few seconds I filmed my feet walking on different surfaces and then I turned the camera to check if imprints or traces were left behind after I had passed. I chose significant places for the research and I occupied, walked over, and inhabited those spaces for brief seconds, walking and trying to understand what mutual impacts they triggered. Following this, I worked metaphorically on the transits, reflecting on the educational wandering in strict interconnection with the experiences created in the context of the TICASS project.

At this point there are two elements to bear in mind when describing reflection in an intercultural key: permanence and imperfection. If we want to deepen our knowledge of urban-relational space, a first glance is not enough; we must gradually immerse ourselves in the otherness and the alterity. And even then they will remain opaque: we will not be able to understand and classify everything to give an exhaustive definition. The first alterity we must learn to explore is that of ourselves in the field because the introspective glance is essential for understanding the different nuances that comprise our personality and professionalism. Being a researcher is a privileged state for human beings as they have the opportunity to question and interact with their own differences and those of others.

Our knowledge is always partial, as is our point of view that is organized thanks to permanence, so the possibility of exploring new urban-human territories, not denying the cultural roots from which we came but questioning them, making them more plastic, able to make space and accept other perspectives and critical readings, is to our benefit. We need to understand where the borders are located and where the frontiers of habitable spaces are positioned to decide which trespasses we can commit, and which relational positions and research trajectories we assume in a situation in order not to take ownership of reality but to become part of it (Aman, 2018; Andreotti, 2011; Spivak, 1990; 1999).

It is not a matter of invading and colonizing other contexts with one's own categories, or of applying reality models recognized and considered valid, but rather of adopting a critical and imperfect, imprecise and partial knowledge to make room for several contributions. In this way, it is possible to construct a dynamic knowledge of oneself, of the context, and of the others passing through the shared experiential element. In fact, shared experience assumes an extreme relevance in deconstructing stereotyped perspectives, generalizations, and abstractions that create distance between the imagined and the real, converging towards the building of barriers and walls inside which to take refuge or behind which to place "the different" (Fugier & Carrier, 2013).

In the urban explorations I carried out, I focused on imprints as signs in which the synthesis between contact and loss occurs, in a continual dialogue between memory and present and between the ephemeral and the interweaving of heterogeneous temporalities (Didi-Huberman, 2008). With this in mind, I developed some instructive reflections with the intention of narrating the view from which I interpreted the research experiments carried out. Among the various dimensions I considered, an interesting reflection also arises from the distinction between

the imprint [that] is made through the pressure of a body standing still on a surface suitable for receiving the shapes, [and] the trace [that] is produced by a moving body on a similar surface. It is the drag, the wake, the scraping. It signals the acknowledged presence of a body in a place, but during the time it is in movement. The imprint

is static, the trace is dynamic. Both of them are evidence of passing in a place, but one is a sign of being static, while the other is of having moved there. (Giusti, 2015, pp. 7-8)

In the various transits carried out between Macerata and Kilifi, in a sort of return journey, we can observe that certain imprints are invisible in concrete reality while others are destined to disappear quickly. In the same way, the traces can dissolve over time since they may have "their own intrinsic impermanence, they are already destined to disappear when they are born" (Giusti, 2015, p. 8). What I am interested in highlighting is the action performed in leaving an imprint and in generating a trace that, even though ephemeral and fragmented, may assume multiple shapes and meanings according to the interaction and the impact between subjects and contexts.

A trace is produced when a material is present [...] [able] to compensate for the transitoriness of the event. [...] Given that the trace retains the ephemeral and holds in the past, its temporal structure has a characteristic deviation compared with that of the event that produces it. (Straus, 2011, pp. 89-91)

These are the wandering deviations that gave rise to the instructive traces shown below.

Grey linoleum: a smooth, uniform, clean, and well-lit surface without interruptions, unexpected snags, or deviations; showing linear trajectories and guided directions. I walk easily over this surface and I do not leave imprints. A few fragmented marks may be imprinted, which lose their shape with the passing of time and make the cold neon lights opaque only when there is strong pressure. Otherwise, everything slides away into the homogeneity and obscurity of repetitions of the already familiar, the known, infinitely reproducing the same structures of thought and action in which we are placed or find refuge.

Repetition requires no creativity. It sticks to the superstructures that deaden the sounds of the steps. When walking quickly over this surface, I do not cause or perceive any variation and I am content with the ease with which straight-line paths can be envisaged, described, and represented.



Il. 1 Rosita Deluigi, *University of Macerata: Linear corridors*  
(Macerata, 19 November 2018, 1.32 pm)





Il. 2 Rosita Deluigi *Old city centre: Temporal-spatial collocations*  
(Macerata, 21 November 2018. 8.22 am)

Traditional paving: historic surfaces, reminding us of the specific nature of the place and its evolution over time; stones and building materials blend to comprise or even support the surface on which to walk. The geometric quality of the surface makes way for the heterogeneous nature of the dimensions of the stones and the colour shades, which, although aimed at creating harmony, enable the coexistence of different nuances.

I walk more uncertainly here, paying attention to my steps and intercepting the lack of homogeneity and elements hindering the linearity. There are slight height differences and the imprints left by the passing of people are small items of refuse, placed silently in the cracks, waiting to be removed. Looking back and upwards, I find myself in a historical-geographical place but on the ground there is still no sign that I have passed, although the effort has been great. The feeling that emerges is of being located in a specific reality.





Il. 3 Rosita Deluigi, *Sandy road: Unsteady climb*  
(Kilifi, 1 December 2018, 10.43 am)

Red earth: sandy surfaces studded with imprints of nature and human tracks; traces and precarious elements destined to disappear and to change collocation with every gust of wind. This dirt road connects Kilifi city to the hinterland where rural villages and built-up areas with traditional houses spread out. There are many imprints that can be seen before I even start walking. They are of different shapes and sizes, and they lead to different directions. They are sometimes imprints of shoes, sometimes of bare feet, which reminds us of the need to be in contact with the land.

I start my walk calmly, passing from the shade to the sunlight, intercepting the sounds, noises and voices of a public space that is continually transforming. My feet raise dust, and sand remains trapped between my toes. As I go on, the surface becomes more and more unstable and it is not easy to walk, leaving imprints between those that are already there. This road is an intersection of traces of human beings, cars, and motorbikes that give it shape and volume. Traces of people are not destined to last over time in the urban space but they take on a value of permanence in the memory of the experience and the plans of the person carrying out the walk.

Symbols and meanings of multiple trajectories blend and design a plastic, temporary architecture.



Grainy sand: warm surface comprising millions of grains that move and change place continually; a wet beach on which the sea, the wind, and the sky leave small gifts, leaving residues that make it imperfect to the person who seeks smooth compactness. As I walk, I make a noise, shifting some of the ground and holding it under my bare feet. Alongside is the lapping of the sea. The land keeps the memory of my passage while I hold the places in my memory. In this case too, the landscape created is temporary but the weight of the experience gained is not.

Both surfaces change as they touch each other: my feet and the beach have no filters; there is no mediation except for that of the encounter that modifies the shape of both, expanding the space of the exchange. It is a mutual crossing in which a link and an interdependence requiring effort and plasticity are built. A continual movement that transforms and requires an attitude that is open to possibility.



Il. 4 Rosita Deluigi, *Mazingira: Weights and residues of the encounter*  
(Kilifi, 2 December 2018, 1.00 pm)



## Crossing Unprecedented States

Exploring different places allowed me to shed light on various intercultural meeting-points thanks to the progressive direct contact with the ground, which became more and more destructured. From closed shoes to bare feet, the distances shortened, the barriers weakened, and the frontiers became more porous, leaving residues of the experience gained.

Sometimes the impact of the differences is so strong that we may not have time to build plastic perspectives and this requires a full immersion in what seems distant, divergent, and conflictual. It is also possible to leave, not unscathed, these transits and crossings, and this is a risk that the intercultural approach must assume.

What balances must be broken to generate the encounter? What shifts do we make, what borders do we recognize and decide, not without fear, to cross? Being in a situation and starting a complex dialogue requires taking some steps, choosing and deciding to make crossings, seeking the reciprocity of the other or accepting the other's invitation to dialogue. The time of the experience plays a fundamental role as each seeks their own place before one is assigned that does not correspond.

Episodes are not enough; it is necessary to project oneself into continuity. At the same time, we can gather fragments of experience and echoes of reflection that trace subtle and imperceptible lines of crossing. Lines that can be broken, not continuous, articulated, made up of different parts, built with different materials. Between the urban-human space there are thresholds, between the inside and the outside, between what has already happened and the unpredictable, between the known and the unknown, between what I identify with and what appears different, between how others identify me and how I identify myself in them.

In these transits, on these curved and broken trajectories, there are contacts and encounters between alterities that leave their mark, trace, and imprint, which can testify that something has changed. How do you really examine this in depth? How do you generate an impact that lasts over time, that transforms and generates shared projects in which everyone must move from their focus to realize new ideas?

The desire and effort of the encounter require commitment, dialogue on equal terms, deconstruction of pre-established categories and stereotypes, to make room for what is not known, in terms of form and substance. Even though the traces of reciprocity are fragile and ephemeral, the weight of the impact left and received will be large and dense, beyond the current space-time, towards the possible unprecedented state of the (im) permanence of life.

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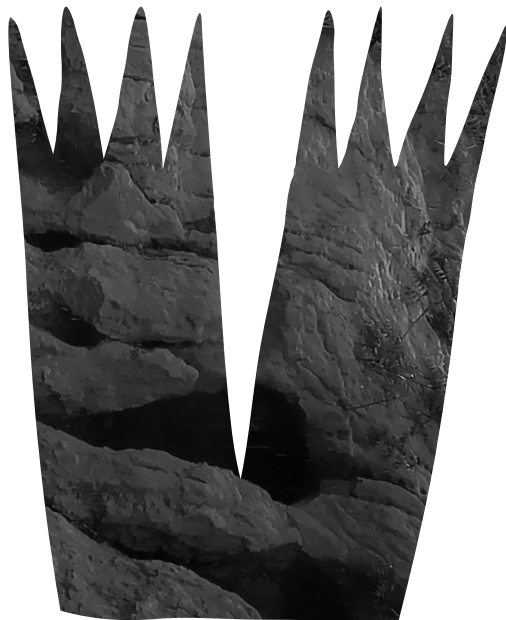
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## Keywords

Berlin  
Smart City  
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# BERLIN in TICASS Prism

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## Abstract

TICASS is the European Union research project of which Polish University Abroad and other partners have been active members since 2017. One of the interests of our institution is the urban public space and its current transformations, within which the "smart city" trend is important. The university's strategic vision is shaped this way: as we live in a "global village," we act in many places as well as move from one place to another frequently. As such, it is worth enabling people from different parts of the world to feel almost at home in other parts of the world; one way of achieving this is by means of simple urban signs, easily interpreted by today's and tomorrow's inhabitants of our planet. Visual signs in the modern urban space seem to still require updates; we use one currency in most of the European Union, we have no physical borders, and we have all started to speak one common language, too. But there has been no unification in visual signs in modern urban space, which is such a crucial aspect of life today. This means that after reaching our destination, we must use the old-fashioned ways of getting around, e.g., ask the locals, who take the local rules for granted.

## Introduction

This article relates to a trial study of the "smart city" carried out in Berlin from the 23rd to the 26th of May, 2017, and concerns the need to introduce it, a study in one of the biggest cities in the European Union, into the scope of interest of the TICASS project. TICASS is the European Union research project of which the Polish University Abroad and other partners have been active members since 2017. This partnership is, for us, an implication of the European Union status of an academic research institution with university rights, as the Polish University Abroad was declared in 2016. One of the interests of our institution is the urban public space and its current transformations, within which the "smart city" trend is important.

The term "smart city" became known in the 1990s: it regards information technologies becoming an integral part of contemporary cities. The United States leads the way in innovative global economy development, as can be seen, for example, in the fact that the California Institute for Smart Communities is considered the leader of IT in design and implementing it to make cities smart for living and operating within their structures (Alawadhi et al., 2012). However, "smart city" ideas are growing more important all over the world. Big cities, primarily, are thought to be the core of the future development of the reality we live in. They are the leaders of global socioeconomic growth (Mori & Christodoulou, 2012). More than 75% of the European population live in urban zones (UN, 2008). Therefore, we must introduce and strengthen sustainability on one side, and on the other take the anthropocentric approach by making our cities friendly in all aspects of everyday life (Turcu, 2013). The search for more efficient local transportation exerts a very positive, long-term impact upon cities. Making public transport efficient by implementing mobile technologies is necessary not only to enable people to get to workday after day but also for social and economic growth based on increasing human mobility and tourism as well.

## Polish University Abroad in TICASS

TICASS is the first project supported by the European Union in which Polish University Abroad takes part. It started in 2017 and will last until 2021. The idea underlying TICASS activities is to carry out research regarding identifying, interpreting, and unifying urban signs in contemporary public spaces of large cities. The specific questions concern how people in different cities read and perceive visual signs, icons, QR codes, diagnostic images, and digital graphics; and how we use visual technologies in different cities and on different continents (TICASS, 2018). However, our university's strategic vision is shaped this way: as we live in a global village,

we act in many places as well as move from one place to another very frequently so it is worth enabling people from different parts of the world to feel almost at home in other parts of the world. One way of achieving this is by designing simple urban signs, easily interpreted by today's and tomorrow's inhabitants of our planet. To this end, we turn to the idea of the smart city.

A smart city is considered a modern community (Nam & Pardo, 2011) based on cooperation for more efficient everyday experiences for all inhabitants and visitors; this lets people, institutions, and authorities work in a coherent partnership to develop and explore in a positive way the environment in which they all live and operate (Berardi, 2013). The integral elements of any smart city are the people, technology, and governance (Nam & Pardo, 2011). A smart city is for people; it uses modern technological solutions and is being developed thanks to the forward-looking management on all levels by authorities investing in progressive technologies. In 2017 the European Union released a new vision for future life in united Europe, which relates to smart city issues. A social innovation conference took place in Lisbon on the 27th and 28th of November 2017 (European Commission, 2018). The conference goal was to make the role of social innovation clearer for Europeans and to shape an efficient framework program for the research and innovations the European Union will carry out between 2020 and 2027. The program will open the European Union up to a changing future; it will also focus attention on the advancement of academic research results and implies the promotion of social innovations throughout the world.

Social innovation, in the view of the European Union, relates to necessary and mandatory responses to the increasing social demands in today's reality, which reshapes all the processes of social interaction. The purpose of this is to improve our well-being as citizens of the modern world. The examples range from start-ups focused on online education to internet-supported social networks; from start-ups focused on equal access to local public transport information for all European citizens and visitors to changing people's approach to choosing local public transport instead of using cars; to entities developing free mobility on a global scale. Social issues are even more important now as the European Union is firmly engaged in a new 2020 growth strategy for a smart, inclusive, and sustainable Europe. This aim is to create new methods of bringing people out of poverty, and build socioeconomic growth based not only on the well-being of European Union citizens and visitors but also with their active involvement in the process (Bureau of European Policy Advisors, 2011).

## Berlin

Berlin, the capital of Germany, was selected because it is located relatively close to Szczecin – the capital city of Western Pomerania, where the first secondment in the TICASS project was held – and, mainly, because it is one of the largest and most culturally diverse cities in the European Union, with around 20,000 professional artists and 160,000 people employed in sectors of the creative economy (State of Berlin, 2018). People from all parts of the world flock to Berlin, and you can check what is waiting for them in our united Europe within a prism of urban visual communication in a large European city. Every tenth student, out of around 200,000 students living and studying in Berlin, comes from abroad (German Academic Exchange Service, 2018). Therefore, we decided to put on the shoes of one such university student, coming to Berlin from another corner of the world, and go to Germany to experience for ourselves today's European way of urban visual communication.

### Step 1: Airport

Schönefeld Airport in Berlin is not a big airport at all. It has five terminals, but only around 13 million passengers used them in 2018 (Flughafen Berlin Brandenburg, 2018). We come across such airports in many European cities: their primary missions are domestic and short-haul flights. Arrival halls are usually part of the same, a relatively small building by itself, and the departure halls usually dominate over the arrivals in a visual communication prism of such public spaces. Schönefeld airport looks this way, marked – first of all – with an icon looking like a plane in take-off position, together with the inscriptions: "Abflug/Departures," in two languages – German and English, seemingly easy to understand for everyone who lives in today's world and is used to travelling by aeroplanes.



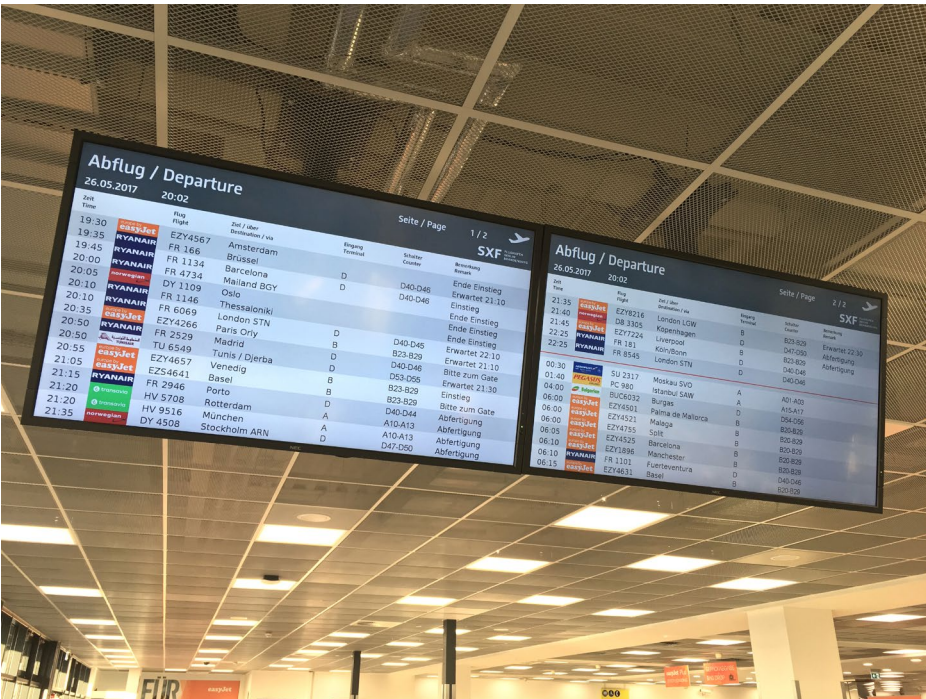
Il. 1. Roman Mazur, *Berlin Schönefeld Airport*, 2017.

DESCRIPTION: Departures at Berlin Schönefeld.



Step 2: Airport information accessibility

Information boards are one of the primary sources of information we access at airports before leaving any city. The departure board in Schönefeld seems very clear: a white background as well as contrasting inscriptions and icons on almost the entire surface of that device.



Il. 2. Roman Mazur, *Departure board at Berlin Schönefeld*, 2017.  
DESCRIPTION: Departure board with present departures at the Berlin Schönefeld Airport.

Step 3: Taxi

Taking a taxi is usually one of the fastest methods of leaving the airport area and getting to all city districts in big modern cities. Berlin taxis are light beige and have the standard visual sign reading "TAXI" affixed to the car roof. There is also the inscription "BER" on the side doors.



Il. 3. Roman Mazur, *Taxi in Berlin*, 2017.  
DESCRIPTION: Local taxi car parked in of Berlin's streets.

## Step 4: Underground

Modern underground transport networks have dramatically improved people's mobility in big cities. Moving passenger transport from the street level to the underground is a major characteristic of Berlin, and there are several underground lines. In fact, there are 10 lines of the *U-Bahn* and over 1 billion passengers a year in Berlin. The *U-Bahn* is the local name for all the underground train systems in that city (Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe, 2018). Looking at the sign with the number of the train, shown in our picture, everyone can guess that the underground system in Berlin is vast.



Il. 4. Roman Mazur, *Berlin underground train*, 2017.  
DESCRIPTION: Berlin U6 underground train heading for Alt-Mariendorf station.

## Step 5: Underground information accessibility

The departure board in the underground, like the departure board at the airport, is one of the prime sources of information in any underground system. Departure boards in the Berlin underground show the time remaining until the next train departure of a particular line, heading for one of its end stations. Additionally, it is equipped with an analogue clock indicating the current time. It also displays a message (in English as well) concerning the ban on smoking in Berlin's underground.



Il. 5. Roman Mazur, *Departure board in Berlin underground network*, 2017.  
DESCRIPTION: Departure board showing upcoming departure times of the U6 underground line in Berlin (the train is going to Alt-Tegel station).



## Step 6: Tram

Trams are urban transport alternatives to the underground for many cities, although travelling by them usually takes more time than by underground trains. An advantage of using them is avoiding the traffic on today's streets. Both transport means are available in Berlin: underground and trams. Berlin trams are articulated; they are white and yellow. The tram system is made up of 22 lines and is used by almost 500 million passengers a year (BerlinMap360, 2018).



Il. 6. Roman Mazur, *Trams in Berlin*, 2017.

DESCRIPTION: Trams in Berlin with "Berliner Fernsehturm" in the background.

## Step 7: Tram stop

Electronic information boards at tram stops are a great convenience, e.g. for students who are in a hurry for classes. Being aware of the number of minutes left until the arrival of the tram can positively balance out all the concerns regarding the possibility of not reaching your destination on time. Information boards at tram stops in Berlin show the last stop of each tramline in German, along with its name and time remaining to the departure. Additionally, they have the option of presenting short-form information, such as local job opportunities.



Il. 7. Roman Mazur, *Electronic information board at the tram stop in Berlin*, 2017.

DESCRIPTION: Information board at the tram stop called *Naturkundemuseum Underground Station* in Berlin, presenting information in German about the approaching arrival of tram number "12" (heading for the *Am Kupfergraben* stop in the *Mitte* district). There is also information about tram "M5" (heading for the *Zingster* stop in the *Hohenschönhausen* district). A message from Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe – Berlin's public transport company – about openings for bus driver jobs is also displayed, which relates to current urban transport issues in Berlin.



## Step 8: Tram interior

Modern means of public transport – such as trams – in Berlin not only provide commuters with a means of moving from one place to another but also offer acceptable quality. Berlin trams have spacious interiors, corresponding to the relatively large number of people who will use them in the big city. These trams are manufactured with many seats inside of them, spacious both for sitting and standing.



Il. 8. Roman Mazur, *Berlin tram interior*, 2017.

DESCRIPTION: Part of a tram interior in Berlin with sitting and standing areas. There are no clear signs regarding possible priorities for using the seats. There are only three buttons on the yellow handrail, which allow passengers to communicate to the driver to stop the tram at the upcoming stop.

## Step 9: Pedestrian crossings

Pedestrian crossings are a part of the street allowing people to move safely from one side to the other. Pedestrian crossings in Berlin are marked with traffic lights and white stripes painted on the street, which define the boundaries of the pedestrian crossing area quite clearly.



Il. 9. Roman Mazur, *Pedestrian crossing in Berlin*, 2017.

DESCRIPTION: Pedestrian crossing at the *Oranienburger Tor* Underground Station in Berlin. Two of the three visible traffic lights display green, the third one displays red. All of them are characteristic to Berlin due to "Ampelmann" on them – an icon of man wearing a hat (Ampelmann GmbH, 2018). On three lanes of the road, including the one constituting the tram track, white stripes are painted.

## Step 10: University building

Universities are usually open access buildings where almost everyone is allowed entry. The headquarters of the Institute of Biology of the Humboldt University, at 42 Invalidenstrasse in Berlin, is indicative of the splendour of that institution. The Humboldt University was founded in 1810 and today has over 30 thousand students, including over 5 thousand foreign ones (Humboldt Universität, 2018). However, the building is, from the entrance – and at first glance – not accommodating for people using wheelchairs, and it requires some refurbishment to meet today's standards of accessibility, including for persons with severe disabilities, the availability of human support, the role of specialized agencies and universal design (European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities, 2018).



Il. 10. Roman Mazur, *Institute of Biology of the Humboldt University in Berlin*, 2017.

DESCRIPTION: Entrance to the building of the Institute of Biology of the Humboldt University in Berlin. Four-step stairs lead from the stone floor to a big door. The metal door is solidly shaped, with some glass elements, and is provided with a coat of arms looking like an eagle with an inscription: "GOTT HELF" (German: "HELP US GOD.") On both sides are lanterns with the number 42 on them. Beneath one of them is information about the fact that this building belongs to the Humboldt University.



## Conclusions

The notion of “smart” in the term “smart city” relates to more friendly and intelligent solutions designed and implemented for end users (Nam and Pardo, 2011). Urban planning based on smart city ideas is realized by local and state authorities introducing programs and policies focused on sustainable social and economic development and improving the quality and conditions of everyday life, including the process of work so inhabitants and citizens feel – in general – fulfilled (Ballas, 2013).

This also includes social innovations that can be identified by means of the goals we want to achieve: social innovations aimed foremost at a positive social impact, unlike business innovations which focus mostly on financial profits. Social innovations are concerned not only with monetary outcomes; they deal with the overall process of transforming people’s lives by influencing the environment to be more welcoming. This requires considering the old patterns and limits between individuals, groups of individuals, authorities, and the private sector as well. However, such a process of engagement in the transformation on a wide scale is important by itself as it opens new, better ways of leading society into the future. These ways include the implementation of new technologies, new products, new services provided by new institutions, new organizations, and even brand-new forms of entrepreneurial activities, like start-ups rapidly carrying out social innovations (Reynolds et al., 2017).

We live in the era of advanced mobile phones. Virtual maps with GPS features are in our pockets and bags all the time. No matter who we are and where we are, navigation services are almost the same for almost everyone in the world. However, this is but one side of the coin: the other is real-life, meaningful practice. Reaching the destination does not mean we know at once where we are or what should we do next, which door we should enter, or which shortcut to take.

Visual signs in modern urban spaces still require updates. We use one currency in almost the entire European Union, we have no physical borders, and we have all started to speak one language, too. But there is still no unification of a crucial aspect of today’s life: visual signs in modern urban space. After reaching our destination, we must use old-fashioned ways of getting around, e.g. ask the locals, who take the local rules for granted. This is not bad, but it does not make our life easier, either.

We can presume and expect that the TICASS project will dramatically improve the level of awareness of the role of visual signs in today’s world. We – the Polish University Abroad – find it a brand new and not solely academic challenge. There can be only one conclusion: research into visual communication in urban space must be continued, especially in the European Union, which is a social innovation by itself. In the 21st century, people coming to the biggest EU cities should really feel at home, able to get to their destination as soon as possible – as our student could do. Smartphones will always have one crucial disadvantage: they run out of power relatively quickly, whereas physical signs can exist without power.

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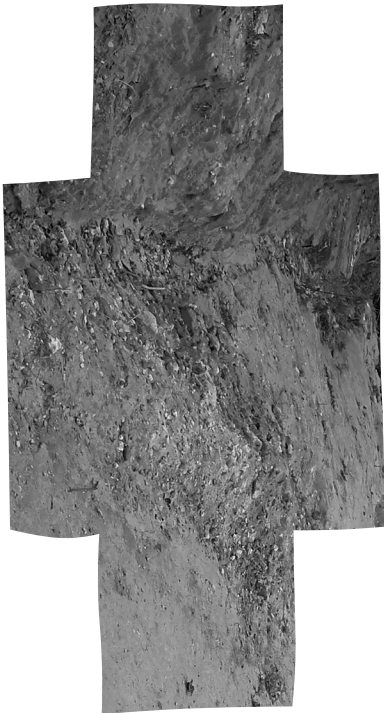
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architecture  
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cities



# Visual Aspects of the Architectural Development of Public Space on the Chosen Urban Cases

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## Abstract

The following chapter examines the interpretation of visual aspects of the architectural development of public space. Furthermore, it discovers representative values of visual aspect in the frame of the process of the interpretation. Municipal public space is currently not just the concern of professionals like architects and urban specialists, but also of the general public. There are many civic activities that are rediscovering public space, and they are participating in building the visual image of the city. This paper deals with a historical outline of the development of public space in Middle Europe and its present use, complemented by comments regarding the author's own experience with public space in Kenya.

The title of the paper: *Visual Aspects of the Architectural Development of Public Space on the Chosen Urban Cases* implies a certain historical view on the issue of public space; quite justly in a sense because the way we experience public space, especially in Europe, is determined by the vast history of architectural development. The way public experiences grasp public space is associated with specific visual aspects of the setting, which might be decisive for the inhabitants moving in such space. The city is a key entity because it is, in the first place, where public space has become the key subject (entity) of debate. The aim of this paper is, however, not to focus only and extensively on the historical view of this issue. Instead, it will also focus on the current development connected with the development of modern architecture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the corresponding development of urbanity.



## Public space

The essential question is thus how public space developed as an architectural and urban entity, and what its visual characteristics are. More precisely, what was and is the visual appearance of this development, and how is its visual representation perceived in society? Historically, public space apparently evolved from the common law on public land. In the Czech Republic, the law defines public space and public areas. The legislation, however, defines public space in rather broad terms, stating the technical specification.<sup>1</sup> Debate began in 1989 when some of the fundamental issues regarding public space, which had been neglected, were reviewed; the debate continues and it is arguable if it will ever be possible to end it once and for all. In his introduction to his anthology on public space, Petr Kratochvíl shows that the debate about public space plays a key role in both the current theory and the practice of urban planning. "The phrase 'public space' after all refers to two levels: the physically defined shape and the life that fills it" (Kratochvíl, 2012, p. 10). We can say that there are two main factors, architecture and urbanism, as well as society itself, which not only build the tangible image of the city but also create the intangible phenomenon of social relations, the living tissue of the public spaces in which people live.

## Community, memory and space

Public space is thus defined mainly by architecture and urban disposition, and by one not fully measurable yet important phenomenon – community. A community is an essential element when forming and thinking of public space, and what needs to be emphasized is the retroactive influence of urban space on the given community. To achieve this, it is worth reviewing Maurice Halbwachs' reflections on the phenomenon of collective memory, contained in his book *On Collective Memory*. Halbwachs argues that the relationship between collective memory and space offers the necessary background for understanding its importance in our case of public space and society. Maurice Halbwachs emphasizes the influence of space on the community in terms of the referential framework of societal formation as the relationship between mind and items, and adds that "our habitual images of the external world are inseparable from our self" (Halbwachs, 2009, p. 185). He sees space as such as something capable of influencing the community in the same way as community adopts and adapts space:

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<sup>1</sup> Act No. 128/2000 Sb., on Municipalities: Section 34: "The term 'public places' shall mean all squares, streets, marketplaces, pavements, public green areas, parks and other places publicly accessible without restriction, i.e. places serving for public use regardless of the ownership of such places."

The group not only transforms the space into which it has been inserted but also yields and adapts to its physical surroundings. [...] The group's image of its external milieu and its stable relationships with this environment becomes paramount in the idea it forms of itself. (Halbwachs, 2009, 187)

This interactivity of space and society is crucial in forming public space. According to Halbwachs, the place thus retains the imprint of the group and the group is able to retain the image of the space in collective memory (Halbwachs, 2009, 188). It is clear (and also noted by Halbwachs) that the image is not inert but can also be dynamic. A community changes, moves, and also influences the collective memory, transforming the image of the place. Halbwachs considers the image of the place important within the community and adds that, as observed, even though the community perceives its surroundings in a rather absent-minded way, people would be offended if a street or a house should disappear (Halbwachs, 2009, 189), mainly because it would distort the image of the surroundings, which would be violated through such intervention.

Habits related to a specific physical setting resist the forces tending to change them. This resistance best indicates to what extent the collective memory of these groups is based on spatial images. (Halbwachs, 2009, 191)

When focusing on this issue, Halbwachs concludes that it is very difficult to describe collective memory without mentioning any spatial framework. According to Halbwachs, the interconnection of space and collective memory is so strong that it is hard to separate them, bringing us to a longer quote:

Thus, every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework. Now space is a reality that endures: since our impressions rush by, one after another, and leave nothing behind in the mind, we can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings. It is to space – the space we occupy, traverse, have continual access to, or can at any time reconstruct in thought and imagination – that we must turn our attention. (Halbwachs, 2009, p. 200)

It is obvious that Maurice Halbwachs means, in particular, the tangible urban space or any space inhabited by a community. That is why he considers the sensory and perceived space in the critical edition. I believe that it concerns the perception of space in its completeness, not only the images imprinted in our memory, the memory of its users, the sets of architectural details, urban specificities, or other images the space offers. It also includes the experience that shapes the personal memory, which, according

to Halbwachs, is a way of accessing the collective memory (Halbwachs, 2009, 91).<sup>2</sup> Through it, we can reconstruct our personal (intimate) image of public space.

## Image

Even though I predicted a non-historical perspective, a short excursion into history is necessary as the European public space has been developing for more than a thousand years, which to some extent determines how it is perceived. European cities are partly based on ancient foundations but in the early Middle Ages they were developing as organic cities. This means that they were built rather intuitively, without any strong urban base. A medieval city is enclosed within walls and directed towards itself. It raises contradictory images in the mind of medieval society; on one hand it is idealized; on the other hand, especially in the feudal world, it is perceived as a source of moral dangers.<sup>3</sup> The image of the city, as preserved in *chansons de geste*, oscillates between being admired and being condemned. European cities developed as closed compact entities up to as recently as the 19th century. Despite the modern tradition, the image of European cities is deeply connected to the medieval tradition.

Even though the image of the city changes with generations, the image of a historical city is strongly represented in the mental image of its inhabitants. The fundamental transformations of public space began around the mid-19th century, together with transformations of the whole European society. Social transformations also evoked transformations of the city structure. First appeared the biggest metropolises, capital cities like Paris, London, and Vienna. Other, smaller, regional cities quickly followed; for example, those that became local industrial centres in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Together with urban and architectural transformations came a change in the perception of public space. These transformations were also reflected in art. The first to discover the poetry of the new urban space were the impressionists, who started to capture not only the city as such but also the transformation of lifestyle. The paintings of Claude Monet, Gustav Caillebot, August Renoir, and Camille Pissarro reveal a new fascination with the visual aspect of the modern city.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In terms of the relation of representation and cultural memory, this issue has been studied by Petra James and Martin Kolář (James, Kolář, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Le Goff described precisely this moment in his analysis of the medieval *Chansons de geste* (Le Goff, 1998, 1991.)

<sup>4</sup> It was not only the impressionists who discovered new visual aspects; realists also captured the ongoing changes and transformations; for instance, Adolf von Menzel's painting *Eisenwalzwerk*

Hygiene and transport slowly became determining factors in the second half of the 19th century. At the turn of the 20th century, there was, among other things, another major social shift: life gradually moved from public space to indoors. At the end of the 19th century, a significant Viennese architect, Camillo Sitte, began to deal with the relationship between urban planning and art (today we would probably use the term visual communication), partly because he mentioned significant changes in the urban planning of Vienna at that time and criticized them. Even though his work was first published at the end of the 19th century, several interesting observations he made are still relevant now. When reflecting on the work of Vitruvius, he notes that "according to this description, a forum is nothing more than some kind of theatre scene" (Sitte, 1995, 16). This is an important criterion, which he uses to define how a square or public space should work in an architectural and urban sense. This means that he defines it according to certain visual qualities, and in opposition to the then-forming course of urban planning. Sitte's considerations were followed by his research focusing on the public spaces of organic, mainly medieval, cities.

Sitte did not care about the decorations so popular in the 19th century. He rather focused on urban planning, more than was usual in the architectural décor in his time. His grievance – that no one cared about the artistic side of urban planning because it was considered to be rather a technical issue – is, in a sense, almost prophetic for current urban planning.<sup>5</sup> Sitte was aware of the technological change, and he knew that it was not in his power to preserve the picturesqueness of the medieval cities and towns.

Works of art are increasingly straying from streets and plazas into the "art cages" of museums; likewise, the colourful bustle of folk festivals, carnivals and other parades, of religious processions, of theatrical performances in the open marketplace, etc., are disappearing. The life of the common people has for centuries been steadily withdrawing from public squares, and especially so in recent times. Owing to this, a substantial part of the erstwhile significance of squares has been lost, and it is quite understandable why the appreciation of beautiful square design has decreased so markedly among the broad mass of citizenry (Sitte 1995, 71).

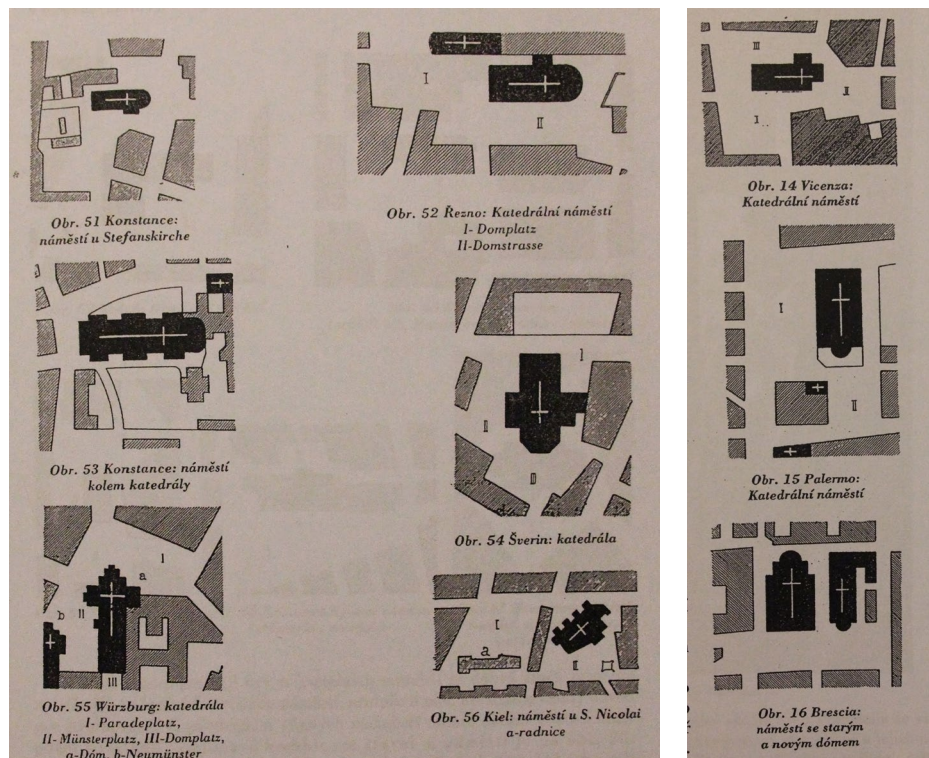
Sitte adds that the life typical of our ancestors might have been more favourable for the artistic concept of urban public space (Il. 1, 2). This can be understood as a feeling of nostalgia for the disappearing world, originally living on the streets but gradually pushed aside by the arrival

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(*The Iron Rolling Mill.*) The regional late-romanticism painting by E. G. Doerell captures the gradually emerging machines and technical buildings in the landscape of the second half of the 19th century, too.

<sup>5</sup> It needs to be stated that the idea of artistry is 19th-century-discourse-bound, not ornament-bound, as was already stated and strongly opposed by Adolf Loos.

of the modern world, or, on the other hand, as a reflection on the image of a city as an organism, the life of which was mainly in the streets and squares.<sup>6</sup> The fact that social activities moved from the outdoors to indoors was probably the strongest shift in the history of urban society, and it reached its peak in the second half of the 20th century. Sitte's plans for the revival of public space in the XXII Vienna district, as many others, were ignored for most of the 20th century. They were taken into consideration only later, with the arrival of the postmodern movement in architecture and a turn to the revival of public space.



Il. 1 Camillo Sitte's groundplans of squares in medieval cities in Europe. ©SITTE, Camillo a Vladimír BURIÁNEK. *Stavba měst podle uměleckých zásad*. Praha: ABF, 1995.

Il. 2 Camillo Sitte's groundplans of squares in medieval cities in Europe. ©SITTE, Camillo a Vladimír BURIÁNEK. *Stavba měst podle uměleckých zásad*. Praha: ABF, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Radical evidence of the shift from the outdoors to the indoors can be found in Margaret Crawford's text, in which she documents the world of American apartment houses (Crawford, 1992).

It was the architectural avant-garde, with Le Corbusier as the main representative, who understood the changes in society and their future strengths and focused on architecture and urbanism in the city as subordinate to the transportation system. Le Corbusier's urban plans were designed to open up transport as well as break up the street front (Plan Voisin) with the gradual creation of zones, i.e., separating the individual functions of urban space. It was not entirely about the subordination of urban space to transport but rather about the strict separation of work, services, and relaxation areas. In fact, Le Corbusier was not the only one to propose this kind of organization of the city: others that can be mentioned are Ludwig Hilbesheimer and Nikolai Alexandrovich Milyutin, who designed *Socgorod*, a radical variant of a linear city constructed along a strip. The idea of a modern city as a loosely-formed area without much space for the symbiosis of community and urban space was very important for the avant-garde.<sup>7</sup> Almost none of these urban discourses took interest in regional variants or the timelessness of historical architecture or culture, although history is something people should be a part of. It is true that this radical approach of the early avant-garde was somewhat modified later but it was never completely rejected.

The idea of searching for the Platonic perfect stability or perennial Platonism, in this case, is thematized by Karsten Harries, who quotes Plato's dialogue *The Philebus* in which he points out how objects and their images are connected to the physical world, and how they contrast with beauty that is not created by the body but by the spirit. If a geometric object needs to be made, certain instruments are needed – Plato speaks of turning lathes. We get here a hint of why this perennial Platonism could so easily have allied itself with a machine aesthetic. The machine technology of the twentieth century has indeed allowed us to envision beauties Plato could not have dreamed of. But the main point remains the same: The Platonic idealization of the beauty of geometric forms leads easily to a machine aesthetic. The machine-made object, the machine-made look, is given the nod precisely because it bears the imprint of the human spirit (Harries 1998, 229).

Harries uses also quotes from avant-garde artists such as Theo van Doesburg to illustrate how strong and inspiring the idea of spiritualizing machine production was. These ideas were adopted by the avant-garde, as documented in the texts of an important Czech art theoretician Karel Teige and his friends, architects from the Devětsil association. They also gave rise to the idea that architecture is a science and as such does not, nor should have, anything in common with art.

It was at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 60s when the ideas of avant-garde architecture slowly became reality. The development of technology, in particular the prefabrication of concrete panels, enabled

<sup>7</sup> In general, we can say that it was the Athens Charter of 1933 that was crucial for the shift towards the functionality of urban space; it codified the urban planning of urban space pursued by the avant-garde and zoning.



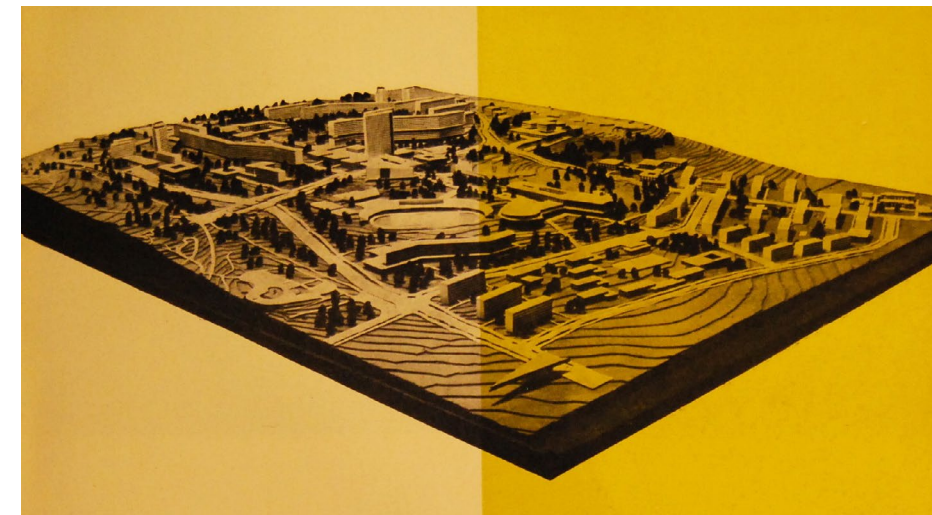
the large-scale building of new settlement units and the development of new urban districts. The purity and geometry of shape became two of the key characteristics used in urban construction schemes with these first attempts. The Eastern Bloc states started to significantly experiment with ready-made production at the end of the 50s, after a short period of social realism with the design looking back into history. Czechoslovakia managed to set up a functioning system of ready-made production in a very short time after the first experiments, and so could start building large housing estates in the early 60s. This shift also created the need for an urban plan for such housing estates (Il. 3, 4).

## The Image of a Place

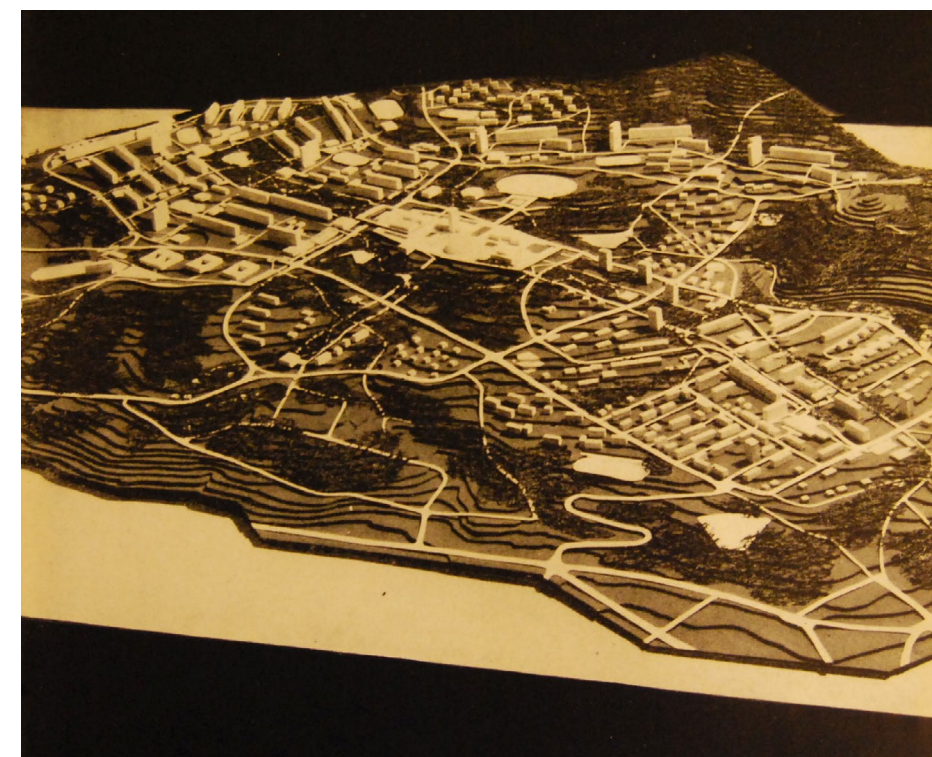
I would like to take the North Bohemian city Most, which has undergone unique development, as a case study on the complexity of visual aspects of public space. We can divide it into three main periods according to the city's history. The first period can be characterized in the European context as the normal building development of an organic city from the Middle Ages to the mid-20th century (Il. 5, 6, 7). The medieval-up-to-modern urban development is interesting because the city had three squares, one of them triangular-shaped, and these squares had a structure admired and considered as ideal by Camillo Sitte. These squares also had a corresponding function in the process of how society functioned (Il. 8, 9). For instance, the so-called second square was used as a marketplace up to the 20th century. The shape was given for centuries, and although the architectural design of the surrounding houses was changing, the shape remained the same.<sup>8</sup> Another stable aspect was the sculptural elements of the fountains and columns, which were prominent visual features in these squares.<sup>9</sup> The building development was closely connected to the history of the community. The original architecture of the area under question reflected not only its history as such but also personal or intimate history, a much more important aspect.

<sup>8</sup> Let's consider, for example, the original Renaissance town hall, which was replaced by a building in the eclectic style at the end of the 19th century.

<sup>9</sup> This is typical not only for Czech cities but also for European cities in general. This does not make Most unique.



Il. 3 Model of an urban plan for the housing estate in Most (F. Kameník) © 20 let práce krajského projektového ústavu v Ústí nad Labem. Krajský projektový ústav, Ústí nad Labem 1970. 1.



Il. 4 Model of urban plan for housing estate in Ústí nad Labem (V. Krejčí a kol).  
© Private archives of Václav Krejčí.



Il. 5 View of 18th-century Most © Photo: Eva Hladká, Oblastní muzeum a galerie v Mostě.

The second period of the city's development started at the beginning of the 1960s. By that time, it was decided that the original Old Town should be destroyed because of the mining plans for the coal reserves situated beneath it. This led to the founding of a new city based on the avant-garde architectural ideas of the 20th century.<sup>10</sup> This second period was also connected to one crucial situation – the change in inhabitants. At the end of 1946, the original German population was expelled and newcomers from all over then-Czechoslovakia replaced them. The new Czechoslovakian city was loosely formed with a distinct city centre. There was an open call for plans for a new city centre in 1959, in which a strong representation of avant-garde architects participated.<sup>11</sup> Václav Krejčí and Jaromír Weil, the winning team, finalized their plan at the beginning of the 60s and thus presented the final variant of a city centre that reflected all the above-mentioned influences of pre-war avant-garde, and which were inspired by the Brazilian school of architecture, namely Oscar Niemeyer, and also by the Soviet school<sup>12</sup> (Il. 10, 11, 12). The architects created an impressive open space with important representative buildings, designed to a high quality. The design quality was somewhat hampered by the problems of the Soviet building industry but it was more or less constructed as it was designed. The problem was that the centre was disconnected from the rest of the city. If taken as a bit of an overstatement, one could say that the city centre formed a separate entity.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The final decision regarding the destruction of the old royal city was made in 1964.

<sup>11</sup> Even architects who were members of the pre-war Czechoslovak avant-garde association participated in the open call.

<sup>12</sup> Here we mean the construction of Brazil's capital city initiated by Joscelyn Kubitchek, or city centres in the Soviet Union planned by Mikhail Vasilievich Posokhin.

<sup>13</sup> The city centre is a kind of separate entity in cities like the Brazilian capital and Moscow, and other big cities in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc in general. These cities have spectacular but

This was, among other things, due to the fact that most of the architectural realizations in the city centre used materials that were not easy to get at that time.

The city centre of the new city of Most was never fully completed under the socialist governments. The research published by Jiří Ševčík, Ivana Bendová, and Jan Benda represents a unique attempt to compare the images of the old and the new city (Bendová, Benda, and Ševčík, 1977). It is unique because it is rooted in complex research conducted in a unique situation. Based on Kevin Lynch's methodology, the research is focused on the search for the mental image of the new city and its comparison with the old city, gradually disappearing at that time. The authors tried to reconstruct the image of both cities based on Lynch's concepts of visibility, legibility, identity, and orientation. Based on preconceived ideas and how people adopt their environment, a tangible counterpart needs to be created as well; architecture (and also urbanism) can be therefore perceived as the "concrete realisation of the existential space" (Bendová, Benda, and Ševčík, 1977, p. 14). Based on their findings, the authors also proposed some recommendations for the new city. These concerned paths, green areas, urban areas, industry in the city, and many others. The most important recommendation concerned the city centre. Here is a short quote from this rather extensive recommendation:

The city centre must represent a strong, clearly identifiable city area, which should become the most prominent part of its image. In the strict sense, it must be formed by a space or system of space areas, adequately limited, enclosed and concentrated in one place. (Bendová, Benda and Ševčík, 1977, p. 137)

This recommendation was written while the city centre was still being constructed. Some of the buildings were completed in the mid-80s. It is, however, obvious that the authors were considering the future.

One of the few events that regularly took place in the urban area of Most in the 70s and 80s was the May Day parade, a manifestation of the Labour Day celebrations; these were, however, obligatory and should demonstrate the loyalty of the population to the communist regime. The city centre was functional though, mainly thanks to the functional buildings such as the House of Culture, the shopping centre, and the post office. The theatre became a significant visual landmark.<sup>14</sup> Regarding the use of public space, the situation in the centre worsened in the third, and current, period of the city's development, which started in the 90s when big shopping centres were built on the outskirts (i.e., in areas with a higher population density). The House of Culture also lost its prominent role at the

greatly oversized areas, perfect for big parades but unsuitable for a normal life.

<sup>14</sup> This building is, interestingly, very positively perceived by the inhabitants and the majority see it as one of the best buildings there.





Il. 6 Urban plan of the city Most 1898 © Státní oblastní archiv Litoměřice – Státní okresní archiv Most.



Il. 7 View of Most in about 1900 © Photo: Eva Hladká Oblastní muzeum a galerie v Mostě.



Il. 8 First square (Most) in about 1910 © Photo: Eva Hladká Oblastní muzeum a galerie v Mostě

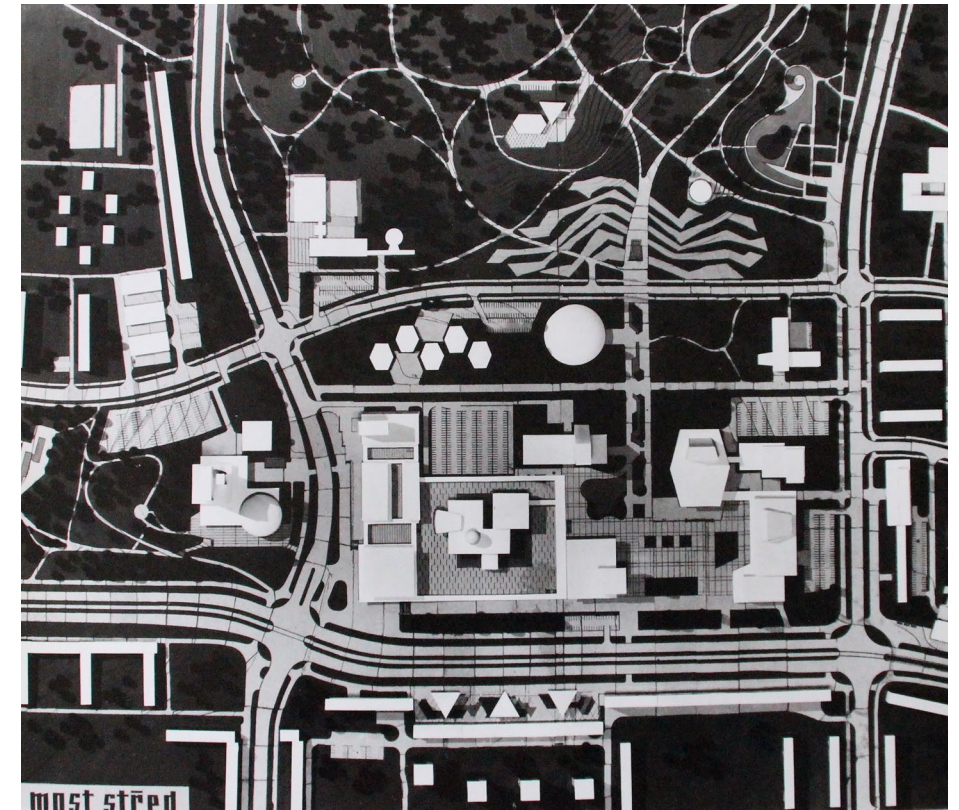


end of the 90s and the city centre emptied. At the beginning of the 90s, there were efforts to recreate a vibrant city centre and bring people back. There was an open call for plans concerning the completion of the city centre and the creation of new squares. The idea of the winner, Milan Šimeček, was to restore the three original squares. He decided to plan a triangular-shaped main square to copy the original city square (Il. 13, 14). It was not the first attempt of such nature. In the 80s the architects Jiří Kučera and Jaroslav Ouřecký came up with a similar plan<sup>15</sup> (Il. 15). Also, Milan Šimeček's plan for the new square implemented the column and the fountain from the original city centre. Even though this project was strictly regional, it is closely connected to the postmodern turn in architecture.

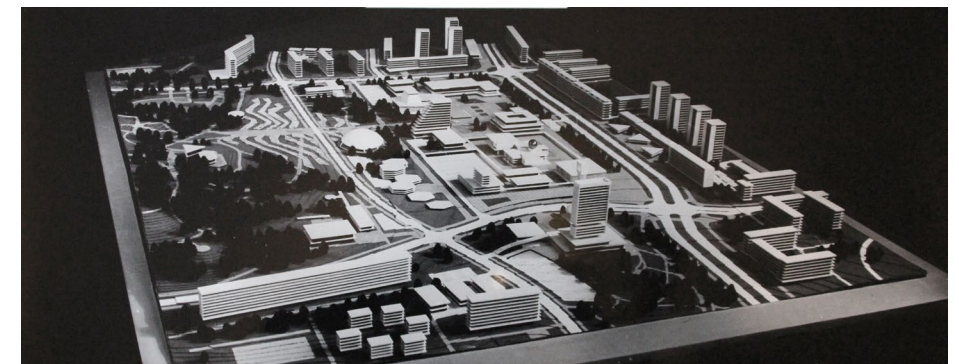


Il. 9 Second square (Most) in about 1910 © Photo: Eva Hladká Oblastní muzeum a galerie v Mostě.

<sup>15</sup> My thanks go to Prof. Petr Kratochvíl, CSc. for pointing out their work. The two plans were similar because of the projection of the old urbanism of the former city onto the new centre city from the 60s, especially in an effort to project the original three squares to the new form.



Il. 10 First design of the new centre (Most) V. Krejčí and J. Veil, 1959. © Private archives of Václav Krejčí.



Il. 11 Model of the new centre (Most) V. Krejčí and J. Veil, 1963. © Private archives of Václav Krejčí.





Il. 12 New centre (Most) after 1985. © Private archives of Václav Krejčí.

These attempts by architects and urban planners show how important historical memory is, and the memory of a society which perceives the images of the city it lives in as the referential framework of its being. Architecture and urban planning create a visual framework for community functioning in public space. The framework, however, must be filled with activities to be meaningful. It is also connected to how people perceive and understand the public space of their city. While the community of the original royal city was closely connected to the history of the city, there was no such relationship to the new city. To build a relationship to the new visual image of the city was, and still is, a problematic process.<sup>16</sup> Firstly, it is related to the more

<sup>16</sup> In this context I would like to mention one of Kevin Lynch's important concepts – imageability – “a character or quality held by a physical object to create a strong image. This might concern shape, special colours or arrangement of the whole object, which cause an intense, unique, structured and practically useable image of the area [...]. We can use terms such as legibility or visibility” (Lynch,



Il. 13 New first square (Most) with the building of the Theatre, M. Šimeček, 1997. Photo: Eva Hladká © Oblastní muzeum a galerie v Mostě.



Il. 14 New second square (Most), M. Šimeček, 1997. Foto 2005. Photo: Eva Hladká © Oblastní muzeum a galerie v Mostě.

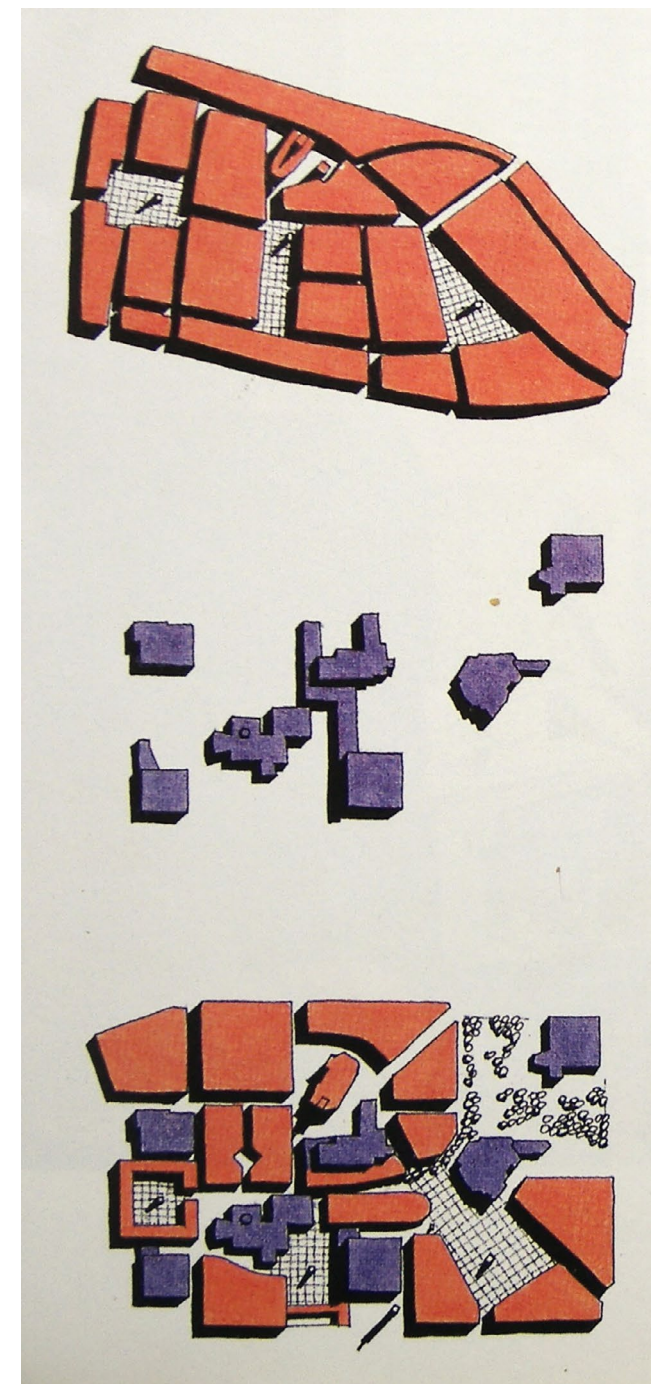


distant attitude of the inhabitant towards the machine aesthetic of modern architecture, and secondly with the fact that it took several generations to create a community that would consider this area as their home. Moreover, the architectural heritage from the 60s is often perceived as a result of the communist era, which gives a negative stigma to such architecture. Furthermore, modern architecture was never enthusiastic about decorations and ornaments. To understand it means to accept the aforementioned minimalist, or rather geometrical, ideal, a Platonic approach.

Recently, there has been a shift in the perception of the described space. The crucial element of this shift is time. The city grows into the intended form; this is not connected to architecture as such but rather to transformations in green areas and the completion of some architectural steps. But it also concerns personal time, the time the community needs for the city to become a part of its collective memory.

## Appendix

The paper presented above preceded my stay in Kenya, which broadens the scope of my personal experience of various public spaces, although it was limited both in time and location, which prevented me from understanding this complex issue in detail. Nevertheless, I would like to add a few comments regarding my observations from the research stay in Kilifi. When comparing life in the public space in Kenya with what was written above, it can be stated that, also due to the climatic conditions, almost all social interactions take place in the public space. The second comment concerns the Kenyan city urban character, which is still ambiguous for me. I have no data that would provide an insight into the way the inhabitants perceive their cities, based, for instance, on Kevin Lynch's methodology, and therefore I see the urban structure as random without any given clearly identified areas; for instance, what could be considered as the city centre with representative urban objects, which would create a semantic and symbolic centre of gravity on which the whole urban structure would be planned.



Il. 15 Ideal proposal for centre of Most, J. Kučera, J. Ouřecký, 1986. © FRAGNER, Benjamin a Jiří ŠEVČÍK. STL Středotlací: Michal Brix, Tomáš Brix, Benjamin Fragner, Zdeněk Hölzel, Petr Keil, Jan Kerel, Vladimír Krátký, Václav Králíček ... Praha: Svaz čes. architektů, 1989.

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## Keywords

textile's functions  
symbols  
tradition  
message/rag  
excess  
shout



# CONTEXTILES<sup>1</sup>. Fabric, its functions, meanings, and ornaments as a universal non-verbal language

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## Abstract

What kind of message and meaning does modern fabric offer? How do we read the meaning of symbols in ornaments? How does fabric affect public space? How is fabric subjected to changes in time, fashion, and taste?

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<sup>1</sup> "Contextiles" is a hybrid word coined by myself, which I use to describe "art fabrics" and "fibre art" in a broader context, in relation to other phenomena of contemporary art. The huge interest in fabric as an autonomous medium turned out to be a short-lived phenomenon, and although we clearly notice the return of artists' interest in fabric as an important way of expression (Document 13), this "return" is coming from different perspectives, somewhat distant from the fabric scheme in the concept of "fibre art" we knew in the 1970s and 80s. Recognizing these phenomena and experiencing them, I made attempts to recognize the image contemporary fabric has in the context of the phenomenon known as intermedia.

The word "contextile" also references the theory of "Contextual Art" by Jan Świdziński, who indicates the dependence of the sense of a work on the time, place, and circumstances of its creation, stating that the work assumes meaning in any given time, place, or situation in relation to a person or persons. With the change of these factors, notes Świdziński, a work of art may cease to be a work of art and become only a document. Initially, my interest in the subject of "fabric art" came in the context of intermedia as a curator of the exhibition "Faces of Textile Images" that I organized in the PATIO Gallery in 2004 (which I ran at the time.) I invited artists to participate in the exhibition, for whom fabric was a source of inspiration, who use fabric in their work as a means of expression, or whose output derives from fabric, though they nowadays reach for other media.

At the international conference "Contemporary Fabric. Concept. Creation. Education" organized by the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź in the Municipal Art Gallery as a part of the 13th International Triennial Fabrics (2010), I gave a lecture on "Contextiles" (the first time I used this term publicly), in which I presented my observations and experiences, recalling examples of works of artists who use or make references to textiles. Since 2012, this term also functions as the name of the Fibre Art Triennial in Portugal.

Is attachment to (widely understood) traditions superseded by popular demand? The following paper is a collection of impressions from a month-long stay in Kilifi, Kenya, concerning the socio-cultural contexts of fabric – it is an attempt to answer the above questions.

## Weft 1

"Fabric has been a part of people's lives for a very long time" – is a phrase with which almost every text about fabric begins, because how else to start writing about a commodity so common, sometimes unbearably ubiquitous, banal, and which has so many functions in our lives: fabric was and is a cover, a shelter, a piece of furniture, a record of events, a sign, sacrum, a message, a metaphor.

Robert Alan Dahl, a late American political scientist, using a textile metaphor to describe his theory of democracy as a great three-dimensional fabric, seeming finite but actually an unlimited universe. It is too large to embrace with one glance, entwined with strands of different degrees of elasticity. While a few patches are intertwined with rigidly connected streaks, in others the connections are looser or quite slender (Rozner, 2013). This way of approaching democracy can be also found in Plato's *Republic*, where he describes the most beautiful of political systems with a textile metaphor because, for him, democracy is like a fake cloak painted in all possible flowers, varied with all possible morals (Plato, 1945).

## Warp 1

During a trip to Africa as part of the TICASS project, focused on "urban visibility, mobility, information, and image technologies," I thought about the presence of fabric and related handicrafts and what I could learn from local craftsmen. My aim was to see the African fabric, get to know its extensive contexts, "listen to what history it tells us today, look at ways of thinking about patterns, colours, clothes, and how to wear them – these were the main goals of my 'research.'"<sup>2</sup> The only assumption that I made was an emotional, intellectual, and sensual cognition of the environment without evaluation, an "active wandering" – learning about people, colours, tastes, touching "another" reality.

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<sup>2</sup> The word research is written in quotes because one month is definitely not long enough to get to know the fabric of a country such as Kenya, which speaks over 40 languages, and the number of ethnic groups exceeds 30. This multitude of ethnic groups and languages shows emphatically that we do not have to make do with homogeneous fabric, not to mention its social contexts.

## Weft 2

I was

[o]pening to the outside with the help of sensual experience – and, in consequence, admitting to myself the wonder that what we experience differs from its cultural significance, the information assigned to it. [It was a]n attempt to experience beyond the information,

as Olga Lewicka wrote in the text "Beyond the circulation, beyond the authorities, beyond the dialectic – and in the middle of them" (Lewicka, 2018).<sup>3</sup>

## Warp 2

The stay in Kilifi verified some of my previous plans. Wandering through seemingly endless marketplaces, streets, and roadsides full of makeshift stalls, I remained *Mzungu* (a white person). I heard this word very often and had the impression (as it turned out, correctly) that it also means a stranger or a sucker because it was often accompanied with the word "pesa" (money), which means a better life – and for many, simply a life. Then, I assume that my observations of things must be superficial. I am alien in many respects, and, above all, I view this world from the perspective of a Polish, European woman from Łódź, who has been educated in the field of unique textiles.

## Weft 3

In Kilifi there are a multitude of street traders selling similar goods side by side. Everyone is waiting for just one customer and a salary, which is enough for half of a family dinner. Awareness of this fact meant that I nearly hated shopping because I felt the duty of buying as a tourist, and thus I was *Mzungu* there, who wanted to avoid bargaining, barely cared about it, minding just not to overpay too much for a snippet of material, or stamps for printing on fabric, ordered from a local sculptor.

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<sup>3</sup> Author's translation to English.



## Warp 3

Observing the colourful crowd, mainly due to the women's clothes, it is clear that these outfits attest to the level of affluence, religious affiliation, or belonging to a particular social group. Here, analogies with the folk or historical costumes of other continents are clear. Children from different schools wear uniforms, vibrant uniforms that are the local answer to the colonial past. The contrast between the desire to stand out and to be uniform surprises in every scene. The coiffures also attract attention; hair, intricately braided for hours, sometimes with bright, artificial hair extensions, is reminiscent of fancy headdress and sometimes even "soft sculptures."<sup>4</sup>

## Weft 4

A visit to a tailoring workshop, which is also a shop with textiles and a "photocopy shop" (a workbook with photographs designed and sewn in this dress factory, put on plastic "T-shirts"), showed me that most of the fashion trends tend to mix traditional styles with Western influences so the clothing meets the requirements of both worlds. It made me realize, too, how far the clothing's function goes beyond the protection of the user's body and well-being in the sense of attractiveness, of appearance. The clothes I have seen are a testimony to the will and the courage to manifest individuality and people's relationship with nature.

The colours of Kenyan textiles are related to nature, as became obvious to me the moment I saw, in a fragment of the landscape framed by the pillars of the veranda where I was sitting, orange and yellow birds fluttering on the magenta flowers, against the ocean in the background, which at this time of day was turquoise. The brightness of colours, light, and no "care" for the range of colours – the same is seen in African fabrics and, very often, also in people's clothes. Such a view of the surrounding nature gives a sense of release from the strong, though invisible, conventions, ties, and restrictions that impose on the education and taste of the West, and which are universalized as a "fashion," "dress code," or "style."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Soft sculpture is a sculpture made of rags, foam, paper, various elastic fibres; this technique was popularized in the 1960s. One of the representatives of soft sculpture was Magdalena Abakanowicz. I re-enacted a soft sculpture made by Katarzyna Kobro, the Rabbit, originally made for Kobro's daughter, Nika Strzemińska. This work was presented at the Medytacje Fibonacciego i sztruksowy krolik exhibition curated by Dorota Grubba-Thiede.

<sup>5</sup> I mention here the spheres that are obviously related to fabric, such as fashion. However, the principle of the universalization of tastes and the theory of art historians (broadly understood) of the West also translates into other spheres of public space. This has far-reaching consequences – like the over-production of clothing, considered to be one of the most important and most dangerous environmental threats.

## Warp 4

On African fabrics, next to the vegetal or geometric forms, there are often placed universal sentiments addressed to loved ones or "Adinkira" signs – a kind of pictogram – which symbolize popular local proverbs or aphorisms. They present stylized objects, animals, plants, creations of nature, buildings, or hairstyles.

## Weft 5

One needs to see more broadly, one has to travel – in space, and preferably also in time. However, travelling is like everything else, including art; something uncommon is discovered once, and sometimes it rushes into a tourist's trap – and comes out of it, squeezing some stereotypical memento, a fake authenticity prepared for tourists,

wrote Stach Szabłowski in one of his texts: "The artist of the global people. About the Synthetic folklore of Janek Simon"<sup>6</sup> (Szabłowski, 2019).

## Warp 5

Running my errands in Kilifi, this "synthetic folklore" was like the air around my body. Viewing "African sculptures" or "paintings," I mainly reached for those that were addressed to tourists. These impressions were hard to bear at first – entire expanses full of polished elephants, endless rows of giraffes. Fortunately, there was fabric, which never fails me, even the so-called "Chinese," a fabric amassed in the street stalls,<sup>7</sup> so full that it creates mazes in which buyers can easily get lost, and which resembles artistic installations.<sup>8</sup> Even the abandoned fabric, lying in the mud next to the market stall, preserves the dignity and ruggedness of a rag, which ensures that it will quickly degrade and become a new organic form.

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<sup>6</sup> Author's translation to English.

<sup>7</sup> The presence of Chinese businesses and money can be observed at every step. It is not only the presence of the Chinese minority but also the financial and now also cultural impacts. The framework of this impression does not allow us to develop the subject of contemporary neocolonialism.

<sup>8</sup> I was curious to see the view of this maze from a drone. I can only assume that, indeed, it resembles a more mythical prototype in which the corridors made the one who entered lose their way, rather than the pseudo-labyrinths of the English gardens.

## Weft 6

The fabric that has accompanied us for ages, covers our bodies, is the carrier of knowledge, history, and cultural memory, and is one of the elements of modern economic processes, flooding the market with overproduction, impossible to consume. Shops and street stalls offering excess clothing, textiles, and all kinds of accessories reveal the pathology of their production. The whole world has become a garbage dump, and Africa with it.<sup>9</sup> Civilization's waste – piles of all kinds of plastic, metal packaging, and tyres – is a common sight yet an unseen problem, which everyone tries to "manage" somehow but nobody solves. In Africa, where the workforce is cheap, this situation leads to the development of individual and common recycling systems. Visiting the Karen Village Centre of Art and Cultural Heritage in Nairobi, we had the opportunity to see how mountains of damaged flip-flops are transformed into gadgets "made in Kenya" – souvenirs from Africa in the form of fish, elephants, giraffes and hippopotamuses, which Europeans like to buy.

## Warp 6

The phenomena of the post-colonial and neocolonial policies of Western countries, consumerism, and overproduction are topics raised by African artists. In this context it is worth recalling the name of El Anatsui, the artist whose monumental work resembles *kente* fabric, being woven from thousands of pieces of crushed metal cans collected from local recycling stations, capsules, bottles, plaques, nails, railway sleepers, graters for manioc, printing plates, tins, pressed paint buckets, and aluminium containers connected with copper wires, guitar strings, and metal industrial clips. However, the artist himself emphasizes that although they look like soft, draped fabrics, they are sculptures.

## Weft 7

One of the best analyses of El Anatsui wall carvings was given by Roberta Smith, who wrote that:

works evoke lace, but also mail coat; quilts, but also animal skins; robes, but also mosaics, not to mention rich ritual tablecloths from many cultures. Their curtains and folds have a sensual sculptural presence, but also an undeniably charming bravado. (Smith, 2010)

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<sup>9</sup> The news about the import of garbage from Nigeria to Poland shows another "bottom" of the global problem, economy, and politics.

El Anatsui's works are in the collections of the largest museums and institutions, including the British Museum in London, the Pompidou Centre in Paris, the Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Kunst Palast Museum in Düsseldorf, and the African collections in The National Gallery of Art and Diamond Bank of Nigeria in Lagos, the Asele Institute in Nimo, and the African Studies Gallery at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka.

One of El Anatsui's most famous works is "Fresh and Fading Memories" (2007), made for the Biennale in Venice in 2007, where it covered the elevation of Palazzo Fortuny. In this, as in many other works, El Anatsui raises social, political, and historical issues. As he emphasizes, his metal fabrics capture the essence of alcoholic beverages that were brought to Africa by Europeans at the time of the first contacts. The strongest impression on me was made by his observation, expressed in an interview on the exhibition, that fabric is in Africa what monuments are in the West. Considering the importance of *kente* fabrics, I suppose we should verify the current knowledge on art history and change the curricula of arts if we want to keep up with the world in which Africa will have a growing significance.

## Warp 7

In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue prepared by the National Museum in Szczecin from the collection of the Department of Non-European Cultures, "African Fabrics. Tradition and Change," the author of the text Ewa Prądyńska quotes an interesting myth referring to fabric. According to the mythology of many African peoples, the skill of weaving and the very act of making threads came from transcendental beings. For example, according to the Dogon of the Republic of Mali, the skill of weaving was taught to the people by Nommo, one of their first mythical ancestors – the son of the creator of the world (Prądyńska, 2017).

## Weft 8

This myth has an effect on the collective consciousness, as confirmed by modern scientific research, because it is assumed that the ability to process and interweave natural textile materials has gone hand in hand with the development of human speech.<sup>10</sup> The development of grammar and the development of fibre processing skills have comparable complex features so the myth about Nommo and his fabric is a distant metaphor of our memory of the relationship between fabric and words.

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<sup>10</sup> I rely here on the lecture "Textiles" by engineer M. Cybulska, PhD from the Lodz University of Technology.



## Warp 8

The first Palaeolithic remains dating from 77,000 years ago were found in the Sibudu Cave near Durban, in KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa. Sibudu Jama is a cave in a sandstone cliff in the north of KwaZulu-Natal and is an important habitat from between 77,000 to 38,000 years ago. Evidence of some of the earliest examples of technology were found there: the oldest known needle (61,000 years old), prototypes of composite materials – the earliest use of heat-treated glue (72,000 years old), the earliest example of bedding – mattresses (77,000 years old).<sup>11</sup> Already at that time, glues and plant materials for making mats were used. Their complexity is proof of a continuity between the beginnings of human cognition and modern people. In the cave, a mat a few centimetres thick was found, made from layers of stems of sedge and quince leaves.<sup>12</sup> The leaves of this tree contain chemicals that are insecticidal and are used to repel mosquitoes. The choice of these leaves suggests that the inhabitants of Sibudu had knowledge of plants and were aware of their healing and insecticidal properties.

## Weft 9

The African Heritage House, founded by collector and designer Alan Donovan, is a specific archive of material culture in Africa created from the perspective of Westerners. An amazing building is located on the Athi Plains near Nairobi which shows a mixture of styles, charmingly juggling conventions and the symbolism of "exquisite." It contains the "treasures of Africa" collected by Donovan with an extremely rich collection of fabrics, including ritual costumes, which is breathtaking. In one place you can see and touch almost all kinds of traditional African fabrics and learn about their history.

**Ase Oke** – cotton or silk fabric, woven only by men on narrow looms. Narrow fabric strips are sewn together into a larger whole. It is worn by men and women and brings social prestige to both the user and the weaver.

**Kente** – is the most well-known of all African textiles. It is woven in strips by men on narrow looms and the bands are sewn together. The beauty of kente lies in the combination of many colours, interwoven with a geometric order.

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<sup>11</sup> [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaskinia\\_Sibudu](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaskinia_Sibudu)

<sup>12</sup> Information about the sedge clearly says that it is a fibrous plant that is present only in the northern hemisphere. This shows that one can assume not only how the climate and steppe of Africa have changed but also the traces of great human migrations.

**Adire** – a fabric similar to *batik*, dyed indigo, is one of the most famous fabrics in Africa and worn only by women.

**Bogolonfini** – woven by men in Mali, commonly referred to as a "mud cloth." The linen is first soaked in a dye made of bark and leaves and then painted with a thick mud containing iron acetate, collected from the bottom of the lakes.

**Lamba Mena** – the most magnificent fabric of raw silk in shades of emerald green, deep purple, crimson, burnt orange, walnut, and white ash. This fabric, woven by the women of Merina, was traditionally reserved for the ceremonies of "famadihana" (turning the dead). The authors sometimes sign the cloth with beads.

**Adinkira** – fabric hand-printed with stamps from a thick gourd skin that can be "read" because each stamp has a meaning related to a proverb. Along with kente, it is the royal cloth of Ashanti, worn mainly on important ceremonies.

**African Wax** – fabrics dyed by printing and then waxing, which consists of covering the part of the fabric not to be coloured with wax. They function in Africa under the general name "waxes."

## Warp 9

*Kwa upendo kutoka Afrika* means "With Love from Africa," and it is one of the *kanga* sayings. Kanga also means a special kind of fabric – wrapped as headscarves, used as tablecloths or curtains (like in my house now), or to cradle babies. It is a long rectangular piece of fabric with printed patterns of flowers, chickens, cooking pots, and slogans in Swahili. The words on the *kanga* are important: some serve as blessings for good fortune, friendship, and respect for family life but they may also bring a warning against gossip. They are considered not just versatile and useful but also uniquely African.

Collecting information about the fabrics, observing them in everyday life and in real space, I also thought about the future designers, educated in Europe or Africa. What kind of communication will they make in their realizations, what stories will they "tell" with their fabrics? What will future fabrics be made of: natural fibres, recycled garbage, maybe algae, or coffee grounds?<sup>13</sup> Or maybe the utility fabrics, including those in fast fashion, will gain some "uniqueness" thanks to a return to old technologies.

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<sup>13</sup> Fabrics obtained from used coffee grounds have been gaining popularity for several years. Supposedly they are not susceptible to moisture, have non-staining properties, and are resistant to body odour.

## Weft 10

I found a clue and a kind of answer to my question during my visit to Kenyatta University in Nairobi, where I had the pleasure to meet Dr Anne Mwit, an artist and lecturer at the Textile Design Department of Fine Arts and Design Faculty. Anne works with drawing, painting, and fabric design – the latter using traditional local techniques. Visiting her workshop, I was attracted to the textiles that serve as a primer during printing and stamping fabrics. Used repeatedly and by many students, they bear the traces of prints of many designs and colours which over the years have been a random, barely legible, but authentic and bright record of the many fabrics made in the studio. The sincerity of this record and its form is a kind of visual metaphor, a symbol of the constant mixing of styles, conventions, and aesthetics that create a completely new value, which I had started to discover.

translation

Alicja Kujawska

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## Keywords

visual communication  
validity claims  
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# For Whom and for What are Visual Signs in an Open Urban Space: Functions of Inclusiveness and Exclusiveness

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## Abstract

The city is a living dynamic organism, remaining in constant interaction with the direct and indirect natural and social environment, reacting and evoking reactions in social relations and in natural climatic processes as well as in the world of flora and fauna. It is the place of "natives" – endogenous inhabitants – people, animals, and plants. All of them have a fixed place in the social and spatial stratification. Usually these places are a permanent guarantee of individual and collective security. However, into the city come others, invited because of their usefulness in the city structure or because of empathy and compassion for their distress in other places. There are also tourists who come because the city is a social, natural, and technical attractor, a centre of politics, culture, and education.

To all these people and groups, the verbal, iconic, kinetic, and proxemic messages occurring in urban space are addressed. I would call them specific sociolects. In the context of communication activities in cities, three validity claims play a crucial role – claims of truth, clarity, and normative correctness. In the following chapter on an example of selected communications, signs in the open urban space, I point out those which fulfil functions of inclusion and those that communicate exclusion – informing which spaces are closed to some.

## Introduction

An open urban space is filled with all kinds of elements: animate and inanimate, movable and immovable, stable and dynamic, beautiful and ugly, friendly and hostile, safe and dangerous, fragrant and smelly. All of them communicate something, inform someone about something, permitting or prohibiting specific behaviours. Some of them serve to respect human dignity, others to humiliate or deprive access or the rights of people to express themselves.

Visual signs in the city are inseparable elements of social infrastructure. They are codes that communicate the conditions of safe human behaviour in interactions with other people, things, phenomena, and processes. In the face of everyday activities and unexpected events, they inform about ways of behaving safely. They are addressed to all people (and soon to objects of artificial intelligence also), which is why it is so important that they are legible and understandable for every user of the urban public space, i.e. for both the inhabitant of the city and the newcomer, for the educated and uneducated person, for children and the elderly, for a person with good sight, hearing, and mobility, as well as people with disabilities. This is very important in any public space but in the city, it takes on special importance because the city is a "living organism" with high complexity and, at least formally, universal accessibility.

In this paper I attempt to justify why visual communication in the city is important from the point of view of social justice and respect for human rights. I present the specificity of the city as both a milieu and the agent of civilization development, and I look for the answer to the question: what is the condition for the existence of a "happy city" – a city for every person and group, as well as for each living creature? Against this background, I analyse visual communication in the city in the context of accessibility, both communicative codes and places in space. Finally, I analyse selected visual communication in the perspective of validity claims and challenges for education.

## The City as a Place for Living. Why Should One Take Cities as Places of Visual Communication into Account?

Cities can be considered the greatest achievement of mankind. They represent the greatest achievement of our imagination as a species, attesting to our ability to change the natural environment in a thorough and lasting way. Today, our cities can even be seen from space (Kotkin, 2018).

The history of the city as a place of human life is a theme of myths and stories. The rise of cities is, in fact, a manifestation of an important change in the life of a man who, in this non-natural environment created by people, feels "natural" and safe. The city protects one against threats by creating new patterns of interpersonal relationships and developing new skills; it also creates new places for its gods. Places of worship are in fact an immanent element of urban space. At the same time, as Tomáš Sedláček wrote: "the city was (especially in old Jewish texts) a symbol of evil, degeneration and decadence – inhuman things" (Sedláček, 2012). Starting with Quaramel – the oldest city in the world (XI-X millennium BC), discovered by Polish archaeologists and located in the north of present-day Syria – the city was and is still giving shelter to an increasing number of people. In 2016, 1.7 billion people (23 percent of the world's population) lived in cities with at least 1 million inhabitants, and other towns were growing. According to the UN Report published 16th of May 2018 by the Department of Economy and Social Affairs:

Today, 55% of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 68% by 2050. Projections show that urbanization, the gradual shift in residence of the human population from rural to urban areas, combined with the overall growth of the world's population, could add another 2,5 billion people to urban areas by 2050. (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018)

Although many people still live in villages, the characteristics of such places are so different around the world that it is difficult to compare them. Differences occur not only between continents but also within countries; they include size of community, landscape, social structure, and spatial arrangement, as well as economic functions and life patterns. In each case there appear specific communication phenomena and social problems, but their range makes them local, usually unique. The experience of life in villages strongly differs from the experience in cities, including the cohabitation and coexistence between people and nature. Therefore, despite their diversity and apart from the dynamics of the development of civilization, rural areas are one of the slowest changing habitat types for people, fauna, and flora.

Creating and building cities pushes other living creatures out of the urban space – birds, snakes, spiders – which will persist in trying to return to their former habitats. This is often due to careless, unreasonable human behaviour, such as feeding wild animals or throwing food into garbage cans. As a result, animals and birds often become intruders, threatening the safety of residents. Other intruders are unwanted migrants, looking for a safe place to live. Some of them may have difficulties with the comprehension of the signs and signals that regulate behaviour in the urban space. Similar difficulties may be experienced by people with different kinds of disabilities.



An open urban space is filled with communication signs: sounds, scents, and visual information with functions of inclusion or exclusion regarding locals and visitors. These signs are both the mediums and agents of a city's culture and social environment, with specific rules and orders. Social communication serves to sustain this culture. Signs of visual communication are not only information but they also have the power to create available spaces, setting boundaries and accessibility criteria as well as the behaviour within them. This means that visual signs become social stratification factors.

Universal problems and social dilemmas are concentrated in the city, including multidimensional inequalities in the access to goods and places. Living in contemporary cities demands understanding the meaning of signs and images created by both humans and nature. Both kinds of communication (manufactured and natural) are intended for people to obey, or at least not disregard.

Taking into account the openness of an urban realm and its other features – and bearing in mind rural areas, seen mainly as places of occlusion, where processes of inclusion and exclusion are much slower, where ways of communication, both vocal and visual, understandable for locals, are steady or at least quite unchanged – it is easy to see why communication signs in the city are the focus of important research.

## Visual Communication and Claims of Validity in the Urban Open Space

Many places in cities with open access for users, both inhabitants and visitors, are full of visual communication. Properly reading and responsibly following it are conditions of individual and common safety. Understanding its meanings is the base for respecting human rights and social fairness in the access to the public sphere. Visual messages (images and words) containing both orders and prohibitions addressed to users of the urban space should be treated as a manifestation of respect for the human right to information. According to the 19th article in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to seek, receive, and give information" (United Nations, 1948). But, as a main condition, this should be comprehensive information and the communication should fulfil claims of validity, i.e. claims to truth, normative correctness, sincerity, and comprehensibility – which is the basis for the first three claims (Habermas, 1999). Claims of validity refer to all visual messages in the form of real and symbolic as well as written images. They also require considering the locations where the images are placed; for example, somewhere they are easy to see, placed in a highly visible spot, and so they are accessible to all users within urban spaces.

According to Jürgen Habermas (Habermas, 1999), author of *The Theory of Communication Action*, the aim of rational communication is reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another. This is fundamentally a recognition of the validity claims shown above. Although Habermas addresses his theory of communication mainly to words (both spoken and written), it applies also to visual communication. Signs and images, real and symbolic, in order to be credible and to lead by understanding to agreement, must fulfil claims of validity, too. Thus, elements of visual language need to be seen as an immanent part of social communication; as such, they must perform the same functions as the other speech acts distinguished by Habermas; namely:

*description, informing, explaining* – meaning to represent the state of affairs in the system of the external world,  
*expression of expectations and hopes* – i.e. representing the subjectivity of actors of interaction, and  
*promises and warnings* – i.e. presenting the norms regulating the social order.

Knowledge regarding the meanings of orders, prohibitions, instructions, and information, as well as understanding the criteria of inclusion, exclusion, and occlusion, are the basis of a subject's action of acceptance or rejection. The researcher's choice of reaction depends on their critical judgement of a situation; namely, the judgement of communication from points of view favouring equality, social justice, and the limits of freedom.

## Inclusion, exclusion and occlusion in the public urban space

Visual communiques co-create the urban social order, regulating the life of individuals and groups. They can serve as a criterion for the availability of individual places in the urban space. This means that individual visual messages have the power to include, exclude, and enclose persons and groups in specific actions and places in the city. In the 2018 revision of *World Urbanization Prospects*, it is stated

To ensure that the benefits of urbanization are fully shared and inclusive, policies to manage urban growth need to ensure access to infrastructure and social services for all, focusing on the needs of the urban poor and other vulnerable groups for housing, education, health care, decent work, and a safe environment. (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019)

The main condition of this is to ensure access to as many goods as possible for all users in an open public urban realm. One can do this through visual communication: hence, comprehensive information and communication fulfilling claims of validity (i.e. claims to truth, normative correctness, sincerity, and comprehensibility, which can be seen as a basis for the first three claims) are necessary.

Acts and processes of social inclusion, exclusion or occlusion, with information as an agent, take various forms:

- a) codes of information used: understandable and possible to interpret by all or just by a few, realistic in images and words, or abstract;
- b) content of information: orders or prohibitions addressed to all (meaning inclusive) or to specific groups of people ("strangers," meaning exclusive, or "ours" – occlusive);
- c) accessibility of information: for people with or without technical or digital tools, including those with different types of disabilities.

These modalities of visual communication in an open urban space are the chosen examples of criteria for interpreting information from the position of the viewer. The diversity of viewers-readers of communicative signs means carefully examining visual literacy as the foundation of understanding and using codes accessible for all. Many similar, or even the same, signs have a different meaning depending on the context, but from the perspective of fair access to information in the urban space, one should always have in mind the "real" spectator as well as the "implied" spectator of all signs with information, which triggers the social practices of inclusion, exclusion, or occlusion. The key purpose of reading visual objects, both material and symbolic as well as graphic and verbal, is an understanding of the dominating ideology and of socio-cultural contexts where the visual objects are located.

Using examples from research in cities in Kenya (Kilifi, Mombasa, Mtwapa, and Malindi) and in Poland (Szczecin), I will illustrate signs of social stratification in the access to activities and places in the urban spaces by means of visual communication. These signs were recorded in the photographs taken by members of the TICASS international team.

The first criterion of interpretation, the intelligibility of the code of information, shows that signs written in the local language are examples of occlusion against visitors from other countries. Inscriptions in Swahili or Polish (or other local languages) means that the information in a message is only for "us and ours," for members of a closed circle. However, most of the images and material visual signs, both figurative and abstract, with few exceptions, are examples of inclusiveness. Nevertheless, the language of written communication is not the only indicator of occlusion. The same function as an inscription in the local language is realized by abstract

images, which can be read only by highly prepared readers, by members of sociocultural elites, or groups of specialists. This is also the case of monuments featuring local heroes or local traditions and myths, if there are no plaques with information. As an example, I would like to point out the monuments Three Eagles in Szczecin and The Swahili Tea Kettle in Mombasa, both of which have symbolic meanings understandable only for inhabitants (and I am afraid not even for all of them).



Il. 1 Rosita Deluigi, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 1/1-4. TICASS research materials.





Il. 2 Rosita Deluigi, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 2/1-14. TICASS research materials.



Il. 3 Rosita Deluigi, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 2/1-17. TICASS research materials.

However, in most of the documentation collected during the research, everyone can easily decode the visual messages. This means that, first, they are addressed to all "readers," to all recipients of the universal, human culture, regardless of how much education they have received or scientific-technological abilities they have. These messages fulfil claims of validity, such as claims to truth, normative correctness, sincerity, and comprehensibility, not only due to themselves but also to the contexts in which they are located. Because of their wide target group, understandability and the possibility to be interpreted by all people, their function can be considered as inclusive. An example of such visual communication with the power of inclusion is in the following photo, which was taken on a street in the town of Mtwapa (Kenya). The photo shows the simple form of social inclusion through access to the consumption of known products.

This is one of the visual symbols and advertising messages for products that, in spite of being specific to a local context, are written and painted in an artisanal way, and intend to inform both inhabitants and travellers about the possibility of accessing a local product. This time the product is a stimulant whose green leaves are chewed for excitement and the healing of various bodily disorders. Due to its low price and easy availability in Kenya's towns, one can find many persons – *muguka* chewers – mostly in the afternoons at *muguka* sit-in kiosks. The visual sign in the photo invites passers-by to join in.

Some of the visual information in the open urban space have inclusive functions not only through their intelligibility but also through their contents, the actual messages presented, as well as accessibility to everyone regardless of individual skills and competencies. In the next photo, taken in Malindi (Kenya), one can see the cumulation of the criteria presented above. In the visual message there are two kids, a boy and a girl holding hands. They are both wearing school uniforms. There is also a crest showing a book, pencil, and key, and two ribbons over and under the crest with the phrases "Shalom Academy" and "Education is the key." Everyone can see the familiar picture of a school and connect it with education and gender equality in the school (a boy and a girl holding hands) as an agent of social inclusion.

A different kind of message, oriented towards social exclusion through visual communication, is on view at the Courthouse in Mombasa.

On the main wall of the building is an inscription in English but there are no signs indicating that this is the court chamber. The sign may indicate that information about places like courts of law are only for highly educated, literate people who speak English. Besides the inscription, there are no other visual signs to indicate the function of this building. One can understand from this that the justice policies in Kenya are in the hands of educated people. The indicator of exclusion is not only the language (English) but also the location of the inscription: the message is high on the wall thus is not accessible for people with a visual impairment.

Another example of exclusion of people with impaired vision can be seen in the following photo, taken at the *matatu* (local mini buses) station in Mombasa (Kenya).





Il. 4 Aleš Loziak, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 2/2-4. TICASS research materials.



Il. 5 Karolina Zawiślak, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 2/2-7. TICASS research materials.

The visual message is on a board with a price list for *matatu* rides. The board is attached to a voltage pole at a height of about 3m above the ground. The board is in a visible place but the message on it is not clearly visible to all people because it is too high. Thus, it can be taken as an agent of exclusion due to the inaccessibility of the message and because it does not fulfil claims of normative correctness and sincerity. "Readers" of the message on this board with prices (I should add – contractual, usually their amount is set with a ticket seller at the entrance door to the *matatu*) are treated with insincerity.

Interpreting the abovementioned, just a few examples of visual communication in the urban public space, through the lenses of validity claims, I conclude that visual communication in the open urban space that does not fulfil these criteria should be seen as a medium and an agent of social exclusion, disrespectful of human rights, especially the right to receive honest and truthful information.



Il. 6 Anna Watoła, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 2/5-8. TICASS research materials.



## Final remarks

The answer to the question posed in the title "For whom and for what are visual signs in an open urban space?" seems to be simple and obvious: for all and for everyone, and for the safe coexistence in the city, in the environment created by the humans, by civilization. The city is a social, natural, and technical attractor as an arena for broader institutions and processes, whether in politics, business, education, arts, or culture. Visual signs in urban public places play a crucial role as agents of the social infrastructure. They help people to orient, to behave according to rules, and to understand common messages. Taking into account the demographic forecasts for cities, these places ought to become more and more inclusive, both for people who want to, and for those who must, live there because verbal, iconic, kinetic, and proxemic messages occurring in urban spaces are addressed to all these people and groups. Thus, all of the information must be understandable.

After decoding visual communiques from Kenya and Poland, one may note that they are mainly addressed to people who are able to read in English or in Kiswahili, or in Polish in the case of visual communication in Poland. Some places are signified as accessible only for specific people, such as worshippers or lawyers. In many cases both contents and forms of visual communication are familiar; hence, they are understandable and accepted. The aims of visual signs are mainly information and incentive. All of them, by their forms and colours, are readable by everyone and are accepted as visual information with respect to fairness, freedom, and justice in the urban public realm.

One should stress that visual communication, signs in the public urban space, are part of a cultural guide that teaches a little of the culture of a city to its visitors and newcomers. It also helps inhabitants to be familiar with their own history, with local tradition and myths, and to collect information on buildings, heritage places, important historical incidents, and people. Through signs people can learn not only where objects are located but also ethical rules – what they are allowed and what is prohibited, which behaviour is right and which is wrong, where one can feel safe and where one feels estranged. Visual communication education is an inevitable task of teaching and learning at any age and in any social position due to the respect for the right of access to the goods that a city has on offer.

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## Keywords

visual literacy  
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Pwani University  
Technical University of Mombasa



# Perception of Librarians on Visual Literacy: A Case of Selected Universities in Kenya

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## Abstract

Today's university students live in a visually rich, screen-based world. They regularly come across and create meanings and knowledge through images and visual media. Yet this participation in a highly visual culture does not in itself prepare them to engage critically and effectively with images and media in an academic environment. The purpose of the study presented in this article was to find out how Kenyan librarians regard visual literacy in academic libraries. A descriptive survey research design was adopted to study 30 librarians from Pwani University and Technical University of Mombasa, both in Kenya. It was found that public university policies, funding, and staffing are critical in the implementation of visual literacy programs. This study is intended to serve as a catalyst to librarians and university management in Kenya who are interested in implementing a visual literacy program in their libraries.

# Introduction

Libraries are known as places that collect, preserve, and archive information, making it accessible and available to their users. The role of librarians in promoting information literacy in universities and colleges is therefore paramount. Users must learn, with the help of librarians, how to find, evaluate, and use the needed information effectively. Education in Kenya is primarily print-oriented, so librarians have aligned their information literacy programme for users of print. Information has grown over the years in different disciplines; accessing and retrieving information has also become more complex for the users, requiring librarians to employ more than a single form of literacy – for instance, media literacy, aural literacy, internet literacy, cyber literacy, and critical literacy.

Multiple literacies strive to re-evaluate literacy in relation to modern ways of life, and they are vital to meeting the challenges of today's society (Kellner, 1998). Information is no longer bound by text or simple illustrations, and multiple literacies tend to gravitate towards new technologies and modalities beyond print literacy. In the 21st century, with the advances in technology and the domination of visual images, librarians must reinvent their information literacy program and introduce visual literacy as well. The idea of visual literacy has been around since the 1960s, when it was popularized by John L. Debes. Now, in academia, there is a consistent trend in scholarly archives to provide access to and the utilization of high-quality visual materials to students, members of faculty, and researchers. New technologies have led to a shift from traditional print media in the way people communicate.

It is crucial to note that the constantly changing nature of visual images poses numerous challenges to users. There is the development of the image-rich world, where there are already "digital natives" who are intuitive visual communicators; although being a "digital native" does not mean that students or faculty naturally possess sophisticated visual literacy skills (Felten, 2008). The study conducted in chosen academic libraries concerning visual culture led to finding that undergraduate students' assignments require incorporating images. It further identified a need to consider the inclusion of more visual resources in the library and arrived at the conclusion that academic librarians should find ways to introduce image-related skills in their information literacy instruction (Mayer and Goldenstein, 2009).

# Research Questions

I employed the use of a questionnaire on a sample of 30 respondents from the Technical University Mombasa (TUM) and Pwani University (PU). I looked for an insight into the following issues:

- Understanding of visual literacy by respondents.
- How visual literacy is implemented in libraries, and what the challenges are in this process.

# Findings and Discussion

The response rate is presented in table 3.1 below.

Sample		Frequency	Percentage
Participated	TUM	15	70
	PU	6	
Not participated	TUM	8	30
	PU	1	
Total Sample		30	100

Table 3.1: Response Rate

Fifteen (70%) of the respondents took part in the study while 9 (30%) of the respondents did not participate. The total sample size was 30.



# Definition and Understanding of Visual Literacy

Visual literacy is a set of abilities that enables an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and visual media. Visual literacy skills equip a learner to understand and analyse the contextual, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, intellectual, and technical components involved in the production and use of visual materials. A visually literate individual is both a critical consumer of visual media and a competent contributor to a body of shared knowledge and culture (ACRL, 2012).

In a library setup, "[v]isual literacy has traditionally been understood in terms of information literacy, with a focus on locating images, evaluating and selecting image resources, and using and citing images" (Hattwig et al., 2013). It is important to note that "[v]isual literacy is what is seen with the eye and what is seen in the mind" (Bamford, 2003 as cited by Budram, 2009); that is, as John Debes asserted, "a group of vision-competences a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experience" (Clark, 2018).

It is very important that scholars have exhibited interest in visual literacy; however, it can be noted that "[a]dvances in the field of visual literacy have suffered due to the absence of an agreed-upon definition" (Brill and Maribe Mbranch, 2007). There is no single fixed definition of what is meant by visual literacy, nor even a prescribed set of objectives for it, nor a definition of what the essential visual skills are. Visual literacy has been evolving with the introduction of new terms and languages over the years. However,

the richest definitions of visual literacy include both an interpretive and a productive component. In other words, they stipulate that ability to analyse and interpret images and other visual material, although critical, is not by itself sufficient for full visual literacy; it must be accompanied by some ability to create visual material (Brumberger, 2011).

Sample		Frequency	Percentage
Participated	TUM	10	71.4
	PU	5	
Not participated	TUM	5	28.6
	PU	1	
Total Sample		21	100

Table 3.2 Visual literacy definition awareness among librarians

Regarding the description of visual literacy, table 3.2 shows that 15 (71.4%) # librarians from TUM and PU responded to the question while 6 (28.6%) did not respond. All the definitions submitted by participants shared certain common descriptions, like "digital collection, pictures, graphics, and videos". Other common words that appeared in their descriptions are the "ability to retrieve and use non-print materials." These descriptions point to the challenge that librarians face when dealing with different dimensions of literacy. Despite available definitions, librarians still cannot agree on a single description.

# Implementation of Visual Literacy

Method of teaching	Frequency	Percentage
Library website/portal	5	23
Telephone inquiry	8	38
Library brochure/leaflet	3	14
Class instructional lessons	2	9
Library orientation of new students and staff	7	33
Online tutorials	3	14
One-to-one demonstration by library staff	10	47

Table 3.3 Methods used in teaching visual literacy

Visual literacy involves a set of skills ranging from simple identification, naming what one sees, to a complex interpretation of contextual, metaphoric, and philosophical levels. The method used to teach visual literacy is therefore an important measure of how librarians perceive visual literacy, so the respondents were asked to indicate any of the seven methods – listed in table 3.3 – used in their libraries (Yenawine, 2013). Table 3.3 reveals that the most often used were one-to-one demonstration by library staff – 10 respondents (47%), telephone inquiry – 8 respondents (38%), library orientation of new students, and staff – 7 respondents (33%). This implies that librarians play less proactive roles based on the methods they use. Class instructional lessons, which requires the librarians to be more proactive and more effective, were indicated as the methods used only by 2 respondents (9%). Can this be the fault of the librarians’ education? Perhaps their education in Kenya is

not preparing them to carry out instructional roles. Most of the library school curriculums in Kenya have given prominence to information literacy and less attention to other literacies, for example, visual literacy. Perhaps this has played a role in how librarians regard visual literacy.

In the literature we may find a question on how librarians should be teaching visual literacy but there is an agreement that instruction delivered simultaneously with visual support allows learners to participate actively as they practice to become skilled in problem solving (Yamada-Rice, 2011).

# Challenges of Visual Literacy

ChallengeF	requency	Percentage
Lack of supporting policies	5	23
Inadequate staff	8	38
Lack of curriculum in visual literacy	3	14
Inadequate knowledge of visual literacy	2	9
Lack of institutional support	7	33
Inadequate infrastructure	3	14
Inadequate funding of visual literacy	10	47

Table 3.4 Challenges faced by librarians in visual literacy

The challenges faced by librarians in the field of visual literacy are shown in table 3.4. From the table, the four largest challenges are: lack of supporting policies – indicated by 10 respondents (47%), inadequate funding of visual literacy – 7 respondents (33%), inadequate staff – 5 respondents (23%), and lack of curriculum in visual literacy – 4 respondents (19%). Library

schools in Kenya focus more on information literacy and pay little attention to visual literacy.

There is no instruction in visual literacy in schools or out, not even recognition that learning to look is, like reading, a process of stages. There is no accepted system by which to teach it either – that is, strategies sequenced to address the needs and abilities of an individual at a given moment, strategies that eventually allow one to deal with complex images (Yenawine, 2003). This challenge in teaching visual literacy refers to an inadequate knowledge of visual literacy, which one of the respondents (4%) pointed out.

Visual literacy differs between people. People do not get the same information, even though they may be looking at the same visuals. This is because the meaning of any visual language does come from the visuals themselves, but from the people interpreting them. People learn to attach meanings to visual symbols. Whatever we interpret in a visual sphere is based on our association with it (Gathu, 1986). University students and faculty members come across different information in different media and from different places every day; the way they interpret it depends on their experiences and perceptions. It is imperative to regard visual literacy in relation to the higher thinking order that requires analysis, evaluation, synthesis, and prediction. Visual literacy also requires a robust base of knowledge, skills, and strategy in executing visual literacy instructions.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

Academic libraries remain an important pillar in educational institutions; they are still looked to for help to access information, despite the many challenges they have in executing their mandates. In the recent past, librarians in Kenya have made a concerted effort to conduct a number of trainings and seminars in order to promote information literacy, which is recognized globally as an essential skill, with the objective of making information literacy a mandatory course in all universities. Despite all these intensive efforts, not much was achieved, which has also affected the development of other literacies like visual literacy, introduced to complement information literacy. Muema Kavulya reflects that

Information literacy training for university students in Kenya is not a success story. It is observed that, in spite of scattered efforts, the majority of students are forced to pass through the university system without ever mastering the art of information retrieval and use. (Muema Kavulya, 2003).

Institutional and governmental surroundings are not much help either considering, for example, the fact that the government of Kenya

froze the hiring of new university staff and reduced the budget allocation, consequently affecting library operations like staff training and raising student awareness and training.

The information landscape is changing rapidly; despite the aforementioned challenges in implementing visual literacy programs, I recommend that within the realm of information literacy, librarians must understand and teach visual literacy. This is necessary because today's information onslaught is characterized by highly visual content. Librarians should be visually literate; they should acquire a visual literacy knowledge base and start creating awareness of the ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, 2011. They should employ in their teaching the use of the CRAAP test (Currency, Relevancy, Accuracy, Authority, and Purpose), which is a much-cited method for evaluating information online because visual literacy and information literacy are closely connected, and visual literacy involves many of the same principles as information literacy. Also, both literacies include problem solving and critical thinking skills as well as digital literacy skills.

There is a common belief that young people are proficient with technology. In real life, they know how to share information and images but may not necessarily know how to create them. Librarians can support them in learning how to produce new, genuine visual communiques and how to interpret the ones that are encountered. However, to develop and enable a user of the library to be a visually literate person requires a concerted effort from the teaching fraternity of the university. Visual literacy instruction cannot be left to librarians alone; they need institutional support in developing visual literacy programmes and formulating policies to support its implementation. Teachers should be also involved in the process because, as Lynell Burmack states, "A teacher can be 10 times more effective by incorporating visual information into a class discussion" (Budram, 2009).



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## Keywords

monument  
visual message  
ethical perspective



# Monuments in Urban Public Spaces as Visual Messages – An Ethical Perspective

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## Abstract

The subject discussed in this chapter is the iconosphere of contemporary urban public spaces and their communicative functions. One of the key visual messages in an urban surrounding is the monuments. Located in open public spaces, often in their centre, they characterize certain places in the city and their symbolic value tends to be regarded as more important than their informative value. The fact that they are interesting from the point of view of their external features (appearance, shape, colour, ornamentation) as well as their significance creates multidimensional interpretative possibilities of monuments as visual messages.

From an ethical perspective, in Paul Martin Lester's view, one can analyse monuments as the works of the creators responsible for them, as elements of public space installed by the representatives exhibiting them, and as objects representing a specific philosophy of values (according to accepted philosophical categories by Lester). The person responsible for each monument is its creator (the author of the design or contractor), but also the people determining its location – which, to a large extent, determines the monument's symbolism and its meaning. The creators of monuments are responsible for the aesthetics and diligence of performing, and for bringing the original meaning to the work. The following analysis covers various types of monuments – icons, symbols, and pieces of art.

## Introduction

Visual culture and communication are attracting growing interest from the social sciences. Researchers highlight the complexity and deficiencies of their theoretical and methodological interpretations that can provide the unambiguous resolution of dubious issues. The visibility-based methodology is interdisciplinary in nature, opens space for several social and humanistic sciences, and does not limit the possible range of research. Each research project based on the analysis of visual materials necessitates unique solutions and measures that enable the implementation of specific cognitive goals.

The object of interest in the TICASS research project is the environment of images typical for the contemporary urban public space and its communicative functions. Among several concepts available for the analysis and interpretation of the empirical information collected (photographs of visual messages in city spaces), Paul Martin Lester's interesting approach (2011) was selected as the leader. Lester emphasizes the necessity of a multifaceted analysis of visual materials and points to several complementary points of view, such as personal, historical, technical, ethical, cultural, and critical (Lester, 2011, pp. 122-131). In each of those points of view, he lists key analytical categories and provides arguments justifying his further reflection.

From the ethical point of view, the following preliminary assumptions, which determine the thoughts and actions of a researcher, should be adopted as guiding principles for the analysis of visual materials. Ethics is a philosophy and a normative theory of morality (arguing on the moral certainty of specific actions). The material object of ethics is the conscious and free action of an individual (including attitudes considered to be fixed patterns, and the subject of action himself/herself – the conscious and free performer of action). The formal object of ethics is the action in terms of good and evil. The specific nature of reflections by Lester makes them practical – they finally refer to the good or righteous life of a person.

Maria Ossowska (Polish morality theoretician and sociologist) has emphasized that what we commonly refer to as morality is a versatile and incoherent entity (Ossowska, 1963, p. 178), although all sciences examining the phenomenon of morality are in agreement that morality is actually linked to conscious and free individual action, and to a large extent determines individual and collective behaviour in social relations. Therefore, analysis of the social reality from an ethical point of view is a rudimentary research practice on one hand (as supported by several social arguments), and exceptionally difficult to perform, on the other hand since it is not definite.

## The ethical perspective in the concept of visual analysis by Paul Martin Lester – two aspects

The ethical perspective in the concept of visual analysis by Paul Martin Lester is an interesting solution as it regards the examination and description of a sort of entanglement of visual materials and people who create them, relating directly to people's professional (and artistic) roles and the consequences of publicizing their creations (for recipients and creators). The same also applies to the creative process itself (there is a need for an assessment of ethics at all stages of the creation process – from conceptualizing to publicizing).

While distinguishing between normative (giving definite prescriptions and norms to be obeyed) and descriptive ethics (dealing with studying morals as pure socio-cultural facts, experiences, and language or communication facts), Lester proposes that the analysis of visibility should refer to normative ethics, which establishes what is morally good and bad, and determines guidelines for behaviour based on the assessment and obligations related to it (Cf. Lester, 2011, p. 124). He proposes applying specific components of normative ethics (agathology, axiology, aretology), with special emphasis on deontology, or unique moral demands towards creators. This is where we deal with the responsibility of the creator regarding various constituent elements of the aesthetic situation (creation, creative process, recipient, experiences of creator and recipient). Therefore, there is a need for the researcher to be particularly attentive and careful while drawing conclusions from such analyses. A researcher also needs to take responsibility for their analyses and the conclusions drawn.

Examining Lester's ideas enables us to determine basic analytical categories, which can be included in the analysis of visual materials from an ethical perspective:

- Responsibility of the creator of the object and its executors (To whom is the creator/executor answerable? To himself/herself, to other creators – to a professional community, to individual and collective recipients, or to an institution?)
- Responsibility of the creator and its object (What is the creator responsible for? For the creative process, creation, and for consequences of publicizing the creation, the experience of the recipient during contact with the creation?)
- Dimensions of responsibility (For whom is the creator responsible? For himself/herself [self-responsibility], for others, for their



experiences related to the creative process and a reception of the work [social responsibility: allocentric and sociocentric], for humanity and the actual [global] consequences of publicizing the creation [historical responsibility – for past and future; ecological responsibility]?)

The second aspect of Lester's considerations relating to the ethical perspective of the analysis of visual materials directs our attention to recognized philosophical categories that are pillars of morality in social life – individual and collective, private and public – and in the legal sphere, categories that are so well-recognized that they do not require any additional explanation or justification. Lester points to the necessity of understanding basic philosophical issues in order to scientifically examine visual materials and proposes using six great philosophical questions in the analysis of visual materials. He refers to a particular sensitivity and the pitfall of negligence, which should be avoided, since we recognize that visual materials have the power to transform our thinking and behaviour. This puts a particular kind of responsibility on the creator and the researcher. In this respect, following Lester, I should emphasize the following analytical categories (known and justified categories of philosophy of morality) and include them in the practice of analysing visual materials as regards categorical imperative, golden rule, golden mean, utilitarianism, veil of ignorance, and hedonism.

## Monuments in Urban Public Spaces as Visual Messages – Ethical Perspective

In this paper I analyse visual signs in public places, in parks, squares, and streets, in the city of Szczecin, which were photographed by participants in the TICASS project (Kitso Lynn Lelliot, Palesa Shongwe, Rosita Deluigi, Adela Machova) in 2017. A major part of the visual messages examined refers to monuments because monuments are remarkable locations in any city, and their symbolic value is more accentuated than the informative value. Alexander Wallis emphasized that

a monument is usually dedicated to an open public space. It always occupies a prominent and very often the main location. [...] It stands out regarding its form and scale based on principle of opposition. (Wallis 1980, 223)

A monument is interesting from the point of view of its external features (appearance, shape, colour, ornaments) and those that pertain to its meaning. This creates opportunities for a multifaceted interpretation of the monument as a visual message. From the ethical point of view, within

our interest (as discussed by Lester), monuments can be analysed on one hand as the works of their creators and the people exhibiting them, and on the other hand, as elements manifesting a specific philosophy of values (following Lester's philosophical categories). The reason for this is that more than just the creator (the author of the design, contractor) is responsible for the monument: creators of monuments are responsible for their aesthetics, performance, and the expression of their original meaning, but responsibility is also borne by the people who determine the monument's location, which to a large extent generates its symbolic expression and meaning.

The photographs analysed below show various kinds of monuments – icons, symbols, and artworks – approached from an ethical perspective.



Il. 1 Kitso Lelliot, Palesa Shongwe, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 1/1-18. TICASS research materials.

## Icon-type Monument

The visual message of an icon-type monument is usually a realistic representation of a person who is meaningful to the cultural heritage of a country or a region, and the way the monument is perceived to a large extent is homogeneous in a given community (this involves the public acceptance of the person presented in the monument). Primarily, icon-type monuments play a symbolic role: they are transparent in a sense, or their message is overt to the recipient (Kowalewski 2007, 4-5). The creators of such monuments are responsible for the message and form of their creation but do not give it a major ideological significance.

An example of such a monument-icon is presented in photograph 1, which is of the monument of Pope John Paul II, a well-known iconic person who, although linked to the Catholic Church, has gained common respect. The monument is made of bronze and placed on a granite base (ed. Kozakowska 2012: 173). It is located in the Jasne Błonia Square in Szczecin, opposite the Polish Endeavour Monument. It commemorates the visit of the Pope to Szczecin, and the service celebrated at that very location. The city took the initiative to establish the monument and its creator is Czesław Dźwigaj (with co-creator Stanisław Latour).

## Symbol-type Monument

Objects, which are the visual messages of a symbol-type monument, are not commonly recognized among members of the society as specific individuals (as is the case with icon-type monuments). People tend to associate them with certain categories, without highlighting their uniqueness. In the case of this type of monument, symbolic functions prevail, whereas other functions are determined based on conventions. Their message is not fully transparent, and they may also have a hidden meaning (Kowalewski 2007, 5-6). The people responsible for them are their creators (authors, designers, contractors) who assign meaning to them, as well as the people who select their location and exhibit them. A symbol-type monument can be perceived in more ways than in the case of specific realistic images.

An example of such a monument is the Szczecin-based Monument for Polish Endeavour recorded as a visual message in photograph 2. This monument is interpreted in many different ways. Although residents of the city have adopted the interpretation promoted by the creator (designer: Gustaw Zemła) (ed. Kozakowska 2012, 205-206) and the promoter (the then city council), visitors to the city who are not familiar with it see just three eagles. The true message is hidden in the history of the monument, which expresses respect and gratitude for the struggle, work, and education exercised by three generations of Poles: Poles living in Szczecin before WWII, Polish pioneers coming to Szczecin right after the war, and the generation responsible for the further development of Szczecin. History reveals the ethical values in the message and its saturation with the axiological categories (respect, work, education, and social and historical responsibility) deeply rooted in the awareness of residents.





Il. 2 Rosita Deluigi, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 1/1-4. TICASS research materials.

Another symbol-type monument is recorded in photograph 3, which provides a visual message through the form of a seafarer. It is situated on Szczecin's Fountain Avenue and represents the maritime nature of the port city of Szczecin. It is symbolic, historical, and aesthetic. The monument was created by Ryszard Chachulski (ed. Kozakowska 2012, 51). The city council responsible for setting the monument decided to locate it in the city centre, which makes it well-exposed and strongly associated with the city.



Il. 3 Adela Machova, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 1/1-9. TICASS research materials.





Il. 4 Rosita Deluigi, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 1/1-6. TICASS research materials.

## Art-work Type Monument

Another symbol-type monument is (or rather was, since it was demolished in November 2017) the Monument of Gratitude for the Soviet Army (designed by Stanisław Rudzik) (ed. Kozakowska 2012, 42), captured in a photograph 4.

It is a sizeable obelisk, which stood in the Żołnierza Polskiego Square in the centre of Szczecin from 1950 to 2017, glorifying the Red Army and highlighting its major contribution to displacing German forces from the Pomerania region. Since it stood in a central location in the city for many years, it sent a controversial and contentious visual message. Although associated with the city, as a symbol of socialist Szczecin, it brought back bad memories for many inhabitants of the city. This led to recurring proposals to demolish or rebuild the monument. In 2017, the city council responsible for the monument decided to dismantle it and rebuild it at the Central Cemetery.

One of the key features in the socialist city space was that ideology was omnipresent. Architecture and urban planning were completely dependent on the ruling party. As emphasized by Oliver Thomson, "Building facilities may become a symbol of horror, greatness, peace, power and permanence (...). Many facilities were built to impress and convey message about the owner's wealth" (Thomson 2001: 31). In a socialist Polish city, monuments played that role. Shortly after World War II, monuments and monumental cemeteries were established to commemorate the Soviet Army in many Polish cities (Czarnecka 2015, 7-19). Authorities used various occasions to commemorate the Soviet Army in those locations and highlight the greatness of the USSR (Cf. Basista 2001, 104). While analysing these visual messages from the **ethical point of view**, we may discover that they represented ideology and propaganda. City councils and local socialist party committees were responsible for them and they decided on the locations for those facilities and their use while organizing gatherings for residents (commemoration events, celebrations, wreath laying ceremonies). There we can see **traces of historical responsibility** (for the past and future of the nation).

Those messages contain a lot of **hedonism**, which was highlighted by Paul Martin Lester in his publication (e.g. highlighting the prestige and significance of the former Soviet Union). From an **ethical point of view**, it is hard to provide an unambiguous assessment of the decision made by the council of Szczecin to demolish the monument (visual message) in one of the prominent locations in the city. While assessing such decisions, Florian Zieliński expressed his radical opinion: "To destroy monuments is to destroy the identity of a city and push a part of the city community beyond the city framework" (Zieliński 2005, 226). On the other hand, Maciej Kowalewski emphasized that in a democratic city, various social groups may question the justification for the presence/location of a monument. However, the multitude of cultures in contemporary cities does not translate into versatile

symbolic representations in the public space. Not every city community has a monument of their own that refers to their particular values. "A monument remains within the influence of the city authority, and only prevailing ideologies may become overtly expressed" (Kowalewski 2007: 3).

The quotation above is confirmed by a case related to yet another symbolic-type monument, shown in photograph 5. It is the Angel of Freedom (by Czesław Dźwigaj), which commemorates the victims of the December 1970 riots (ed. Kozakowska 2012, 88). Although the decision was made to construct the monument in 1996, it was not actually set in Solidarności Square until 2005 because political decisions by the city council blocked the establishment of the monument for several years. Today, the monument is well established in the architectural landscape of the city. It has become a symbol of the victims of the December 1970 strikes, and is a unique component of city aesthetics in its location. It is a symbol of freedom and of the struggle for freedom, a symbol of the taking of historical responsibility by those the monument commemorates. Additionally, it is a symbol of the fight for a good future for further generations, which allows us to assess it highly from an ethical point of view because the monument is shaping the awareness of Szczecin's citizens.

Szczecin's urban space also contains monuments that are primarily artistic creations, i.e. monuments as pieces of art. Those are the "abstract presentations, which assign certain features or relations (...) The thing they present can hardly be recognized by the recipient, and physical properties of those monuments do not convey their basic meaning. Their significance rests beyond their appearance" (Kowalewski 2007, 6). Aesthetic functions, implemented through a specific convention, prevail in regards of the perception of such visual messages. In the case of those messages, we have zero transparency (there is a multitude of hidden meanings). The creators responsible for them concentrate their responsibility on the creative process and the creation that is expected to provide aesthetic impressions, which should be the central element of a certain aesthetic situation related to contemplation of the work.

Artwork-type monuments are recorded as visual messages in the following photographs: number 6 (Flora Monument in Orła Białego Square in Szczecin; author: J. G. Glume, designer: J. K. Koch), number 7 (Birds Fountain in Różanka Garden in Szczecin; author: Kurt Schwerdtfeger), and number 8 (Solar Clock in Solidarności Square) (ed. Kozakowska 2012, 104, 207).

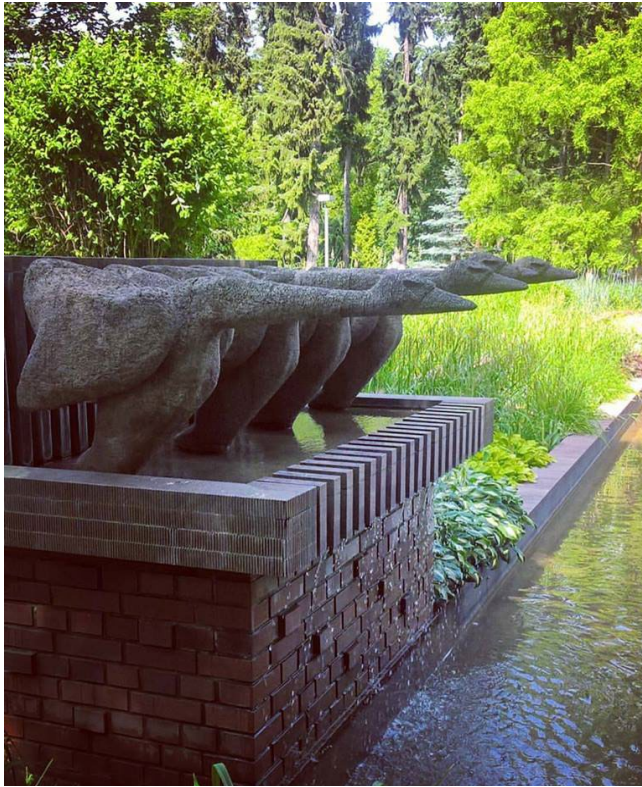


Il. 5 Rosita Deluigi, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 1/1-3. TICASS research materials.



Il. 6 Rosita Deluigi, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 1/1-8. TICASS research materials.





Il. 7 Rosita Deluigi, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 1/1-16.  
TICASS research materials.



Il. 8 Adela Machova, Visual Document Analysis Card according to H. D. Lasswell 1/1-10.  
TICASS research materials.

According to the ethical point of view of visual messages by Paul Martin Lester, we may discover signs of hedonism in the way monuments are developed and displayed. The hedonism of their creators is expressed in the focus on the artistic dimension of the work supposed to provide prestige (and privileges related to it), and which should make the location more prestigious. Artwork-type monuments evoke emotions in recipients through the means of artistic expression used. They are usually specific for a given period of their creation or specific for their creators.

## Conclusion

Apart from a few symbolic functions, visual messages in the form of monuments displayed in the urban public space play aesthetic and usable functions (they fill leisure locations). Their creators and the people making decisions concerning their exposure are responsible for the actual implementation of their message function. In the case of the messages analysed, decisions on the location and the manner of exposure can be assessed as positive because the people responsible for them showed care in the selection of the location for those monuments (central, easily accessible locations in the city; squares, parks, and streets) as well as ensured access for everyone interested in seeing the monuments.

The content of the messages examined is clear and overt for the recipient, in particular in the case of the icon-type monuments. Meanings given to symbol-type monuments are clear for the recipient prepared for the contact with a given visual message (knowledge about the history of the message and underlying reasons). However, the content is less clear than in the case of icon-type monuments. Artwork-type monuments play aesthetic, artistic, and decorative roles in the city space. Being a creation of symbolic meaning, they convey general, often abstract meaning, which allows for their different interpretations.

Each of these monuments in a city can become an element of its identity. In the process of building that identity, it is important to ensure proper articulation, supporting the content to which the symbolic dimension of visual messages can be related, and which can be significant for the integration of the local community.



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## Keywords

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framework



# The Visual (Photographic) Literacy of a Person in the Public Space

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## Abstract

In the Euro-American context, fine art in the public space has almost become a natural part of our lives. Even though the perceptions of old, modern, and contemporary art may be diametrically opposed, the perceptual attitude toward such visual work remains the same – we know it is art and we are ready to perceive it. We understand that it is art and therefore our subsequent interpretation is defined by the boundaries of art. Photography is a medium commonly employed in the advertising industry, but it is also a distinct field of fine art. The language of photography is ambiguous and thus its interpretation in the context of the (public) space in which it is presented may be very different. Art in the public space strongly affects not only our aesthetic perception but also our socio-political beliefs. As a result, visual literacy seems to be a necessary requirement for every individual in our society. What kind of sway can a photograph presented in the public space hold over people's opinions and way of thinking?

## The Gallery Space

The most common form of exhibition space is a typical "gallery" – also known as a "white cube" – a space enclosed by walls, often without windows, and comprised of a uniform floor and a ceiling with inconspicuous lighting. It is a neutral space where the viewer may appreciate the displayed artworks with minimal disruptive influence. Apart from "white cubes" nowadays, many places that were not created as exhibition spaces have become galleries.

The exhibition space does not necessarily have to be just a white wall, or an area enclosed by such walls where an installation takes place. It could be a discreet corner in the foyer, a ladies' restroom, a dressing room, or a connecting corridor. In spite of the differences, these gallery spaces have one common purpose; when we enter such a space, we automatically become recipients of art; we are forced to peruse and explore the individual exhibits and, as a result, we form a relationship with them. Whether we are members of the general public or of a knowledgeable audience (art historians, theoreticians, artists, etc.), we are constantly confronted by the art and therefore we need to form our own opinion of what the gallery space offers us. In the last century, the gallery space underwent a huge development. With a slight exaggeration, we could even go as far as to say that the current image of the gallery is a relic from the times of the 19th-century art salons. The present-day appearance of the "white-cube"<sup>1</sup> may be a mere *cul-de-sac* of the original concept of the 19th-century art salons – the need to put art on a pedestal (in a gallery space) as a validation of the fact that what we see here is indeed art.

Important changes occurred in the American art of the 1950s; one of its main characteristics, among other things, is the endeavour to introduce art to a general audience instead of just to a small number of specialized audiences. It asked two general questions: where we should display artworks, and for whom is the art intended. Art began to enter the public space and thus, logically, it started to be used in various forms and strategies, not just by the advertising industry. It has gradually become an integral part of public life and, as a result, it also shapes our private life.

It is important to realize that whenever we enter a space where artwork is being presented, which we (temporarily or permanently) address as a "gallery space", our perception is automatically switched to what we can call the "consciously artwork perception" mode.<sup>2</sup> Our minds then begin to automatically assess everything we see in such space as a work of art or, eventually, as an artistic gesture, performance, etc.; and, as such, they also access, interpret, and evaluate this perception. In the end, it does not matter

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<sup>1</sup> The term "white cube" was used for the first time by Brian O'Doherty in his 1976 essays published in the *Artforum* magazine and later in a book called *Inside the White Cube*, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, we should stay cautious. The most important thing is to distinguish when we consciously approach art and when we are oblivious to the fact that what we see can be, indeed, art.

whether it is a canvas, drawing, photograph, video, object, advertisement, human figure, or nothing at all, an empty gallery. The moment we place a particular element or situation in a space defined (by a curator, owner, gallerist, or artist) as a gallery space, everything placed within the space is automatically perceived as a work of art. Let us remember Marcel Duchamp and his "ready-mades." The artist took ordinary manufactured objects and, by placing them in a gallery space, elevated them to artistic artefacts.

## Public Space and Advertising

Nowadays, gallery space is not defined by four walls and a sign with the caption "gallery." Instead, it both naturally and forcefully infiltrates public space. However, what is public space? Each person perceives it differently; even the laws of countries use this term in various contexts and interpret it differently. For our purposes, especially when talking about gallery space, the definition that a public space is accessible to everyone and as such is not visibly marked by an inscription that reads "this is a public space" will suffice. By contrast, gallery space is actually, in most cases, visibly marked with a sign and an inscription that reads "gallery."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, we can establish this fact from public sources (for example, the Internet) as well. What does this mean in the context of the perception of an artefact? When we are in the public space, our primary expectation is not that we will interact with art there. Our mind is not set up in the "consciously artwork perception" mode; on the contrary, it is in the "utility space perception" mode in which we observe the movement of people, means of transport, information signs, traffic lights, advertising space, etc., with the main goal of navigating and moving in this space.<sup>4</sup>

An integral part of public space is used for advertisements – billboards, placards, benches, public transport stops, shops, and cafes, etc. These spaces are used by contemporary art for the presentation of artwork. However, before getting back to art, let us ask a few simple questions: Why are these advertising spaces located in the public space to begin with? Why are they a part of it? Why are there no buildings built especially for advertisements, like there are galleries built for artworks? The reason is simple: the advertising agencies need to deliver their advertisements to as many recipients as possible in order to increase the sales of their products and services. They must make them accessible to everyone so every person who walks through the public space can see, perceive, and receive them.

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, "In Vitro" Gallery, Ústí nad Labem.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, we can also enter the public space for the reason that there is an artwork. However, this is a different situation altogether since we have decided to enter this space precisely because we want to see this piece of art.





Il. 1 Ales Loziak, "In Vitro" Gallery, Ústí nad Labem.



Il. 2 Ales Loziak "Kaluž" Gallery, Ostrava.

An advertisement does not require individual interpretation; its message is simple and straightforward, and it needs a collective comprehensibility. The visual information on the advertising space connects with the audience even if the audience does not actively decide to perceive it, unlike with the gallery where we consciously make the choice to enter the gallery space and perceive art. We enter the gallery space with a clear objective – to be confronted with art; we want to encounter it and establish a relationship with it.

Let us go back to art several decades ago in the United States of America. It is the 1950s, and the art world is asking questions related to the presentation of art. Contemporary art is inaccessible, incomprehensible, and often meant for a small number of people; it is exclusive. The need to bring art to the general audience not only leads to galleries being opened in the public space but also to using public space to present contemporary art, as it is used to present advertisements, which have virtually become a natural part of our daily life. Artists and curators, observing the increasing need for advertising agencies to quickly, easily and, in particular, effectively introduce their products and services to as many people as possible, logically concluded that the artistic world should start using public space for the presentation of art too, precisely because they wanted to introduce art to the general audience or to as many people as possible. However, it would be a mistake to say that this was the only, or even the most important, reason.



Il. 3 Aleš Loziak, Advertising billboard, Kilifi, Kenya, 2019.





Il. 4 Aleš Loziak, Advertising billboard – simulation, mosaic.



Il. 5 Barbara Benish, Artwall Gallery, "Flower Power," 2000.

Another reason why art should be presented in public space is the characteristics of public space itself. Public space largely differs from the neutral white cube where we put artefacts, creating a situation for the audience. The public space is ever-changing and, furthermore, completely unpredictable for its users, aka visitors. In addition, when we move through public space we do not expect to be confronted with art, and we should consider the fact that one of the essential aspects of public space is its users, that is, the audience, who can affect the form of the displayed artefact; or, similarly, that artefact can significantly affect the behaviour of the audience in the public space, who would otherwise, unaffected by the artefact, behave differently. As a result, there is an interaction between the space (including its users) and the artefact.

The public space shapes the art while, at the same time, the art shapes the public space. For many artists, this situation is a challenge and a motivation to display their work in public space. A mutual dialogue, the transformation of a specific location, the confrontation between the location/person and art, the disruption of the routine – public space thus offers a plethora of situations. However, these situations can also be created by art itself. Just an unexpected encounter between art and an audience in a public space is a situation which disrupts an otherwise mundane life and may enrich it. As a result, art does not become the privilege of a small number of people who decide to enter the sanctuary of a gallery, but instead becomes a part of public life, public space, and all of us.

At the end of the 1990s, the Czech-American artist Barbara Benish came up with the idea to use the space of the retaining wall of *Letenské sady* to present contemporary art. In 2000, the wall, which originally served as a space to promote the Communist regime and, after its fall, remained empty for many years, was restored by the artist's project "Flower Power," which she carried out with the help of the Centre for Contemporary Arts Prague.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.artwallgallery.cz/cs/page/o-projektu>; <https://www.artwallgallery.cz/en/page/about-artwall>



## Communication Strategies

Let us focus on commercial advertising photography and try to define this term in order to differentiate it from artistic photography. The communication strategy of the advertising industry must be easily comprehensible. One of the basic prerequisites of good advertising photography is therefore the ability to quickly convey the message. There is no time for contemplation and long deliberation; the shortest reading time span for information contained in an image (the time it takes to view one photograph) is 4 – 6 seconds. In the case of billboards located in the vicinity of roads, this time is shortened to just 1 – 2 seconds due to the speed with which we pass them by. In the case of advertisements featured on outdoor placards or in magazines, even though we have the option to stop and look at them, we rarely do. If the visual information does not immediately get our attention, we either continue to walk or turn the page. Based on this simplified analysis, we can conclude that the amount of visual information coded in advertising photography is close to zero, which means that the overall strategy is to minimize the coding as much as possible in order not to burden the audience with contemplation; instead there is the general effort to serve the information to them on a silver platter. One of the features of advertising photography is thus to quickly and comprehensively convey information, which the recipient will subsequently process. On the other hand, any encounter with art always requires our imagination, experience, and interpretation.

Billboard campaigns have now become a common strategy of the advertising industry while in the case of fine art it is still a relatively specific form of presentation. A billboard's distinction lies not only in the relatively widescreen format of the exhibit space, its size, and its placement in the urban space but also in the fact that we still expect a simple advertising message in this space, an awareness campaign at best, but definitely not fine art. Some art projects challenge these expectations however: for example, the international project Billboard Gallery Europe<sup>6</sup> uses city billboards to present contemporary fine art. The project took place across Europe (Prague, Bratislava, Vienna, Graz, Brno, Zagreb, Ústí nad Labem, Warsaw, and many other cities). In Ústí nad Labem, we can still encounter the effects of this project in the vicinity of the Faculty of Art and Design of Jan Evangelista Purkyně University, where, among other things, it serves as a practical outcome of the Curatorial Studies Programme.

As a part of the aforementioned project, the Bosnian artist Šejla Kamberic presented her work "Bosnian Girl" in Ústí nad Labem<sup>7</sup> using the medium of a billboard in public space. The portrait photograph was multiplied for the purpose of the billboard format. Apart from the billboard format,

this particular project (a single portrait photograph) was also presented in other forms of advertising – posters, magazine advertising, and postcards.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to consider whether this multiplication intensified the author's message contained in the photograph or not, and if so to what extent.



Il. 6 Aleš Loziak, Billboart Gallery Europe, Cliché, 2012.



Il. 7 Sheila Kamberic, Bilboart Gallery Europe, "Bosnian Girl," 2004 – 2005.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.billboart.org/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.billboart.org/cz/sublabelcz.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <https://sejla-kamberic.com/works/bosnian-girl/>



## Site-specific Installations

Gallery space is deliberately designed to not affect the displayed work of art. It is therefore completely empty, bare, and neat. As a result, it is isolated from the outside world and external influences – it has no space-time links or connections to the outside world. One gallery function is to prepare a suitable environment for the artwork, which will not reshape it but will instead allow its high-level presentation. Consequently, we could argue that an artwork displayed in any white cube would have the same effect on the audience. By contrast, public space is completely different.

A site in public space is unique not only because of its appearance but also because of its history and collective (social) memory. This unique quality is represented by the subjective perception of a particular location by its direct users, for whom this space is inherent; they make use of it regularly and have developed a close relationship with it. For example, such a space may be the town square we walk through every day on our way to work; a park where we walk our dog; or a vacant lot on the street where we live, etc. It is the unique atmosphere of these locations that causes a much more intense interaction between the space and a specific work of art. As a result, space fundamentally affects our perception of the artwork.

Public space undoubtedly shapes the artwork displayed in it while the artwork shapes the public space as well. On the other hand, this does not apply to outdoor advertising, which is, in a sense, independent of its environment. Likewise, its function is unaffected by the environment. An advertisement will most likely work in any public space, regardless of the way it is presented (billboards, posters, projections, etc.).<sup>9</sup>

Many works of art displayed in the public space are created directly for a particular space. Such presentation or installation of an artwork is known as "site-specific." Naturally, it is not only limited to installations in public space; its main characteristic is that it cannot be transferred. When transferred, a "site-specific" installation takes on a completely new meaning while losing the old. A very important aspect of a site-specific installation is the meaning-making context in which the artworks are presented or, eventually, the space for which the installations were created.

The installation poetically titled "My Beloved Land Blooms, When the Labourers and Reapers Crown Her with Their Creative Work"<sup>10</sup> is a typical example of a site-specific installation. The artwork is at a public bus stop

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<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, in this article, we are not concerned with the influence of outdoor advertising on the visibility of the urban space. It is beyond any doubt that outdoor advertising has a profound, and often negative, impact on the image of the public space. While the form of art presentation and advertising is in our case largely the same, their visual language and function fundamentally differ in both instances.

<sup>10</sup> The title of the artwork was inspired by the text written on the mural (*sgraffito*) in the main hall of the Olomouc Main Station.

in the village of Staňkovice, located near Ústí nad Labem in northern Bohemia. The installation of two photographs in the form of a photo canvas responds to the current situation of the municipality, whose future is affected by the fact that the vast majority of its land is owned by a single person. In 2011, the artwork was created as part of the art symposium "Changes of Rural Landscape in the Last Century."

In 1998, Alena Kotzmannová installed a series of photographs in backlit advertising panels at tram stations. Her work refers to the emerging boom of department stores at the end of the 1990s in the Czech Republic and the lifestyle subsequently associated with it. Without a doubt, the photographs in question would look impressive in a white-lit gallery space; however, the chosen form of advertising lightboxes enhances the theme itself and endows the images with a new dimension of perception and interpretation.

## Environmental Sensibility

An interesting fact about artistic interventions in public space is, among other things, their ability to be unobtrusive. While an advertisement is aggressive and attacks us immediately without any warning, many artistic interventions employ the opposite strategy. They are hidden, inconspicuous, waiting for someone to notice them. Furthermore, they explore the audience's sensibility to changes in their environment, their perceptiveness and acumen, and the ability to distinguish between routine banality and something that is trying to establish contact and communicate with them. All forms of presentation by the advertising industry have been as visible as possible in their job description. Despite this indisputable fact, the language of art allows us to be inconspicuous while employing these forms. Let us remember, for instance, Barbara Benish's project "Flower Power" or Alena Kotzmannová's photographic project. Both projects lie at the crossroads, and the audience does not necessarily have to realize that they are artistic interventions, even though Barbara Benish's installation is huge and easily visible.

The photographic project "Photos in the Streets," created in 2013 by an art society in Ústí nad Labem (known as Prokompot) as a part of its artistic activities focused on public space, is also worth mentioning. The project displayed 10 photographs, installed like outdoor advertisements in the public space on the streets of Ústí nad Labem. They could be found on billboards, columns, a sculpture, or a derelict stadium's ticket office. The photographs had been selected from the town archive and returned to the locations where they were originally created 50 years before. No significant events were recorded on them; they merely captured the town's life and its daily routine. The confrontation of history, collective memory, and the present through the artistic intervention installed in the form of outdoor advertisements in many



unorthodox locations gave passers-by the opportunity to discover how life and public spaces had changed in 50 years.

As a part of my studies at the Faculty of Art and Design at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, I carried out a project that explored the audience's sensibility to minor changes in their environment. In order to carry it out, I chose the entrance to the faculty building. On the floor, I mounted a photograph of the floor from the adjacent building, which had an almost identical layout and was due for demolition. It is important to mention that the building of the Faculty of Art and Design is located on the premises of a former hospital, which, when I was doing my project, was gradually being reconstructed as part of the university campus. At that time, the plan to demolish the former hospital pavilion sparked a ferocious debate about its historical value and whether to tear it down and construct a new building for the university or preserve and reconstruct it. My art project responded to the situation by transferring the soon-to-be demolished site to a new "safe" location while examining the extent to which the users of the entrance space even noticed the visual changes of the floor they used daily.



Il. 8 Aleš Loziak, "My Beloved Land Blooms, When the Labourers and Reapers Crown Her with Their Creative Work," 2011.



Il. 9 Alena Kotzmannová, "Shopping Is My Hobby," 1998.



Il. 10 Prokompot, art society, Aleš Loziak, Photos in the Streets, 2013.



## Framework

Just from these few examples, it is apparent that the contemporary art scene has frequently used public space for its presentations. The architecture of space, together with its specific form, structure, historiography, historical (social) memory, and contemporary functions, including the behaviour of its users, creates a framework which is a prerequisite for the development of meaning-making relationships with art. The context (framework) in which a specific work of art is placed then creates the ultimate meaning. The public space shapes the art presented in it while the art shapes the specific space. The site-specific installation depends on the framework in which it is placed, which means that a different context creates different meanings.



Il. 11 Aleš Loziak, Untitled # 9, 2013.

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## Keywords

Kenya  
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slum

# Public space in Nairobi. Diagnosis Based on Visual Messages of Public Space

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## Abstract

The capital of Kenya, Nairobi, is like an open book on the history of the developed political and economic systems of this country. Particular districts – the best ones, the average, the good, and the worst – tell the history of the country in clearly woven threads of cause and effect.

The interpretation of urban, architectural, infrastructural, and visual Nairobi tissue proves the disastrous social consequences of political and economic systems in Kenya. The capital of the country looks as if it was built maliciously, turning its back to the citizens, mocking them with a clear message: you will not feel at home here, you will not feel good.

The following chapter focuses on analysing public space and examines the consequences of introducing neoliberal capitalist economic systems in Kenya. It also focuses on how the increasing corruption impacts the formation and character of public space, the urban architectural environment, and visual language in the cities of Kenya, especially in Nairobi. It identifies the key factors (such as the weakness of the state and of democratic institutions, and the consequent gradual change of the values hierarchy in Kenya) and synthesizes the available data and other information in that regard.

I will refer first to the historical moment a liberal economy was introduced in Kenya by its first president, Jomo Kenyatta. Then I describe the corruption spiral and social mentality change it triggered, pointing out the practical consequences, i.e. the worsening of public services. Later in the paper I will discuss the effects of the governmental neglect of the public sphere and space, and the impact on visual, urban, and architectural aspects of the cities in Kenya, especially the capital, Nairobi.



*Can the space occupied by a social group or several such groups be treated as a message?*

(Lefebvre, 1991, p. 131)

## Introduction

Public space talks to us in symbolic and formal languages; it is never indifferent. We see this in the streets, in how the urban substance of the city is constructed, who it is built for and how it serves its users. Public spaces in cities differ from each other to a large extent. Some are pedestrian-friendly, others favour drivers. Some are exclusive while others are inclusive. They can be intimidating and make people feel anonymous and small or be hospitable and open to various opportunities for people to spend some time in a pleasant atmosphere, which I call "visual comfort." In each instance, the urban tissue depends on economic, political, and social factors that have a direct impact on what is being built and in what way.

On the following pages, I will use Henri Lefebvre's theses as one of the tools in my examination of public space in Nairobi. If the reader wonders why, here is the answer.

The spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytical standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38)

Lefebvre offers a more precise and yet much simpler tool for investigation.

The analysis of any space brings us up against the dialectical relationship between demand and command, along with its attendant questions: 'Who?', 'For whom?', 'By whose agency?', 'Why and how?' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 116)

For Lefebvre, the social production of urban space is fundamental to the reproduction of society, and hence of capitalism itself. The social production of space is commanded by a hegemonic class as a tool to reproduce its dominance. In his book *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues that "(social) space is a (social) product" (1991, p. 26). He develops this further by stating that "social space is produced and reproduced in connection with the forces of production (and with the relations of production)" (1991, p. 77), but "the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; [...] in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (1991, p. 26). Lefebvre argues that space is a complex social construction based on values and on the social production of meanings, which affects spatial practices and perceptions. "Social space per se is at once work and product: a materialization of 'social being'" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 101). As Łukasz Stanek remarks,



this [Lefebvre's] argument implies the shift of the research perspective from space to processes of its production; the embrace of the multiplicity of spaces that are socially produced and made productive in social practices; and the focus on the contradictory, conflictual, and, ultimately, political character of the processes of production of space. (Stanek, 2011)

Therefore, referring to the specifics of Nairobi's districts as well as other public spaces, I will try to answer the question: who produces public space in Nairobi, and what social or political processes affected this production?

Public space in Kenya has stratified residues or, if you prefer, it's like a sandwich of paradigmatic epochs: pre-colonial, colonial, the era of the state construction, and the contemporary, which one could call a layer of post-colonial neoliberal crisis.

I will refer to these different layers later in this paper.

In 1964, Jomo Kenyatta became the first president of Kenya. He apparently realized that the introduction of a USSR-type socialist or quasi-socialist economy could lead the country to collapse. The task of transforming a multi-ethnic country – with borders arbitrarily set by Europeans – into a modern and democratic state that guaranteed civil liberties was a real challenge for Kenyatta. Forty-two tribes belonging to several ethnic groups inhabit Kenya; Kenyatta himself belonged to the tribe of Kikuyu, who comprise 21% of Kenya's inhabitants. It cannot be ruled out that maintaining order in the country and pacifying ethnic, tribal, and religious conflicts legitimately required the creation of a mono-party system of which, for 28 years (from 1964 to 1992), the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) was the only legal party. Perhaps, however, as a member of the Kikuyu tribe, Kenyatta preferred the party to maintain undivided power, which is held by Kikuyu to this day.

Kenyatta understood that any radical moves could lead to very serious disorders, and chose a course for calm, evolutionary changes and an attempt to harmonize inter-tribal relations that were not easy,<sup>1</sup>

argued Prof. Malinowski in an interview with Polish Radio (Malinowski, 2017).

Due to the foreign policy of non-alliance by the president, Kenya did not join the group of African socialist countries, which later suffered an economic collapse, such as Ghana and Tanzania. Kenyatta based his rule on the native Kenyan bourgeoisie, which was formed during his presidency. Thanks to agrarian reforms, a strong class of black farmers was also created.

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<sup>1</sup> Author's translation into English.

This kind of pragmatic line of domestic politics meant that Kenya began to be cherished by the West. A foreign capital stream began to flow into the country. The processing industry was developing; the Kenyatta rule ensured political stability and economic growth, which was not common in Africa at that time. (Malinowski, 2017)<sup>2</sup>

The relatively rapid economic development of Kenya, however, has exacted a price from the country, or actually from its citizens. The adoption of an economically liberal system from the beginning of independence and the rise of the capitalist class have resulted in money or wealth being placed high in the common hierarchy of values.

It can be observed that in Kenya, the liberal (capitalist) system, along with its assumptions and hierarchy of values, did not find a proper social basis for growth in any direction other than predatory, not to mention the co-creation of democratic state ethics, which is probably quite difficult without the Protestant ethics of civic society and enterprise that have been evolving in Europe since the 16th century. However, in Tanzania, for instance, Adam Smith's egoism and greed were hampered by the system of collective or state ownership in place for the first decade of its existence.<sup>3</sup>

The talent for entrepreneurship is not a common phenomenon, and in Kenya the situation was particularly unfavourable for its development: in a country where for centuries the local population was engaged exclusively in the peripheral economy – agriculture, pastoralism, fisheries – trade and entrepreneurship were not rooted in tradition. Moreover, in the 19th century, the population of the country was deprived by the British of access to lucrative activities such as commerce, and coffee and sisal plantation management. The Kenyans could not be merchants in Nairobi either because they weren't allowed by the British to live in the city. Therefore, historically speaking, a trade or enterprise in Kenya was dominated by Arabs in the pre-colonial era then by Europeans (Portuguese and British) and Indians (who were settled by the British in Nairobi as employees of the Ugandan Railway and lower administrative staff). Today, Kenyan entrepreneurship is dominated by Kenyan Indians and the descendants of Arab settlers (Himbara 1994).

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<sup>2</sup> Author's translation into English.

<sup>3</sup> The corruption rate is much higher in Kenya than in the neighbouring Tanzania. This can perhaps be explained by the different economic systems adopted by these states after obtaining sovereignty. The system in Tanzania was based on the Arusha Decree of 1967, containing the basic assumptions of Tanzanian socialism (*ujamaa*.) As part of this concept, President Nyerere conducted the process of collectivization of the agriculture and the nationalization of the economy. In the Corruption Perceptions Index 2018 list, Tanzania is ranked 99th with a score of 36, and Kenya is 144th with 27 points. Denmark is ranked the first in the Corruption Perceptions Index, and Somalia shamefully closes the list. Michaela Raab, an expert in international development programs, argues however, that the corruption perception depends inter alia on how skilled the interested parties are at hiding unlawful procedures. In the EU countries, the flourishing corruption is much less visible than in Africa, hence the countries are better perceived.



Il. 1 Ngara Rd, by Lukasz Skapski. "Eating"



Il. 2 Small shop, Ngara Rd, Nairobi, by Lukasz Skapski

There is no argument that entrepreneurship requires friendly conditions to develop. i.e. sound legislation and a transparent, independent legal system. In Kenya there is no such system and it is unlikely to appear soon because politicians are reluctant to create and enforce clear legal principles. An efficiently enforced law would limit their opportunities to get rich illegitimately. One can observe here a self-perpetuating vicious circle: since there is no efficient legal system, corruption flourishes among politicians with impunity, thus diminishing further the chances of creating a good legal system.<sup>4</sup> In the face of legal impunity for high-ranking law offenders and nationwide corruption collusion involving the courts and law enforcement bodies, democratic institutions cannot act and government institutions are powerless, even when they show good will.

Susanne Mueller emphasizes the tribal-centric character of President Moi's rule: "controlling the state was the means [used by President Moi] to entrench an ethnically defined class and to ensure its enrichment" (Mueller, 2008, p. 188).<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps it was the combination of attachment to the tribal and clan tradition with neoliberalism that resulted in uncompromising neopatrimonialism, nepotism and opened the door to unbridled corruption. These phenomena are all enemies of a republican system, democracy, and equality in face of the law. They deprive the government of the funds it needs to provide basic benefits to Kenyan citizens, such as health care, a social security system, resources to fight against malaria and HIV, sufficient drinking water provisions (for every day and in crisis situations), protection against crime and acts of terror, and last but not least, a friendly public space.<sup>6</sup>

As Maina Kiai, a Kenyan lawyer and human rights activist, the most competent critic of the Kenyan political system, writes,

<sup>4</sup> As Kempe Ronald Hope argues, "The culture of corruption has grown roots in Kenyan society at large and become endemic. Institutions, which were designed for the regulation of the relationships between citizens and the State, are being used instead for the personal enrichment of public officials (politicians and bureaucrats) and other corrupt private agents (individuals, groups, and businesses). Corruption persists in Kenya primarily because there are people in power who benefit from it and the existing governance institutions lack both the will and capacity to stop them from doing so." (Hope, 2014)

<sup>5</sup> Daniel C. Bach blames the failure, or even the total lack, of democratic institutions and mechanisms on the authoritarian control of the country by the second Kenyan president, Daniel Moi, and the related abandonment of basic duties by representatives of the nation towards the citizens. "The centralised and personalised presidential power that emerged under President Moi resulted in what can only be characterised as the total exercise of all power attached to national sovereignty. This exercise of State power led to the supremacy of the State over civil society and, in turn, to the ascendancy of predatory forms of neopatrimonialism with its stranglehold on the economic and political levers of power, through which corruption thrived, for it was through this stranglehold that all decision-making occurred and patronage was dispensed." (Bach, 2011, pp. 275-294)

<sup>6</sup> "The jostling for power paralysed decision-making and reignited the past practices of corruption, impunity, and subversion of formal institutions by informal ones" (de Ferranti, Jacinto, Ody, & Ramshaw, 2009, p. 129).

Apart from its negative consequences on various governance indicators, corruption in Kenya has also induced cynicism as people now regard it as the norm. It has undermined social values because many people now find it easier and even more lucrative to engage in corrupt activities than to seek legitimate public service delivery. It has eroded governmental legitimacy by hampering the effective delivery of public goods and services. It has limited economic growth by reducing the amount of public resources available from both domestic and donor sources, by discouraging private investment, and by impeding the efficient use of government revenue and development assistance funds. The so-called "eating" reduces the resources available to finance public services, which, in turn, directly disadvantages the poor. "Eating" is a practice of acquiring ignoble wealth by dishonest means. (Kiai 2010, pp. 212-218)

According to Immanuel Wallerstein, a major crisis will not find a solution in the system in which it occurs. Only a system change can bring a solution to a major crisis. Wallerstein does not have any illusions about how countries with peripheral economies can resolve the corruption crisis. Although he does not refer to Kenya, his text perfectly describes the situation in this country.

The weaker the state, the less wealth can be accumulated through productive economic activity. As a result, it makes the state machine itself one of the main areas of wealth accumulation – through theft and bribery, at higher and lower levels. [...]

In weak countries, this becomes the preferred means of capital accumulation, which in turn weakens the ability of the state to carry out other tasks. When the state machine becomes the basic way of capital accumulation, the sense of the normal transfer of offices to the successors disappears. This leads to falsification of elections (if any are carried out at all) and conflicts at the moment of change in power, which in turn increases the political role of the army. [...] As a result, it is very difficult for political leaders to maintain effective state control, which in turn increases the temptation of the army to take control of the executive power as soon as the regime seems unable to ensure internal security.

The most important issue here is that such phenomena are not the result of bad politics but endogenous weaknesses of state structures in regions where most of the production processes are peripheral processes, being by themselves poor sources of capital accumulation. (Wallerstein 2007, p. 80)<sup>7</sup>

Some symptoms of the weakness of state institutions mentioned

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<sup>7</sup> Author's translation into English.

by Wallerstein can be observed in Kenya, where the government does not have full control over the country and indeed, it seems that the state has become a wealth-accumulation machine. The well-being of citizens and the public space remain either completely beyond the interest of the Kenyan authorities, which demonstrate neoliberal *desinteressement*, or reveal their chronic impotence.

## The negotiable grey zone

Kenyan authorities are interested in (or capable of) controlling only the safety of road traffic within the physical boundaries of the roads – the shoulders are not in the scope of their interest, and perhaps also not in their competence. That is why the laws of an African version of free-for-all rule are in place here: everything is allowed within the boundaries of the negotiated status between the interested parties. The key to understanding the passenger transport system in Kenya (and perhaps much more) is the notion of a "grey zone" – which does not refer to the grey dust covering unpaved parking lots and bays for "unofficial" taxis or motorcycles but to Kenya's central government policy, which combines elements of extreme neoliberalism with local specificity: tribalism, clan interests, and lack of funds for public projects. Public space, including the organization of public transportation with its infrastructure, is then left by the authorities to be managed by citizens and is the subject of constant negotiations between interested parties.<sup>8</sup>

Locally, there are attempts to organize the visual communication of this part of public space which serves the needs of public transport, but these are not coordinated attempts so they do not create a coherent identification system for the public space. If we assume that the language of visual communication is a unified and generally accepted system of symbolic or iconic signs functioning in the public space (in the entire country or in smaller administrative units), which function in Europe as "visual communication systems," we have to state that such a system is practically non-existent in Kenya.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, in the town of Kilifi, tuk-tuks park semi-officially in no-parking zones, but they park on the sidewalk, which is beyond the interest of the traffic authorities. Tuk-tuks are not allowed to do so but they still park there, using the principle of the negotiable grey zone.





Il. 3 Center of Nairobi, by Lukasz Skapski



Il. 4 A village, Kilifi County, Kenya

## Precolonial era

In the absence of systematic urbanist thinking about public space, it is not difficult to imagine the chaos of contemporary linear settlements in Kenya.<sup>9</sup> There are, however, a few historical exceptions, which – for various reasons – have resisted urbanist chaos. Some were created before the creation of the Kenyan state and belong to another political order while others were created in the heroic period of the formation of Kenyan statehood and represent a new reign, supported by Western funds and, most importantly, in an era in which growing corruption had not yet defeated the decision-making of the state administration.

The first exception to visual chaos in Kenya is the traditional village settlements where life continues in pre-colonial rhythms and the buildings are traditional mud huts constructed of thin poles connected with the bast of coconut leaves and thatched with the leaves. Here, among the groves of coconut palms, scattered houses are arranged in an ancient and rational order – it should be said that the villages, distant from the city by only several kilometres, are beautiful and there is (usually) nothing that would hurt one's eyes. It is the community here that organizes public spaces, and they serve their purpose well. Although farmers are not wealthy at all – on the contrary, due to the emergence of vast plantations, they are often deprived of the opportunity to support their families with farming throughout the year – a guest from the outside does not get an impression of poverty.

The second exception is the older districts in cities that were founded by Arabs, such as the old town in Mombasa or Lamu, which were built on traditional, rational foundations of urban development. Narrow streets and passages protect passers-by from the midday heat, and beautifully ornamented and well-designed and crafted houses provide comfort to their dwellers. These districts are well laid out and it is difficult to get lost.

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<sup>9</sup> A linear settlement is a (normally small to medium-sized) settlement or group of buildings that is formed in a long line. Many follow a transport route, such as a road, river, or canal, though some form due to physical restrictions, such as coastlines, mountains, hills, or valleys. Linear settlements may have no obvious centre, such as a road junction.



## Colonial Nairobi

The centre of Mombasa was urbanized by the British – colonial, provincial but full of *fin de siècle* charm, white buildings with blue details. If the centre of Mombasa can be described as glamorous, then the 19th-century centre of Nairobi, taken as an urban whole, is chaotic, glamorous to a very limited extent but completely devoid of charm. Its chaos resembles products of the capitalist economy, cities such as the settlements of Upper Silesia in Poland set close to the mines, or Detroit in the United States, where urban development was subordinated to car production. Nairobi was also dirty and neglected in the early 20th century. Colonial officer Eric Dutton, who passed through Nairobi on his way to Mount Kenya in February 1926, described the public space of this city in the following words.

Maybe one day Nairobi will be laid out with tarred roads, with avenues of flowering trees, flanked by noble buildings; with open spaces and stately squares; a cathedral worthy of faith and country; museums and galleries of art; theatres and public offices. And it is fair to say that the Government and the Municipality have already bravely tackled the problem and that a town-plan ambitious enough to turn Nairobi into a thing of beauty has been slowly worked out, and much has already been done. But until that plan has borne fruit, Nairobi must remain what it was then, a slatternly creature, unfit to queen it over so lovely a country. (Dutton, 1929)

The formative processes of the city's tissue in the colonial era are transparent: co-created by the colonial administration as well as European and Hindu settlers, practically omitting the local element, they were the result of imperial hegemony and commercial pragmatics. Therefore, Nairobi is characterized by the utilitarian and colonial beginnings of this city.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Nairobi once was a swamp area, transformed to the site of a Uganda Railway store depot, hunting ground, and camping ground for Indian labourers working on the railway. The city was founded in 1899. The colonial administration intended to keep Nairobi as a home for Europeans and temporary migrant workers from Africa and Asia. The migrant workers were brought into Nairobi on short-term contracts, as indentured labour, to work in the service sector as railway manual labourers and to fill lower-level administrative posts within the colonial government. Between 1900 and 1940, the colonial government passed a number of laws – such as the 1922 Vagrancy Act – to segregate people, evict, arrest, expel, and limit the movement of the natives and indentured workers. Within Nairobi, Africans could live in segregated “native reserves” at the edge of the city. Permits to live in Nairobi were necessary, and these permits separated living areas of non-Europeans by ethnic group (*Kibera Facts & Information*).



Il. 5 Old Town, Mombasa, by Lukasz Skapski

## Superreplication – Nairobi in the 60s

The existence of the public sphere should be considered as a condition for the creation of a citizen-friendly public space. This sphere seems to function rudimentarily in Kenya due to the original sin of the mono-party system, which formed the understanding of government-society relations, eliminating democratic discourse from political practice. To some extent, this is understandable if one takes into consideration the tribal structure of Kenyan society. Successive governments based on authoritarian presidential power did not create friendly conditions for the development of thought or democratic practice.

Reflecting on the contemporary public sphere in Kenya, there can be no question of traditional democratic procedures or making collective decisions as Habermas wanted to understand them (Habermas, 1989). As the democratic system is merely nominal in Kenya, the beginning of the public sphere can be created here not so much by the reform of democratic procedures as by their creation from scratch. Theoretically, one should also count on the involvement of social institutions and local organizations but





Il. 6 Center of Nairobi, by Lukasz Skapski

in a country where political murders do not seem uncommon, their effectiveness is very limited and their involvement could be dangerous for activists; therefore one should rather start with a reform of the judicial system and law enforcement agencies, and the introduction of the rule of law in order to allow debate in the public sphere. The next reforming step should be to guarantee freedom of speech. At the current stage, however, "journalists are facing increasing pressure from authorities and new laws that challenge their ability to report freely" (Freedom of Press, 2016). Self-censorship is on the rise and journalists experience harassment from authorities that try to prevent critical work from being published (Freedom in the World, 2016).

After Kenya gained independence, there was a construction boom in Nairobi. In the 60s and 70s, the Central Business District was built to house government and office buildings. Today, the Nairobi downtown area presents itself very favourably: first-class architecture from the 70s that would not look out of place in London or Paris, and even exceeds European capitals in the spirit and purity of its urban concept. The centre near Harambee Avenue resembles the so-called Eastern Wall in Warsaw but the design and finish are better. Built between 1966 and 1973, the flagship skyscraper in the Central Business District – Kenyatta International Conference Centre, designed by architect Karl Henrik Nøstvik – still boasts the original interior woodwork.

Other representational and governmental buildings on Harambee Avenue are also pearls from the 70s: Jogoo House, Treasury, Bima House



Il. 7 Kenyatta International Conference Center, Entrance, by Lukasz Skapski



Il. 8 Kenyatta International Conference Center, Reception, by Lukasz Skapski





Il. 9 Kenyatta International Conference Centre, Nairobi, by Lukasz Skapski



Il. 10 Central Business District, Harambee Avenue, Nairobi, by Lukasz Skapski



Il. 11 Jogoo House, Nairobi, by Lukasz Skapski



(1973), National Bank, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Electricity House (1974), Solar House, and others (there are quite a lot of "razor" facades, fashionable at the time). They were designed by European architects and represent a very high quality of architectural design. "Typical of this period, most buildings are built as concrete structures, experimenting with structural facades, concrete lattice work and louvres, and expressionistic structural elements such as columns and beams" (Roschi, Klos 2007). The district is modernist in design, in terms of urban planning, and would leave the best impression were it not for a sprawling, gigantic container with rubbish pouring out of it, threatening a centrally located park.

From the whole establishment, one can read the enthusiasm and optimism of the 60s and 70s, when not only Kenyans looked confidently at the emerging country. Apparently, Western architects working on the new government offices shared this enthusiasm, something that comes across to today's observer. The reason for this might be that the 60s and the 70s were a period of overall optimism, when the European community had shaken off their post-war shock and managed to rebuild after the destruction of the Second World War. At that time, people still believed in progress, Great Narratives and counterculture, and the typhoon of neoliberalism did not sweep away social benefits. The future seemed safe.

Undoubtedly, Kenyatta and his mono-party founded the Central Business District as a state-building project, demonstrating the political aspirations of the president and the political will to adjoin Kenya to a group of modern, developing states. However, this was not a democratic project in any possible interpretation (it is not a place where people would like to spend time – government buildings or banks are inaccessible; nearby, however, where there are bars, restaurants, and shops, there is a vibrant atmosphere). Even though these are buildings designed for the ruling hegemonic elite, the financially powerful executive, or maybe exactly for this reason, one cannot feel really comfortable there. Skyscrapers in general are not a type of architecture that is friendly to humans – primarily their scale, both outside and inside, tends to alienate individuals, making them feel small and anonymous, regardless of the quality of design. Lefebvre explains the mechanism of assigning political significance to architecture in the following words.

In the extensions and proliferations of cities, housing is the guarantee of reproductivity, be it biological, social, or political. Society – that is, capitalist society – no longer totalizes its elements, nor seeks to achieve such a total integration through monuments. Instead it strives to distil its essence into buildings. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 232)

Applying the Lefebvre category of the replication of society and capitalism to this space, we can conclude that what happened here was a superreplication of the social system and capitalism. The capitalist-liberal system in Kenya has replicated – it has not changed, only the management team changed. I call it superreplication because it was not a mere replication



Il. 12 The National Bank, Bima House, Harambee Avenue, Nairobi, by Lukasz Skapski



Il. 13 Middle Class Living Quarters, Nairobi, by Lukasz Skapski



– it was a replication that survived an apparent revolution, perpetuating the worst features of the previous capitalist system. Whether it has also kept the good qualities is a debatable issue. Thus, continuing Lefebvre's thought, it could be considered that the essential message of the Central Business District complex is that Kenyans have undergone autocolonization.

## Nairobi Today

There are many contemporary skyscrapers and public buildings in Nairobi but, knowing the scale of nepotism and corruption in Kenya, we can guess why their architectural shape is far from the classy high-rise buildings of the '70s. Sometimes they even look humorous as they stand scattered, in random places, often surrounded by shacks or unsightly buildings from different periods. Whether government or privately-owned, the properties are well-maintained and developed when their owners can afford, and desire, to develop the area. Behind the property's border, where the public space begins, there is the invariable Nairobi miseria and visual chaos: dust, unpaved parking lots, dusty bushes, shacks of street-vendors, muddy ditches with sewage, holes in the roads, piles of rotting rubbish, debris and abandoned concrete building elements, and ugly dilapidated buildings from the colonial or modern era, which, although not damaged, look intended for demolition. Construction units do not clean up the debris, for instance, after building a sewage system, and people commonly throw trash in the nearest corner. The public space is beyond the interest of the public administration. One could blame a lack of funds for this negligence, but the problem seems more complex. As Wallerstein aptly suggests, the administration has probably already consumed the available funds and, being busy with further consumption, does not have the energy or means to deal with the unprofitable task of beautifying public space.

Urban chaos is the main component of the ubiquitous chaos in the public space in Nairobi. Developers or builders erect residential buildings where they own a plot, and do not seem to be limited by the administration either in relation to architectural designs or to the location of buildings. Knowing the realms of development in my home city, Kraków (Poland), I can assume that in Nairobi construction permits are also granted for bribes, so if developers already have gone through these unofficial procedures and paid the compulsory bribe, then city plans and restrictions do not necessarily apply to their constructions. Not only that – many buildings are constructed in Nairobi without any permits. In effect, the city is a melting pot of uncoordinated development interests and its development is dictated by a capitalist (liberal) pragmatism based on rapid profits.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Even the middle class in Nairobi lives in a chaotic environment in which the word urbanism sounds

The processes controlling the creation of such public space are held at all levels of decision-making in the state. It is primarily neopatrimonialism or corruption, which is a symptom of weakness in the central and local administration, unable to control the wild development of the city, with all the consequences of such a state: the government abandons urban planning and fails to care for the well-being of citizens and maintain municipal public services. This abandonment is accompanied by the egoism of elites, completely satisfied with the fact that they can afford a house with green gardens in well-developed luxury districts. It seems that they care neither about the rest of the city nor about the rest of the population. Individual egoisms overlap with clan or tribal egoism – after all, Kikuyu control the administration – even the administration of the Kibera slum in Nairobi is dominated by Kikuyu. Clan or tribal egoism (patronage) inevitably implies nepotism, which eliminates democratic procedures and institutions.

One wonders whether the weakness of the state is the cause or effect of corruption. If we accept Wallerstein's thesis, corruption is the result of the state's weakness. It should be recognized that both phenomena are interrelated, however, and they undoubtedly testify to a deeper statehood crisis.

## Spatial Segregation

Life in Nairobi can indeed be full of luxury – the climate is friendly and there is no shortage of elegant and safe districts consisting of old colonial houses or – depending on the taste of the owner – modern residences. Houses stand in beautiful lush African gardens – something that we will not find in Europe. Of course, only the wealthy minority can benefit from dwelling in these areas: a flat in the green enclaves of the city is not cheap. Those who live in good districts and – it should be emphasized – mostly in their private properties, avoid the city as much as they can. There are several fundamental reasons for their reluctance to leave their posh enclaves. Undoubtedly the main reason is the incredible hours-long traffic jams that completely block the city during rush hour (despite the over fifty-kilometre-long Thika Superhighway completed in 2012 at a cost of KES 31 billion). Moreover, there is nothing in the city that could attract the interest of a person living in a good suburban neighbourhood. Shopping is usually done at the elegant and guarded shopping malls nearby, where you can buy everything, even

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like a joke. These districts include "Kitengela, Ngong, Buruburu and virtually the area around the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport and the SGR railway station. The stretch along the Thika superhighway is also very popular with this type of residence, with neighbourhoods such as Roysambu and Ruiru featuring predominantly" (Munene, 2017).

African souvenirs, in boutiques. The city is dangerous so some districts should not be visited at all and others should be avoided after dark. One cannot count on the police; on the contrary, meeting with police officers can expose you to danger. There are around fifty armed gangs in the city acting with impunity, whose well-established bosses are often politicians or police officers. And finally, in many places the city is as ugly as can be – unsightly highways, unsightly houses, and unsightly, because it is completely undeveloped, public space.

The wealthy elite inhabit the good districts. One such good and safe villa area in Nairobi is Rosslyn, a suburban district. Behind high walls you can see the roofs of big *nouveau riche* buildings. The district is safe because it is located quite a distance from the centre. Other luxurious districts are Muthaiga, Runda, Karen and Gigiri, also Lavington, Loresho, Mountain View, Westlands, Spring Valley, Kileleshwa, Kilimani, Hurlingham, and Garden Estate.

As it has the best-functioning economy in Central and Eastern Africa, Kenya is probably the country in which the greatest disparity in affluence occurs. Just as the good villa areas of Nairobi are located outside of the city, so are the slums; the best neighbourhoods are often adjacent to the worst. Behind Runda, the postcolonial habitat of the Europeans, with its villas in stunning gardens, there is the slum, Mji wa Huruma: a steel barricade demarcates the two and a security officer is always in place to keep those in Runda safe from intruders (Makori, 2017). Right next to the affluent Karen district, there is a slum, Kuwindu, whose inhabitants spend well below a dollar per day. Other slums are, for example, Kibera, Mathare, Korogocho, and Mukuru Kwa Njenga; and there are also poor housing estates around the city, such as Huruma, Dandora, Umoja, or Kayole, where crime rates are very high. The Mathare slum, for example, is the cradle of the most dangerous gangs in Nairobi.

There are approximately 2.5 million slum dwellers in about 200 settlements in Nairobi, representing 60% of the Nairobi population but occupying just 6% of the land. The biggest slum in Nairobi, Kibera, houses about 250,000 people; Kibera is the largest slum in Africa and the third biggest in the world.



Il. 14 Ngara Rd, Indian Quarter, Nairobi,by Lukasz Skapski



Il. 15 English House in Garden Estate, Nairobi



## Kibera Slum

Kibera originated as a settlement in the forests on the outskirts of Nairobi, when Nubian soldiers returning from service with the King's African Rifles (KAR) were allocated plots of land in return for their efforts in 1904.<sup>12</sup> At the time of establishment, Kibera probably did not differ from the poor housing estates surrounding smaller cities, such as Kilifi to the north of Mombasa, which in turn do not differ from poor rural areas, except that the residents of these homes do not have land and do not farm. No one in Kenya called such neighbourhoods slums.

The transformation of a rural neighbourhood into a slum occurred with the influx of people from all over Kenya seeking employment in Nairobi, and Kibera's ban as a place of residence. The extreme – for a village – population density, combined with the lack of urban infrastructure, i.e. roads (there is no car access to most houses in the slum), drinking water (until recently, the residents of Kibera could only access water from a contaminated river), sewage, electricity, street lighting, etc., and the lack of basic public services, such as garbage collection, cause catastrophic conditions and make up what we refer to as a slum.

The Kibera UK web page explains how the neighbourhood is divided into a number of villages, including Kianda, Soweto East, Gatwekera, Kisumu Ndogo, Lindi, Laini Saba, Siranga, Makina, and Mashimoni; the quotation is long but worth reading.

The ground in much of Kibera is literally composed of refuse and rubbish. Dwellings are often constructed atop this unstable ground, and therefore many structures collapse whenever the slum experiences flooding, which it does regularly. This means that even well-constructed buildings are often damaged by the collapse of nearby poorly constructed ones. [...] Only about 20% of Kibera has electricity. UN-Habitat is in the process of providing it to some parts of Kibera – this will include street lighting, security lighting, and connection to shacks (this costs KES 900 per shack, which in most cases is not affordable). [...]

Until recently Kibera had no water and it had to be collected from the Nairobi dam. The dam water is not clean and causes typhoid and cholera. Now there are two mains water pipes into Kibera, one from the municipal council and one from the World Bank. Residents

<sup>12</sup> "Nubian people (from the Kenyan/Sudanese border) who now occupy about 15% of Kibera, are mostly Muslim and are also mostly shack owners. The other shack owners are mostly Kikuyu (the majority tribe in Nairobi) – although in most cases they do not live there but are absentee landlords. The majority of the tenants are Luo, Luhya, and some Kamba – these people are from the west of Kenya. There are many tensions in Kibera, particularly tribal tensions between the Luo and Kikuyu, but also between landlord and tenant, and those with and without jobs" (*Kibera Facts & Information*).

collect water at KES 3 per 20 litres. [...] In most of Kibera there are no toilet facilities. One latrine (hole in the ground) is shared by up to 50 shacks. Once full, young boys are employed to empty the latrine and they take the contents to the river. UN-Habitat and a few other agencies are trying to help and improve this situation but it is painfully slow. [...]

Persons living with HIV in the slum are many, as are AIDS cases. In Kibera there are no government clinics or hospitals. The providers are the charitable organisations: AMREF, MSF, churches plus some others. They do a great job. All people are encouraged to have a free HIV test and if positive to take free generic ARV medicine. [...]

*Changaa* is a cheap alcoholic brew. It is widely available, very strong (over 50% alcohol) and made incorrectly, so is usually very high in methanol. The cost is only KES 10 per glass and after a couple of glasses people become very drunk. With over 50% unemployment in Kibera, many start drinking early in the morning, leading to problems of violence, crime, rapes etc. Several charities are trying to help by showing the *Changaa* makers how to make the drink less dangerous. [...]

Cheap drugs and glue sniffing are an increasing problem. Initially taken to alleviate boredom but then people find themselves hooked. Cases of assault and rape are common. [...]

Due to many men still not using condoms and the availability of *Changaa*, many girls become pregnant, at any one time about 50% of 16 to 25-yr-old girls are pregnant. Most of these pregnancies are unwanted, resulting in many cases of abortion. This can be very



Il. 16 Kibera Slum in Nairobi, seen from above, by Schreibkraft – Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8837730>

dangerous, particularly in such a poor area as Kibera. Many charities are working on this problem. [...]

Kibera is near the industrial area of Nairobi where up to 50% of the available workforce are employed (usually in fairly unskilled jobs). However, there is still an unemployment rate of 50%. (Kibera UK)

Most of the villagers in Kenya have no greater comforts than the residents of Kibera: in the villages, there are usually also no drinking water sources on site, no sewage, electricity, street lighting, no rubbish disposal, etc. There is also moonshine being made (palm wine). However, the level of concentration of residents in the countryside is many times lower than in the slums, which means that the risk of infectious diseases and HIV is much smaller, waste is not such a big problem, water is brought from wells, sewage is unnecessary as is street lighting, residents can live without electricity, and palm wine is less endemic. In a major contrast to Kibera, in the villages and small towns there are traditional structures, clan-tribal ties and customs, which definitely limit crime – lynching is the punishment for robbery, and cutting off a hand or slicing palms is the punishment for theft – somewhat compensating for the lack of social care as well as contributing to the prevention of rape and unwanted pregnancies. In addition, in the villages, medicine men effectively treat popular diseases.

Because the Government owns all the land in the slums, one could consider it entirely as a public space. In Kibera, however, shacks are private dwellings so public space in practice consists of the narrow paths between huts, the river, and the railway tracks running through the housing area.<sup>13</sup> The activities of the city administration in public spaces in Kibera have been limited to the construction of one potable water conduit. The rest of the problems of the poorest Nairobi residents – health care, fighting against typhoid and cholera caused by drinking river water, fighting against HIV, alcoholism and poisoning with Changaa, drug addiction, high abortion rates among young women, the lack of electricity and street lighting, the lack of a sewage system, the lack of provision or access to drinking water, training of the unemployed – are dealt with by various charities, churches, the World Bank, and UN-Habitat. This, and the scale of Kibera's problems that have gone unresolved by the administration, shows to what extent the liberal state in Kenya has withdrawn from the organization of public space and from basic communal or social services.

In 1963, just after Kenya became an independent state, dwelling in Kibera was made illegal.<sup>14</sup> This ban, ineffective and evidently not yet

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<sup>13</sup> "The Government owns all the land in the slum. 10% of people are shack owners and many of these people own many other shacks and let them out to tenants. The remaining 90% of residents are tenants with no rights. The average size of shack in this area is 12 ft x 12 ft, built with mud walls, a corrugated tin roof with a dirt or concrete floor. The cost is about KES 700 per Month (7 USD.) These shacks often house up to 8 or more with many sleeping on the floor" (*Kibera Facts & Information*).

<sup>14</sup> "After Kenya became independent in 1963, a number of forms of housing were made illegal

implemented, shows again the weakness of the government. On the other hand, this legal loophole relieves the government of its responsibility for the terrible conditions in which the poorest people live. If we extrapolate the above example, it is more than likely that a permanent component of the governance method in Kenya is to sweep inconvenient problems under the carpet. The example of Kibera shows clearly the negotiable status of public space in this country – legal international and charity institutions help illegal Kibera residents, and this practice is not only tolerated but also encouraged by the government. What's more, there is a slum administration in Kibera, composed of members of the Kikuyu tribe, covered by the tribal-political patronage by members of the government.<sup>15</sup>

The policy of the Kenyan government is not much different from the neoliberal political line adopted, for instance, by the US president Ronald Reagan, who reduced or eliminated decades-long social programs (social assistance, scholarships for students, etc) and entrusted these duties to the society itself. One should remember, however, the differences, which are considerable – social programs existed in the United States before Reagan and furthermore one can hardly compare the wealthy US economy with Kenya's.

## Conclusions

Taking into consideration the complexity of society in Kenya, a country in which many religions, nationalities, and tribes, with many languages and very strong clan traditions, coexist, one can understand how difficult it is to create a strong system of power. If Immanuel Wallerstein is right, the very weakness of power of peripheral economies such as Kenya's contributes to the growth of nepotism and corruption. It seems, however, that in Kenya's case one should not underestimate the influence of clan and tribal egoism on the widespread acceptance of nepotism and bribery. It is not without significance that during the colonial era, native Kenyans did not form the administration or have a voice in selecting the elites shaping local statehood, all the while remaining in the culture of clan and tribal structures, which

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by the government. The new ruling affected Kibera on the basis of land tenure, rendering it an unauthorized settlement. Despite this, people continued to live there, and by the early 1970s landlords were renting out their properties in Kibera to significantly greater numbers of tenants than were permitted by law. The tenants, who are highly impoverished, cannot afford to rent legal housing, finding the rates offered in Kibera to be comparatively affordable. The number of residents in Kibera has increased accordingly despite its unauthorized nature" (*Kibera Facts & Information*.)

<sup>15</sup> "By 1974, members of the Kikuyu tribe predominated the population of Kibera, and had gained control over administrative positions, which were kept through political patronage" (*Kibera Facts & Information*.)



affected their understanding (or lack of understanding) of the civil service ethos. The creation of a sovereign state in 1963 was an unexpected gift for Kenyans, which caught them unprepared (except for perhaps a very narrow, independent elite). Moreover, the adoption of a liberal economic system required the immediate adoption of the capitalist hierarchy of values as well as bourgeois (and civic) ethics<sup>16</sup> fundamentally alien to African tradition.

Focusing on the country's economic development and capital accumulation could have distracted the attention of the Kenyan elite from formulating social goals that should be served by this development; that is, on the nature of the redistribution of funds obtained. As mentioned above, the redistribution of finance does not reach people in the greatest need, nor does it provide citizens with equal access to healthcare, education, or guaranteed income in the post-working period of life. It also does not serve to ensure the personal safety of citizens and their equality before the law. These are some of the factors that shape the social space in the country and, consequently, create a public space unfavourable for the citizens.

Public space neglected by the state, left to itself, is sometimes dangerous in Kenyan cities, and in Nairobi it is simply dangerous. If citizens do not buy themselves a safe place of residence, they will not feel safe. Taking this into consideration, it is no wonder that the experience of public space in luxury areas, where the government's prominent residents live, is reduced to communing with high walls behind which the private space of prominence is hidden. The public space in this city is hideous because it is left to developers who – taking advantage of bribery – build whatever and wherever. It is alarming and often degrades human dignity – after all, slum land belongs to the state.

Nairobi public space is like an open book of accusations against the state administration, in which one can read about the neoliberal mentality of elites, greed, and the weakness of Kenyan governments. The public space in Kenya is beyond government control.

<sup>16</sup> What I call here bourgeois ethics was slowly developing in Europe already from the 15th century, when sight bills began to be used. That was joined by the civic responsibility founded on strong Protestant community ties.

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## Keywords

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# The Visuality of Socialist Mass Housing Estates After Socialism: Examples from Ex-Yugoslavia

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## Abstract

The following chapter investigates changes in the urban visuality of socialist mass housing neighbourhoods in the era of neoliberal capitalism by focusing on the (dis)continuities of post-socialist additions to socialist urban visuality and urbanist principles. By looking at three material frames of change – new structures built in the fabric of neighbourhoods (interpolations), adjustments on the surface (interventions), and contemporary readings of old images (interpretations) – and their formal peculiarities, several layers of possible (dis)continuities are indicated in the urban fabric in ex-Yugoslavia. They are effected by shopping malls, cultural and religious institutions, graffiti, and micro-projects of urban renewal, as well as by the locals' digitalization of collections of old images, demonstrating how conformity with the aesthetics of socialist modernism can be used as a homage to socialist heritage and values, or as a vehicle for alternative narratives. The continuation of aims set by socialist urbanism can be visualized both in contemporary forms and by relying heavily on pre-existing socialist visuality. Therefore, my contribution calls for a careful contextualization and bringing nuance to post-socialist urban visuality.

## Introduction

Mass housing is a global phenomenon rooted in industrial standardization and state involvement (Urban, 2012). Historically situated in the period of the Cold War and shaped by the urbanist ideas of CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne), mass housing initially encompassed functional separation (into residential areas, work, leisure, traffic) and emphasized generously-sized green surfaces. Small but bright and hygienic apartments were equipped with infrastructural refinements of modern life such as electricity and central heating. However, as they aged, many mass housing neighbourhoods significantly changed regarding the social structure and inequality of inhabitants, visual appearance, functions, and the image of the neighbourhood.

Scholars are divided by the debate around the essence of a socialist city. Some argue that urban developments in socialist contexts fit into the broader context of modernization and have much in common with non-socialist contexts (Sheppard, 2000). Others suggest that socialist regimes produced unique, specific spaces due to the state ownership of the land and prioritization of the "ideal of a victorious public," over cramped (semi) private apartments (Hirt, 2012, 34-40), but also engendered less "diversity" and "marginality" (Szelenyi, 1996, 300-303). Subsequently, a similar discord arises around the (dis)advantages of the analytical concept of "post-socialism."

The aim of this contribution is to reflect on the visibility of post-socialist additions to mass housing neighbourhoods and their visual and functional relationship to the socialist layer. Overall, my approach stems from the thesis on *differentia specifica* of socialist urbanity and, consequently, of the post-socialist urban condition. At the same time, using empirical examples demonstrating both the continuities and discontinuities between socialist and post-socialist urbanity, the paper argues for a break with the monolithic category of post-socialism and pleads for more differentiation. By narrowing down the (post-)socialist city to mass housing neighbourhoods, built almost exclusively in the socialist period,<sup>1</sup> I intend to analytically grasp the most distinguished and condensed form of socialist-built environments. The model I propose should also allow for comparisons between different mass housing neighbourhoods inside the same city – e.g. numerous blocs constituting the ensemble of New Belgrade, a part of the Yugoslav capital built during the socialist period.

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<sup>1</sup> However, those sites are not devoid of the pre-socialist past. For decades, New Belgrade was a no-man's land between the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empire, a location for Belgrade's Fair in the early 20th century (turned into a concentration camp during the Second World War), as well as subject to plans which were never implemented (Blagojević 2007, 16-53.) New Zagreb has rural prehistory, and Sarajevo's mass housing neighbourhood Grbavica was preceded by a fascist housing program from the 1940s (Karaula 2016, 93).

The context of post-Yugoslav mass housing estates will be used as empirical input for several reasons. During most of the Cold War, socialist Yugoslavia was neutral and had a prominent role in the Non-Aligned Movement. Since the 1960s, the country has increasingly permitted elements of a market economy and encouraged decentralization. Mass housing in Yugoslavia was formally rather diverse and its "astounding variety" (Kultermann 1985, 228) was also internationally recognized. While in many other contexts – most prominently the USSR and the GDR – the goal was an overall standardization of layouts and mass housing was built in large series throughout the country, the Yugoslav series oscillated between small and "zero series" (Jovanović, Grbić, and Petrović 2012, 408). After the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, seven new countries emerged out of one – all within the spectrum of capitalist democracies but with differing politics concerning urbanism as well as coming to terms with the socialist past. Therefore, the geopolitical context of Yugoslavia calls for an interpretive model, which would allow for comparisons between case studies on the levels of the city, republic, and the state.

## 1. Changing Visibility of Mass Housing

A city is visually articulated and reproduced on multiple levels – through the appearance of the constructed environment (buildings, streets, signposts, green surfaces, etc.) but also through various media (on photographs, in movies, exhibitions, etc.) as well as within the memory of inhabitants, travellers, and even those who might never see the places first-hand. The visual dimension can simultaneously convey various information for both insiders and outsiders to the context. The passage of time leaves various traces on the urban fabric of the mass housing districts – street names come and go with regime change (Stanić, Šakaja, and Slavuj 2009), buildings dilapidate or undergo renovations or demolitions, new ones are built, functions are modified, public spaces are reconfigured, and the social structure of the neighbourhood changes.

It is interesting then to ask how the visual appearance of mass housing neighbourhoods changed after the end of socialism. Are socialist layers still readable? How do different historical layers interact? The analysis proposed in this chapter is based on three intertwined aspects of visibility – interpolations (new buildings inserted into the urban grid planned during the socialist period), interventions (additions to the existing built environment, such as graffiti and murals), and images (medialization of old and new images of the neighbourhood, especially in a virtual world).

The examples discussed are mostly from New Zagreb, a residential mass housing district in the capital of present-day Croatia. Although the intent of the paper is not to undertake an exhaustive analysis of one single



case study, by concentrating mostly (though not entirely) on one area, it is intended to develop instruments for tackling the diversity inside one city.

## 1.1 Interpolations

With the term *interpolations*, the history of architecture defines new buildings inserted into the existing structures or urban matrix. Such an addition is somewhere in the spectrum between the facsimile (repeating formal qualities of the neighbouring buildings and urban plans) and the contrast of standing out – obviously and intentionally differing from the surroundings (Maroević 1986). Among the most common (and frequently debated) interpolations are shopping malls, religious objects, and public institutions. The first two groups especially are seen as an essential expression of the post-socialist condition: a symbol of a triumphal capitalist breakthrough and the comeback of religion. However, we should be careful and ask if those objects are indeed the pure antithesis of a socialist city, or whether they correspond with it on some level. I will discuss these questions via examples from New Zagreb – the shopping centre Avenue Mall opened in 2007, the Museum of Contemporary Art opened in 2009, and the Catholic church of Saint Luke the Evangelist consecrated in 2007.

### 1.1.1 Shopping Mall

Shopping malls, famously described by John Fiske as “cathedrals of consumption” (Fiske, 1997, p. 13), appear throughout post-socialist Europe in city centres as well as in mass housing estates (Bartetzky, 2010, pp. 20-21). In Zagreb, shopping malls started to sprout up in the early 2000s, when the country consolidated after the war in the 1990s. Malls were gradually coming closer to the city centres: the very first – King Cross – was opened in 2002 on the periphery of Zagreb, it was followed by the Avenue Mall in a mass housing neighbourhood, and then the controversial mall Cvjetni in the city centre.

At first glance, malls do seem to be the antidote for the socialist reality; the lack of consumer goods, half-empty stores, and queues are seen to have played a crucial role in the failure of socialism. However, shops were an integral part of the accompanying infrastructure envisioned by the architects and city planners for the mass housing areas of New Zagreb. Socialist urban professionals stressed the importance of a supply of groceries and other everyday goods in the immediate vicinity as an essential step towards the self-sufficiency of neighbourhoods. The shopping mall strongly diverges from the vision of socialist urbanists, and now the small shops on the ground floor of apartment buildings are increasingly losing the market race against shopping malls and supermarket chains with their own buildings and parking spaces (Stiperski, Novak, and Gajski Stiperski, 2015, 34-35). What differentiates the shopping mall from small shops is that, apart from extending the assortment of goods accessible in the neighbourhood, the mall

attracts consumers from other parts of the town and even from other cities in the region, transforming the functions and meaning of the neighbourhood from one with scarce consumption options into an attraction for visitors.

Plans scheduling a centre with cultural institutions, shops, and public spaces in mass housing districts, in both New Zagreb and New Belgrade, were not fulfilled in communist times. However, the area of New Zagreb, where the Avenue Mall and the Museum of Contemporary Art were built in the 2000s, is close to the Zagreb Fair, which had moved there from the old part of the town in 1956. At its peak in the 1960s (Lovrenčić and Sešek 2012, 135-141), the fair acted as the centre of the New Zagreb area and planners envisioned its extension in the form of a mega-structure (Mrduljaš 2009, 35). Therefore, the insertion of both a museum and shopping mall were compatible with the idea of the centre of New Zagreb as conveyed in the socialist period; this settles “old debts” by adding “cultural content and urban situations” (Mrduljaš 2009, 44) to a predominantly residential neighbourhood. Although numerous urban experts and local voices disapprove of the fact that malls are developing into “the new meeting, entertainment, and cultural hubs of the city” (Cavrić and Nedović-Budić 2007, 406), they do recognize their growing importance in producing neighbourhood centres. To some extent, the overall visual appearance of the shopping mall – facades in the shape of a rectangle as well as the adjunct tower with its rigid geometry – corresponds with the visuality of the socialist layer. The surroundings are also acknowledged and literally reflected in the mirroring of the elements of the facade.

### 1.1.2 Museum

Apart from criticism concerning commercial spaces sprouting up in socialist neighbourhoods, there developed also some cultural institutions. The idea of placing a museum of modern and contemporary art or architecture in these areas appears in several post-Yugoslav cities. Some were built during the socialist period (Museum of Modern Art in New Belgrade), some repurposed older structures (such as the Museum of Architecture and Design in Fužine on the outskirts of Ljubljana), and others, like the Museum of Contemporary Art in New Zagreb, were constructed after the 1990s. Traces of a socialist past are abundant in the Museum of Contemporary Art (Il. 1). The shape of the building, a zig-zag meander, pays homage to artist Julije Knifer and to the recurring motif of his paintings. Julije Knifer was a member of the neo-avant-garde group Gorgona (1959–1966), and one of the most well-known Yugoslav artists at the time. To a large extent, the backbone of the collection – modernist art (though tailored for new national borders) – was created in Yugoslavia, coinciding with the construction of New Zagreb. Public institutions such as the museum embody the importance given to public space during the socialist period.

Although the shopping mall and the museum in the core of New Zagreb function as a partial fulfilment of urbanist plans for this part of the town, they are not devoid of tensions, as evident in the change of inscriptions.

The name of the nearest tram station, initially "Siget" (named after a part of New Zagreb), was in 2009 renamed to "Museum of Contemporary Art," while the name of the shopping mall is omitted, thereby demonstrating a symbolical hierarchy by privileging a public institution over commercial establishments.

### 1.1.3 Church

While both the museum and the shopping mall occupied a vacant spot in the neighbourhood, the Catholic Church of Saint Luke the Evangelist (Il. 2) was built on the green surface between high-rises, which had been used as a lawn and park. During the socialist period, the parish gathered in an apartment because of the dismissive attitude of the socialist regime towards religion, so after the regime changed, the need for a proper building was palpable. However, the choice of location – the generously proportioned green surface in the neighbourhood of Travno, surrounded by high-rises and therefore protected from traffic – generated vocal protests in the local community. The opponents repeatedly stated that they were not against the construction of a church, emphasizing that the majority of them were believers themselves, but they opposed the destruction of one of the biggest parks in the neighbourhood. A similar struggle started in 2013 in Savica, a Zagreb neighbourhood (bordering New Zagreb) consisting of housing stock predominantly from the socialist period. Again, the initiative clearly dissociates itself from anti-Catholic sentiments – the subheading on the web page reads "We do want a church in Savica, but we certainly don't like it when someone builds in the park" (Čuvamo naš park, 2013).

Although the location of the church does collide with the initial spatial ordering through its desecularization and reduction of green surfaces, its formal language is not a demonstrative antithesis to the surroundings, confirming the thesis that "[t]he overcoming of socialist urbanization strategies (...) can involve alternative articulations of the modern" (Kip and Sgibnev, 2014, p. 4). Moreover, the architectural mass, a horizontally oriented rectangle and the short, broad bell tower, repeat the outline and height variations of the neighbouring "Mammoth," the biggest housing estate in Zagreb, with more than 5,000 residents in a single building. The use of unadorned materials, especially concrete, also resonates with the visuality of mass housing buildings.

How can we make sense of the visuality of this church within the urban fabric? In a socialist-built environment, the church seems to be caught in a paradoxical ambivalence between acceptance and rejection. By claiming the most favourable of locations in the neighbourhood, the church wants to establish a substantial and privileged presence in the neighbourhood and inscribe itself as an allegedly secular space produced by socialist urbanism. At the same time, through the visual harmony with the surroundings, the impression created is the one of continuity – of religion always having been part of the neighbourhood.



Il. 1 Myriam Thyes, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, 2012.



Il. 2 Kristina Kos, The Church of St. Luke the Evangelist, Zagreb, 2019.





Il. 3 Lea Horvat, Graffiti in Ljubljana, 2018.



Il. 4 DAZ, City Acupuncture in Trnje, Zagreb, 2013.

## 1.2 Interventions

Apartment buildings and their surroundings are subject to many minor revisions, whether executed by the dwellers in their apartments or on public surfaces. The term "intervention" in this context refers to this kind of change, technically executable by an individual or a smaller group – unlike large-scale interpolations of architectural masses. Some of them are the acts of individuals (like closing off the balcony or installing new window frames) while others are organized by NGOs pursuing ideas of urban renewal or refurbishment. What are the specifics of interventions in mass housing districts? Who intervenes and for what purpose? Do the interventions counter the scripted socialist urbanity or do they enhance it? How sustainable and durable are the interventions?

A variety of materials, styles, and techniques of informal roof extensions are implemented in order to improve insulation, increase the effective space of the apartment, maximize profit, or express one's aesthetic preferences (Quadflieg and Theune 2015). A more or less conscious "subversion of the mass housing uniformity" (Bartetzky, 2010, p. 24) is limited to countries where the apartments have become the private property of the residents. In such cases, there is mostly no consensus among neighbours and so the facade, once a unified face of the building, reflects heterogeneity and individuality but also a growing social inequality (Petrović and Backović, 2009, p. 65).

The vertical planes of mass housing facades have shown to be a marvellous canvas for all kinds of murals due to their vast surface. Some of them were artistically elaborated during the socialist period and embellished with murals, reliefs, or mosaics (Meuser, 2015, pp. 307-341), while other additions, such as graffiti and advertisements, came in the post-socialist period. In 2018, graffiti created by the Bad Blue Boys, a group of local soccer fans, appeared in Dugave, a neighbourhood on the margins of New Zagreb. Taking up the whole width of the building, the picture includes the coat of arms of the local soccer club, a blurred herd of fans and their mascot – a bulldog, and architectural symbols of downtown Zagreb as well as quite a few mass housing estates, all accompanied by the text "and our songs will be sung again" and a banner proclaiming "Dugave." The elaborate labour-intensive mural not only communicates fidelity to the soccer club but also indicates a symbolic domination, interlinking the local identity of Dugave with soccer fans. The fact that this and similar graffiti often stay undamaged indicates that they have successfully established themselves as a crucial local identity.

Many graffiti bear explicit political messages, primarily from the extremes of the political spectrum. Numerous messages are examples of hate speech and, in New Zagreb, they often relate to the fascist puppet state, the Independent State of Croatia established during WWII. When such messages continue to exist in the public space, they indicate the tolerance or powerlessness of local authorities towards such illegal activities as well

as the passivity of other inhabitants. An example from one of the mass housing settlements in Ljubljana, Slovenia, shows a different story – where the verbal clash between fascist and antifascist fractions is transforming into graffiti (re)writing. For example, the rightist graffiti "Destroy cultural Marxism" became "Develop cultural Marxism" (Il. 3) with the change of a single letter, while the ominous Nazi greeting was turned into "Sieg fail." The dynamics of the conflict is emphasized through the use of binary colours: the initial message in black was visibly modified by white spray (with a white heart added over the term *cultural Marxism*). Instead of painting over the whole message, the tension, the wit, and the (temporary) gesture of having the final say played an important role.

During the last few decades, mass housing estates all over Europe have become the target of many non-profit initiatives and NGOs and their short-term projects. Most such attempts value public space and interest over commercial uses and privatization, and therefore do resonate with a socialist legacy. At the same time, by singling out mass housing estates as especially troublesome areas in need of urban first aid, they reinforce negative stereotypes and, although well-meant, rarely "offer long-term development perspectives" (Bartetzky 2010, 28). One of them, City Acupuncture, a series of projects in ex-Yugoslav cities, took place in Savica in 2013. Interdisciplinary groups of experts, activists, and young professionals from all over ex-Yugoslavia gathered for a week and developed a series of small-scale interventions based on theoretical input, conversations with locals, and a viewing of the area. As the name suggests, City Acupuncture is focused on interventions of limited scope, aimed not at solving complex structural and infrastructural problems but to foster participative, bottom-up urbanism and enhance public spaces (Careva, Lisac, Pletenac, and Vukić 2017, 192). Due to the restrictions in budget, time, and expected outcome, the projects mostly stayed on the surface, even literally so, resulting in interventions based on the technique of overpainting. The intervention InOut (Il. 4) transformed a rather dark underpass, not well maintained, by using bright yellow as a canvas for quotes from locals, while the project OTW used the same colour to refresh and highlight a shabby pedestrian bridge.

A similar project took place from 2013 to 2016 in Ljubljana. Organized by the NGO ProstoRož, its focus was on public space in the mass housing district of Savsko Naselje with a series of realizations such as a large-scale mural on the basketball playground and a colourful refurbishment of children's playgrounds. Like City Acupuncture, ProstoRož favoured a "micro-scale identification" of urban issues (Velkavrh and Korenjak 2017, 175) and customized, context-sensitive interventions. Both actions were dedicated to the promotion, extension, and improvement of public spaces in line with their urbanist tradition of a socialist settlement. With a splash of bright colour(s), they visually point to the neglected public surfaces in order to remind locals of the existence of public spaces, which are meanwhile endangered and reduced by private interests, and to motivate them to (re) appropriate them. However, they communicate this through contemporary

aesthetics devoid of references to the style of (socialist) modernism and rely predominantly on young creatives with a hipster touch. Due to the neoliberal project logic, such interventions tend to literally and figuratively stay on the surface; their sustainability depends to a large extent on the readiness of the locals to maintain and develop them further.

### 1.3 Images

Not only material substance but also media images constitute the identity of mass housing districts, be it in contemporary periodicals, movies, literature, or in online or private family archives. Making sense of mass housing districts depends greatly on mediated image(s). Who produces them, and for whom? Which scenes, themes, and people get coverage and which do not, and why it is so? Much research has been done on the negative image of mass housing estates – depicted as ghettos, dangerous crime scenes, the hopeless refuge of addicts, the poor and unemployed; as well as on the impact of such imagery on the housing market and life quality in these neighbourhoods (Diehl, 2014; Urban, 2012; Haller, 2002). Although the perception from the outside is an unquestionably important aspect, I want to highlight the agency of the locals and their self-conscious medialization as a work of musealization and heritagization, since such endeavours are largely under represented in the overall picture about mass housing.

In 2010, the Museum of the City of Zagreb showed the exhibition "Half-Century of Trnsko: A Story of a Generation." Trnsko prides itself on being the first residential neighbourhood built since the early 1960s as a part of the New Zagreb, and in the early 2000s its inhabitants started to collect archival materials (mostly old photographs) online, in the "Virtual Museum of Trnsko" (Strukić, 2010). The Facebook page initiated by the locals is active to this day, and people contribute not only old images but also the memories, stories, and legends connected to them. For example, one of the old photos reposted on Facebook depicts the local photo atelier, and two commenters nostalgically voice their experiences of the studio: "my first photos, I still have them <3" and "they photographed the whole wedding and could fit 30-40 people into their studio" (Virtualni Muzej Trnskog 2018). In a similar online project – "Old images of New Belgrade" – a community with a shared interest in the history of New Belgrade congregates. It is no coincidence that the process of self-conscious heritagization, the articulation of neighbourhoods as sites of noteworthy history saturated with affect and memories, took off in Trnsko, one of the oldest Yugoslav mass housing neighbourhoods, and in New Belgrade, "capital of Yugoslav modernity" (Le Normand, 2014, p. 103). The passage of time facilitates both the community-building (since the neighbours had half a century to create connections with other locals) and the awareness of historical value. Older socialist neighbourhoods such



as Trnsko had more time to foster a sense of belonging and the condition of "urban localism" (Gulin Zrnić 2009, 194-208). Additionally, one can conclude that the distinctive status of respective urban projects during the socialist period continues in the post-socialist period.

The self-organized heritagization of local urban history rests on the digitalization of the sources for a visual history (original footage, photos, postcards etc). Such a mixture of the old and the new, analogue and digital, offers a time capsule image of the carefully preserved past on one hand while simultaneously enabling connections with the present on the other – predominantly through means of (in)direct comparisons. By raising awareness of the historical value of the buildings and neighbourhoods via both online communities and local initiatives (e.g. educational walks aimed at locals organized in some of New Belgrade's blocs), we can draw attention to traces of the past, making them visible and activating their commemorative potential. They are often visible exclusively to those who know to look for them; therefore, a more layered image of production and circulation is still mostly confined to the locals.

## Concluding remarks

Unlike in the former GDR, American projects, some of the dwellings built in European social democracies and – more recently – Russia, mass housing in former Yugoslavia experienced neither large-scale demolitions nor a noteworthy vacancy rate; the materiality and function of the socialist layer are still relatively well-preserved. As the examples have shown, the visuality of post-socialist additions has a capacity to transmit various messages: it is a canvas for the visualization of local identity, a site of conflict and struggle for meaning, a mine of personal and local histories. Next to style, further factors crucial in the construction of meaning based on comparison between socialist and post-socialist plans include location (original plans for the area) and the drafted function of the addition. The choice of form, function, and location can therefore convey diverse stories and relations to the socialist past.

Post-socialist urban imagery emerges as a heterogeneous set of visual practices (un)intentionally designed to harmonize with the urbanity traced out in the socialist period or to contest it. Stylistic continuity, the decision for the neo-modernist forms resembling the surrounding built environment, can encompass antithetical ideas. Some projects, like the central area of New Zagreb, with the Museum of Contemporary Art and the shopping mall, work towards a completion of the urbanist goals from a previous period; others, like the Church of Saint Luke the Evangelist, go against the grain of socialist planning. Conversely, a continuation of socialist urbanist ideas can, as in case of ProstoRož and City Acupuncture,

diverge from the modernist aesthetic. All changes subsumed under the umbrella of post-socialism are not a monolithic constant, existing outside time and space. For example, large-scale interpolations only appear since the 2000s and not immediately in the 1990s – a delay caused by the civil war. Furthermore, a rise in the activities of a civil society coincides with the process of European integration fostering such initiatives.

Finally, the tripartite model for approaching (dis)continuities of socialist visuality and urban values in the post-socialist built environment, including architecture (interpolations), surface (interventions), and virtual images (interpretations), calls for a place-sensitive approach and demonstrates the importance of looking at the micro-level of the neighbourhoods. Mass housing neighbourhoods are not an amorphous mass, and, accordingly, they do show varying strategies and options for dealing with the socialist layer. The former areas of special importance, such as the pioneer neighbourhood of Trnsko, tend to maintain a distinctive position. Even in the context of a prevalent rejection of the socialist regime, socialist material substance continues to be an important (although not always widely readable) factor in the visual articulation of post-Yugoslav cities.

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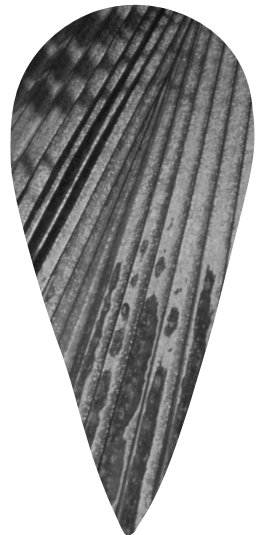
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## Keywords

HIV and AIDS  
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# Imaging AIDS in Kenya: A periodized historic- religious analysis of billboard messages on HIV and AIDS

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## Abstract

Since the first diagnosis of HIV in Kenya, approximately 34 years ago, AIDS messages have dominated the public spaces in visual forms. However, these messages have changed as the epidemic mutated over the years. The following article uses a periodization tool to analyse 23 images and visual messages that have been erected on billboards and are available on in online archives. I argue that AIDS activists, governments, and non-governmental organizations have organized AIDS messages over the years in order to elicit certain behaviours, attitudes, and information on the disease. At the same time, these messages are a product of a society actively engaged with communicating and building perceptions on the disease. Ranging from the scary messages of the 1990s to hopeful messages from the 2000s, AIDS public images have in many ways exacerbated, though in other ways mitigated, the impact of the disease and its spread.



## Introduction

Many scientists stress the great importance of periodization for historical research (Grinin, 2007). "Human thought cannot but divide the historical process into certain periods," as Ilya M. Gurevich correctly observed (Gurevich, 1993). Leonid Grinin has argued that "periodisation is a very effective method to analyse and order material" (Grinin, 2007). However, he warns that "it deals with exceptionally complex phenomena of process, development, and temporal types and inevitably roughens and simplifies historical reality" (Grinin, 2007). Similarly, Dietrich Gerhard was very articulate on the intrinsic value of periodization as an artificial tool. He wrote

The historian knows that any division of time into definite periods is artificial (...) even in the midst of upheavals and utter destruction there is no complete break with the past. Fragments of forms, whether of institutions or of buildings, are put back together and the old forms often reappear. Furthermore, the intensive historical research of the past few generations has increasingly revealed the complexity of every age. Old traditions persist while at the same time many different sources contribute to the formation of new currents. Yet (...) the historian must rely on the abstract generalizations to give order and meaning to the complexity of history. (Gerhard, 1956)

Therefore, any periodization is one-sided and may differ from reality. However, these simplifications serve as arrows pointing to a more nuanced understanding of the past (Grinin, 2007). In this article, I shall use the periodization tool to analyse AIDS messages placed on billboards in Kenya since the first diagnosis in 1984. A total of 23 billboard images were retrieved from online archives through various search engines. I shall argue that 4 of the 23 images, all of which were published during the 1980s, had a clear message of creating fear of AIDS, whereas 5 of the 24 images, all of which were published during the 1990s, had a characteristic message of simply providing more information on AIDS. Similarly, fourteen images from the 2000s were clearly intended to empower readers regardless of their HIV status.

## Literatures on Religious History of AIDS in Africa

Recent works on the history of AIDS have tended to concentrate on the African continent. This is an expected trend given the explosive nature of the epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. With a few exceptions (Muoki, 2016), not much has been done on the history of religious responses to the AIDS epidemic in specific African countries. One popular publication on the history of HIV and AIDS in Africa is John Iliffe's *The African HIV/AIDS Epidemic: A History* in 2006. Iliffe attempts to answer the intriguing question of why Africa has the highest rate of zero-prevalence in the world? (Iliffe, 2005) The former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, attempted to answer the same question by attributing the African HIV and AIDS epidemic to poverty and exploitation (Cohen, 2000). Iliffe "stresses historical sequence: that Africa had the worst epidemic because it had the first epidemic established in the general population before anyone knew the disease existed" (Iliffe, 2005). Iliffe attempts to demonstrate that the HIV virus not only originated from Africa but, more importantly, spread in the continent for many years before it was actually diagnosed. Therefore, according to Iliffe, the African epidemic is more severe because of the pre-existing history of AIDS. Iliffe's major contribution is his mapping of the paths of the African epidemic. He not only outlines the geographical distribution of the epidemic along a timeframe but also anticipates the future course of the epidemic on the basis of its previous record. However, Iliffe does not answer all questions. Apart from raising the hypothesis that the Islamic social order may have limited the transmission of the disease in the savannah region – i.e. Mali, Niger, Chad, zones of extremely low HIV prevalence – his work does not satisfactorily explain why Western Africa experienced a less severe epidemic compared to other regions such as Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa. He also does not explain his assertion that the "AIDS virus originated in Africa" (Halperin & Epstein, 2007).

Philippe Denis and Charles Becker made an argument like that of Iliffe's in their co-edited volume published in French in 2006 under the title *L'épidémie du sida en Afrique subsaharienne. Regards historiens* (Denis & Becker, 2006). Their work was enriched by its multidisciplinary and multinational approach to AIDS, made possible by the wide range of specialties of its fifteen contributors. The book maintains a historical perspective. Apart from a brief section in Paul Kocheleff's chapter, there is no reference to religion. Indeed, its multidisciplinary approach fails to include theologians and ethicists. Arguably, it is this deficiency that led Denis to do a survey of religious influence on the epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa in a 2009 paper entitled *AIDS and Religion in sub-Saharan Africa in a Historical Perspective* (Haddad, 2011). He was convinced that out of the few authors who studied HIV and AIDS as an historical phenomenon, only

a few paid attention to the role of religion in the epidemic. Denis not only raised serious objections to Iliffe's hypothesis that the Islamic social order had limited the transmission of the disease in Africa but also showcased how religion had influenced public discourses in the areas of prevention, treatment and care.

The views of medical doctors have not been lacking in writings on the history of HIV and AIDS. They were highly represented in the 2007 work of Salim Karim and Abdool Karim, entitled *HIV/AIDS in South Africa* (Salim Karim and Abdool Karim, 2007). This work could rightly be referred to as a South African medical AIDS encyclopaedia in a historical perspective. The contributors to this volume covered nearly "all aspects of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, from basic science to medicine, sociology, economics, and politics" with a fine-tooth comb (Salim Karim and Abdool Karim, 2007). The authors covered the evolution of the epidemic in South Africa and its direction, as well as the prevention strategies employed in the country. They also deal with the new prevention strategies under development. Chapter 21, one of the authors' personal and remarkably frank memoir of how she became infected and what it was like to live with the stigma of HIV as a middle-class woman in South Africa between 1996 and 2005, is insightful (Salim Karim and Abdool Karim, 2007). The book is, however, silent on the religious response to the disease. Although it speaks extensively about the fallibility of condoms in HIV prevention, it does not address the religious aspect of the condom controversy.

Arguably, the most resourceful medical history of HIV and AIDS is the work of Gerald Oppenheimer and Ronald Bayer. The two Americans conducted research in South Africa during four extended visits between 2003 and 2005. They interviewed medical doctors who had worked in HIV and AIDS clinics and published their findings in 2007 under the title *Shattered Dreams? An Oral History of the South African AIDS Epidemic* (Oppenheimer & Bayer, 2007). Their work is unique in two ways. First, it is a narrative based on interviews. Second, and most important, it is the first work that gives accounts of the history of the disease in Africa during the early years of the epidemic. Most works on AIDS ignore the 1980s in Africa altogether. Not so with Oppenheimer and Bayer's work, which goes into detail, depicting the struggles of gay doctors in dealing with a South African "gay plague" that was totally ignored by the apartheid government. However, their focus is slightly different from that of the present study: they focus largely on a medical narrative and, apart from religion being depicted as a motivating factor for the doctors in their unrelenting care and treatment effort in an impoverished medical sector, their study had almost nothing to do with religion. Needless to say, Oppenheimer and Bayer's work is eye-opening in its understanding of the missed opportunities in responding to the early signs of the AIDS epidemic.

## A Brief History of AIDS in Kenya

HIV was first diagnosed in Kenya in 1984, and in the following year the National AIDS Committee was established (Kabiru, Luke, Izugbara, & Zulu, 2010). Retrospective tests of 1980 blood samples from Nairobi commercial sex workers (CSW) showed zero HIV prevalence, whereas those of 1981 indicated a prevalence of 4%. Prevalence among this social group in Nairobi peaked at 81% in 1988 (National AIDS Council South Africa, 2011). The 1980s epidemic in Kenya coincided with the introduction of conditionality on International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank loans, tagged as "Structural Adjustment Policies" (SAP). This to some extent fuelled AIDS myths and the general neglect of the epidemic by the government. Apart from the 1988 issuance of guidelines by Kenya's Ministry of Health, stating that patients should be told their HIV status, and the 1989 order by President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi ordering the quarantine of people with HIV and AIDS (which was quietly ignored), there is not much that the government did during the entire 1980s (Gilbert et al., 2007). In contrast, in the international scene, various efforts were made to respond to the epidemic, including the 1987 launch of the WHO Global Programme on AIDS (AIDS, 2017).

During the 1990s, the government attempted to sustain a denialist propaganda, but the odds were too many and obvious. By then, an estimated 7.5 million people were living with HIV globally, whereas in Kenya, HIV incidence (the number of new infections per year) peaked at 2%. A year later, the prevalence in the Rift Valley province was reported to be at 14% and yet President Moi still publicly refused to admit that the HIV epidemic had become national in scope. The general perception was that transmission was coming from the Western Equatorial region via Uganda and perhaps via Tanzania (Simon, 2009). In 1994, prevalence peaked in Western Province at 17% and the government at last acknowledged that HIV was a critical issue. Meanwhile, in 1995 Kenya's blood stocks were found to be unsafe. Again, the government denied that this posed a major problem (Grant, Djomand, & De, 1997).

During the last half of 1990s, myriad indicators showed that the AIDS situation was getting even worse. In 1995, it was reported that whereas over 17.5 million people were living with AIDS globally, and that prevalence in Nairobi had reached 17%, national prevalence was estimated at between 10 and 14%. As more people died of AIDS-related complications, the attention of the nation was drawn to a 1996 statement by a Kenyan cardinal, who condemned the use of condoms to prevent HIV infection. The voice of religious leaders continued to form a large part of the AIDS debate, as when in 1997 President Moi bowed to pressure from religious leaders and shelved sex education plans on the eve of national elections. The year 1998 was a watershed in the sense that it a large number of Kenyan public sector employees died as a result of AIDS, a key factor that led President Moi to declare AIDS a national disaster while publicly refusing



to distribute condoms in schools (Smith & Whiteside, 2010). Meanwhile, UNAIDS was formed and the Kenyan parliament approved a 15-year national AIDS policy and formed the National AIDS Council (WHO, 2009).

The 2000s portrayed a totally different scenario as far as HIV and AIDS in Kenya is concerned. With an estimated 27.5 million people living with AIDS globally, Moi secured support from Christian and Muslim leaders by rejecting condoms and recommending abstinence during his run up to the elections in 2001. In 2002, the newly elected president, Mwai Kibaki, declared a total war on AIDS. However, corruption proved to be a major hurdle as the 2003 Global Fund grants were withheld because of misappropriation allegations. Kenya was among the first countries in Africa to start rolling out antiretroviral drugs in 2005, and one of the earliest to report a decline in HIV transmission levels in 2007. Unlike South Africa, where there was a heated debate on treatment and an extended government denialism, Kenya took the opportunity during the regime change to take up new interventions (National AIDS Council South Africa, 2011). However, it fared poorly compared to its westward neighbour, Uganda, which was showcased for an earlier and more open-minded response to the epidemic on various fronts, including medical, governmental, and religious fronts (Kharsany & Karim, 2016).

## Scary Messages of the 1980s

The four billboard images of the 1980s analysed in this study were displayed at different places, such as markets and by the roads. Although their messages on HIV and AIDS varied, they had one thing in common – to instil the fear of AIDS in the public. The first billboard presents the image of a very thin and weak person, characteristic of the people dying of AIDS. Then the words *"Ukimwi huua, bado haina tiba"* are written in red in Kiswahili; translated into English the mean: "AIDS kills, there is still no cure." The pictures of drugs and syringes beneath are intended to depict the desperation experienced by those sick with AIDS in a helpless search for cure. The colour red is specifically as a mark of danger and death. The second billboard shows a sexy woman and the words "HIV Positive" written in red. The message is very clear, that sex is equal to AIDS. It is a direct association of sexual intercourse with the disease of AIDS. Notably, the woman has crossed her fingers as a sign that undertaking sexual intercourse is a very risky affair. The third billboard contains a picture of footprints in red, and the words "HIV loves sleeping around" are handwritten. The message is simple – if you are having sexual intercourse with multiple partners, you will probably contract HIV. The fourth billboard contains a picture of many people – male, female, young, and elderly. In red is written in Meru, the language spoken by a community that live in central Kenya: *"Muntu wonthe oomba kugwatwa ni AIDS imenyeerei"*; in English: "Any person can get AIDS. Be careful."

During the 1980s, AIDS was hardly understood, hence its popular nickname "the silent killer." The general assumption was that if we can tell people how dangerous this disease is, they will change their behaviour and AIDS will be stopped (Omar Alleyne-Lawler, Black History Month, 2015). This proved to be a big fallacy. The experience was well summarized by Ugandan epidemiologist Nibo Purm, when he said, "It all started as a rumour... Then we found we were dealing with a disease. Then we realised that it was an epidemic. And now we have accepted it as a tragedy" (Purm, <https://prezi.com/itwfopsndkyw/aids-in-africa/>: 2011).

## Informative Messages of the 1990s

The five visual messages recovered in this part of the study were published between 1990 and 1999. They differed significantly from the ones published in the 1980s in that, instead of creating unjustified fear of HIV and AIDS, they offer new information on the disease. They are simply informative and less judgemental. The image of emancipated and skeletal individuals has been replaced by healthy images with very inclusive language. For instance, the first is a billboard showing people in various professions, including a medical doctor, and the words "AIDS: We are all at risk so ... talk about AIDS, be faithful to your partner, use a condom properly every time" are clearly written. The second visual message is created in the form of a large hand-painting of a condom with the words: "It's safe to play and sleep using me." The third visual message is a hand-painted billboard using the analogy of a speeding car. It contains the picture of a car and the words: "Speed kills; so does AIDS so put on your brakes and learn about AIDS now." Similarly, the fourth one bears a picture of a track and the words: "Drive safely with protector plus condoms." The fifth message is created as a painting on the outside wall of a school classroom, along with the school logo. It is made up of the words: "Use a condom please." It is clear that passing from the 1980s to the 1990s, learning about AIDS replaced the emphasis on fear.

The messages described above are a product of society's perception of AIDS during the 1990s, when AIDS thrived due to people's lack of information about the epidemic and the prevention options. Kenyans, just like most other African states by then, felt that the key to AIDS prevention was awareness since knowledge would lead to behaviour change. This proved not to be the case, however, which drove the paradigm change during the 2000s.

## Empowering Messages of the 2000s

I have argued elsewhere (Joshua, 2010) that during the 2000s, activism permeated the AIDS discourses and activities in Africa to such an extent that the right to protection from infection, the right to treatment, the right to equality regardless of one's HIV status, the empowerment of women and the girl child, and the right to access information became very significant. Contrary to the 1980s where AIDS was primarily seen as a *moral issue* (Muoki, 2016) and the 1990s where it was seen as a *social issue* (Joshua, 2006), in the 2000s AIDS was seen as a *human rights issue* in the sense that discourses tended to champion the rights of People Living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) in almost all spheres of the epidemic. Contrary to the 1980s' perception that PLWHA were victims of individual immoral behaviour, and the 1990s' perception that PLWHA were simply bearing the consequences of structural social evils such as colonialism and apartheid, during the 2000s, PLWHA were perceived as those deprived of basic human rights such as gender equality, treatment, and care. This new paradigm was born during the 13th International AIDS Conference held in Durban, South Africa, between 9 and 14 July, 2000, when more than 500 individuals shouting AIDS slogans marched around the Durban International Conference Centre (DICC), the venue, during the entire conference proceedings (Bradshaw et al., 2003).



This image was taken by the BBC on 8 May 2018 and published under <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22449314>.

The denialist ideals of President Thabo Mbeki and the treatment activism that followed set the stage for the perception that AIDS disproportionately affects the poor, women, and the weak in society (Mbali, 2005).

There were 14 visual messages published after the year 2000, which were retrieved and analysed. Their content significantly differed from those of the 1990s in that they went beyond passing information to recipients; instead, they ascribed power and responsibility, and championed the rights of people with HIV or AIDS. For instance, the first gives the information that it is your right to know your HIV status; the second that it is within your power to "think positively"; and the third that "real men" go for HIV testing with their partners. There is an underlying message intended by the publisher: as far as prevention methods are concerned, one can choose and use any accordingly. The sixth and ninth visual messages are particularly clear on this, showing images of individuals who have chosen abstinence and condoms, respectively. This must be seen in the context of the prevention debates that had permeated the 1990s and the better part of the early 2000s. Religion and governments preferred one method against another. Six of the 14 visual messages deal with prevention methods and the right of individuals to choose. The right to choose life by going for a test, thinking positively or otherwise, is a common denominator in all the 14 billboard messages of the 2000s. Phrases such as: "I am in charge with condoms," "I am abstaining," and "Stop AIDS, Love Life, the choice is in your hands" displayed in different forms depict the new official attitude. A sharp contrast between messages from 1980s, which equated AIDS to death, is captured in the last image which contains the sentence: "HIV, AIDS, TB, Cancer, and other diseases are not a death sentence."

## Billboards as a Space for Debate

The AIDS epidemic in Africa has not been without controversies and debates. The most prevalent debate, which has persisted during the entire epidemic, is the prevention debate, especially as it relates to the use of condoms.

The better part of the debate was moral and religious. The Catholic Church has been at the centre of this debate due to its position on contraceptives (Freidman, 1995). Such controversies have been documented both globally and in specific African states. Whereas the same debate thrived in Kenya, a billboard erected in Nairobi in May 2013 by an American-based group of Catholics, Catholics for Choice, in its "condoms4life" campaign, caught the attention of the nation (McMorrow, Lagerwey, & Ford, 2013). The billboard shows a smiling couple with the slogan: "Good Catholics Use Condoms." "We believe in God. We believe that sex is sacred. We believe in caring for each other. We believe in using condoms," the advert states. But Cardinal John Njue, chairman of the Kenya Conference of Catholic



Bishops, said the church promoted pro-life, not pro-choice. "Catholics for Choice are not Catholics in the sense of the one, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church," he said in a statement. Cardinal Njue called for the advertisements to be pulled down.

Catholics for Choice said it launched its campaign after pressure from religious groups forced the Kenyan government to drop an advertisement in March promoting condom use in marriage. "The campaign is vital because the bishops' recent activities are not representative of Catholic teachings or beliefs. Catholics do support the use of condoms, and they do use them to protect themselves and their partners," campaign co-ordinator Jon O'Brien explained. Rosita Deluigi rightly observed that (Deluigi, 2018) "regarding visual language, we are not merely passive users of images, but producers of images also. We are immersed in visual communication between the real and the virtual." W. J. T Mitchell and Deluigi agree that "we live in a world populated with images and we relate to forms of representation and narrative that become active subjects of our lives" (Mitchell, 2005). Hence the Catholic Church and the Kenyan community at large engaged with the AIDS images, and the reactions were sometimes spontaneous and divisive, leading to demonstrations.

## Conclusion

The publishers of the AIDS images since the 1980s were certainly very intentional in the messages they intended to communicate. However, the changing perceptions of the AIDS disease and epidemic largely reshaped these messages. In a fusion of Kenyans relating to the visual messages and the re-formulation of identities, images became a space for public engagement with the disease. During the 1980s, the messages elicited fear whereas in the 1990s they became sources of information. It was in the 2000s that billboards became spaces for AIDS debate, human rights activism, and deeper attitudinal reflection. Visual messages in Kenya have continued to provide a tangible image of an invisible life-threatening epidemic that the society is still grappling with to date.

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The monograph "Urban Visuality, Mobility, Information and Technology of Images" focuses on contemporary problems of the architectural and urbanist environment from the point of view of social environmental psychology and theory. Authors of the subsequent chapters come from various countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, and Kenya) and together they present multiple evidences for the need of transcultural visual literacy in symbolic interactions in the urban sphere.

**"The multidimensional presentation of urban visual and technological environment found in the book is certainly a valuable scientific publication within social and cultural sciences, inspiring the readers sensibility for the quality of visual solutions in architectural spaces for deep research in contemporary urban visual culture."**

-Prof. Wojciech Walat

