
Sant'Elia's narrative spaces. In/Visible geographies from the margin of the city

Maurizio Memoli*¹ and Silvia Aru[†]

¹Università di Cagliari (DICAAR - UNICA) – via Santa Croce, 67, 09124 - Cagliari, Italy

Abstract

This paper focuses on Sant'Elia, a district of low-income citizens in Cagliari (Italy). Sant'Elia is a part of a case study that was included in a broader research project titled "Giustizia spaziale e sistemi territoriali mediterranei. Politiche urbane, pratiche sociali, mobilità" about urban marginality and socio-spatial justice in different Mediterranean cities, including Marseille, Fes, Tunis. Strongly stigmatized for being "at the margins" of the city, Sant'Elia displays some degraded socio-economic conditions, but its own inhabitants have a strong sense of identity and belonging.

The main aim of the project – carried out in cooperation with professional photographers and film-makers – was to acquire a collection of words, narrations and images of the district with the goal of creating an example of "Community storytelling" about Sant'Elia, made of the spatial representations offered by (some of) its inhabitants. To this end, we accepted the hypothesis that "l'observation est une pratique sociale avant d'être une méthode scientifique" (observation is a social practice before being a scientific method) (Arborio & Fournier, 1999, pp.5-6).

The three years' fieldwork has allowed us to access Sant'Elia from a different angle, which is not necessarily in contrast with the traditional representation of this district. The result is the web-doc "Sant'Elia". Frammenti di uno spazio quotidiano" (*Sant'Elia. Fragments of an everyday space*), <http://webdoc.unica.it/santelia/index.php>. What we achieved was to see a multi-layered reality made of ideas, emotions, perceptions, experiences and hopes that its inhabitants expressed. This is also coupled with our own perception and interpretation of the stories we heard during the fieldwork. Indeed, the project aimed to gather practices and representations derived from the interaction between "us" (the research team) and "them" (the inhabitants / participating communities).

Our approach lies at the intersection between visual methodologies and spatial analysis and is inspired by the non-representational theory (Thrift 2008). The geographical perspective we propose is therefore not meant to be representative; rather, it is aimed to express a multiplicity of knowledge strategies related to the emotions and affects that link people and places (Bochet, Racine, 2002). This is the main scientific result of our research project, which will be also used in the near future for dissemination purposes. Therefore, we will first introduce and explain the videos. Subsequently, we will describe the production process used to create the web-documentary that includes some of the inhabitants' narrations of their perception of the spaces they live in and the concept of "margin" they entail.

*Speaker

[†]Corresponding author: silviaaru8@gmail.com

Keywords: Community storytelling/participation/web, doc/non, representational theory/marginality/