

CITY PORTRAITS.

City Portraits is a series of conferences promoted by the Università Iuav di Venezia-School of Doctorate Studies and organized by its PhD students and doctors. The series will cover cities all over the world and address the subject of urban complexity from a variety of viewpoints, which is the only way to understand it. The cities of Beijing, Saint Petersburg, Sao Paulo, Istanbul, Mexico City, Jerusalem and Mumbai have already been retreated, and the next appointment of the series will be dedicated to the city of Berlin.

The aim of the conferences is not so much to summarize processes that are too complex to be the object of a small number of considerations, but rather to provide keys to the interpretation of important aspects of our contemporary nature, and to the understanding of how this nature is presented within those urban phenomena that more than anything else characterize it.

The conference will focus on cities that are particularly relevant for their historical importance and their present-day condition, capital cities or metropolises in every continent. For each city the reasons and the components of their diversity in a globalized world will be analyzed.

Historians, urban planners, architects, experts in design or economics, photographers, etc. will participate to the conferences. Each conference will be accompanied by an independently produced series of images (films, photographs, documentaries) by which means a specific city has been represented and made known to its inhabitants and to those beyond its boundaries.

Alberto Ferlenga, Director of the IUAV School of Doctorate Studies

DETROIT.

The portrait of Detroit is a proposal to reflect upon the **paradigms of growth and urban development**, by exploring the recent urban history of a city that for half a century was considered the metaphor of the “american dream”. Grown around the development of the manufacturing sector, Detroit faced a **seventy-year-long process of shrinkage and decline** bound to the weakening of the automotive system.

The impressive processes of **deindustrialization, depletion and abandonment** that have affected a great percentage of the Detroit area are partly the legacy of this breakdown. This significant condition is still ongoing today, and has been interpreted as the result of the pulling back of a system that for decades designed and shaped cityscape and local society. At the same time, the combination of some federal policies side effects, and the failure of several actions fostered at the local level, seem to have contributed to influence the city present state.

This situation of deep crisis has its clear **spatial evidence in the alteration of the lands of the city**, after a past season of urbanization, modification and layering of meanings, uses, values, identities. It is about almost 100 square kilometers of “non-virgin” territory, of unused, deserted, unpurposed “city-not-city” (“City/not”, Herron 2007).

The queries that emerge out of the Detroit case history question many theoretical fields. On the one hand it signals the urgent need to investigate on urban systems **shrinkage** and **degrowth**, on the **reuse** and the **recycling** of the built environment. On the other hand the reflection seems to cross more general regional and urban planning matters, dealing with the management and the design of “postmetropolises” (Soja, 2000), with the treatment of contemporary urban landscapes, and with the “city-ness” condition in present times (“City-ness”, Brenner 2009).

The Detroit portrait attempts to couple theoretical reflection to practice, suggesting a discussion that crosses the fields of experience, policy-making and planning. In this sense, the suggested frame considers those situations in which **the spatial characters of urban crisis seem to play a prominent role also as generative facts**. In Detroit the management, treatment and use of vacant lands have in some cases played a proactive role, providing opportunities to generate new “visions” and development occasions. The spatial perspective seems to intertwine to new concepts for built environment, the structuring of innovative forms of dialogue between local actors, the appearing of new spaces for citizenship and the invention of original urban identities.

Despite the extra ordinary bearing of the Detroit experience, the american case history seems to strongly undermine some of the typical categories reasearchers have used to interpret local systems. The call for new keywords and new paradigms to understand spatial phenomena can have more general references, specially considering the **recent global crisis and the effect it is generating on cities and regions all over the world**. From this perspective, this city portrait intends to walk a path that moves from the peculiarities of the Detroit vicissitudes to build a dialogue with other contexts.

For these reasons the conference programme is organized around a series of contributions that try to immerse into specifical matters bound to the michigander city as much as spreading the results of their reflection embracing a wider frame. Some lecturers will focus their attention on the roots of the urban crisis, highlighting its causes, interpreting the criticalities and potentialities of the present state. Some others will offer a more comparative perspective aimed at framing the Detroit urban processes in its relationship with other urban experiences (american and european).

The outlined issues and questions will guide the second section of the conference, focused on **the “operational” dimension of policies, plans and projects for the “vacant city”**. The aim is the collection, the comparison and the dialogue between **practices, projects and experiences related to the deindustrialization, neglection and abandonment of urban segments**, opening the reflection to the manifold reality of those cities of the world facing the different social and economic bearings of this kind of processes.

This combination of “voices” will be achieved through the lauching of an international call for papers focused on **urban reuse and recycling**. The principal keywords will be the ones originated by the framing of the Detroit case history, and a particular concern will be conferred to **planning and design practices dealing with degrowth and innovative local development strategies**. The issues explored in this section of the conference will finally be committed to investigate the **informal and temporary dimensions**, and the capability of this kind of actions on the urban environment to **invent new uses, to foster place-making, to generate new urban identities** as far as encouraging **innovative ways to engage local society**.

Chiara Lucchini, curator of the symposium

SYMPOSIUM PROGRAMME

Venice, 24th october 2013 | Turin, 31st october 2013.

“City Portraits. Detroit” is organized on two different appointments and locations. The first appointment will take place on **october 24th in Venice** (IUAV School of Doctores – Aula Tafuri). It will be structured around three sessions in which a group of american and european lecturers will discuss about the recent vicissitudes of this american city. Between one session and the other the potraying of the city will take a different perspective, leaving space to the gaze of cinema and photography. Beside the attempt of framing the Detroit urban condition, these two parallel paths aim at interpreting the american case history not only as a prime example, but also as a possibile field for the generation of questions to be used on the investigation of other contexts.

The second appointment will take place on **october 31st in Turin** (Politecnico di Torino – Castello del Valentino). It will be dedicated to the presentation of a series of contributions offered by researches, professionals and Ph.D. candidates, and collected through an international **call for papers**. In the call for papers the general set outlined by the Detroit portrait will be framed from the the abandoned urban land perspective. A special attention will be dedicated to the analysis of the role the treatment of voids and vacant lands plays in the policy-making, planning and design processes, as much as in informal and bottom-up practices or, more generally, in urban changeover experiences.

International call for papers:

The call for papers treats more closely **the “operational” dimension of policies, plans and projects for the “vacant city”**. The aim is the collection, the comparison and the dialogue between practices, projects and experiences related to the **deindustrialization, neglection and abandonment of urban segments**. The call is addressed not only to the “extra” ordinary detroiter condition, but also to the manifold reality of those cities of the world facing similar processes, even if with different bearings.

Then, the main focus of the call is on **urban recycling and reuse**, and on those planning practices more closely related to the treatment of **degrowth**, to **urban downsizing** and to the fostering of **new forms of local development**. A special concern will be granted to those contributions committed to investigate the informal and temporary dimensions, and the capability of this kind of actions on the urban environment to **invent new uses, to foster place-making, to generate new urban identities as far as encouraging innovative ways to engage local society**.

This dialogue between contexts and experiences is framed by the american case history, whose characters offer some possible keywords and suggest some possible filters to coincide the “vacant city”. In particular this call for papers encourages the candidates to present their contributions on urban reuse according to these four macro areas of reference:

- 1. **Reuse as a mean of “sense-making”**, a tool to generate new metaphors and new

images to conceive the urban system. The work on the “vacant city” as an occasion to explicit a different urban identity and to foster new “visions” for the future;

-2. **Reuse as a way to intervene on the urban body.** The work on the built environment as the handling of the urban fabric and as the physical alteration of the built assets of the city (i.e. single buildings, infrastructures but also city systems);

-3. **Interventions on the “space between things”.** Enduring or temporary void reinvention, collective spaces occupancy, public space inhabiting as ways to foster place-making, and to generate new shared significances for the urban.

-4. **Urban vacancy as an occasion for the development of new practices,** may they be informal or not. The availability of space as a condition that can favour the shaping of **new forms of citizenship.**

The proposals can refer to surveys, researches, analyses or original projects related not only to Detroit but also to other cities of the world facing comparable processes of deindustrialization, abandonment or shrinkage. According to the philosophy of the “City Portraits” series, our intention is to consider urban complexity from a **variety of viewpoints.** For this reason the call is addressed both to those interpretations moving along the architectural and urban studies and to contributions coming from contemporary arts, literature, visual arts and music.

Candidates will deliver an abstract in Italian or English, not longer than 2500 types (including spaces). If necessary, and to allow authors give a better description of their work, the abstract can include a maximum of 4 key words and a maximum of two images with captions. Jointly to the abstract the candidates will deliver a short curriculum vitae, not longer than 800 types (including spaces), and a personal file including name and surname of the author, date of birth, institution/university of reference, e-mail address.

Format and sending:

Text documents (abstract, curriculum vitae, personal file, captions) will be in .pdf or .doc format. Images will be free of copyright, and will have a 300 dpi minimum resolution (smallest side dimension: 17 cm).

Candidates can submit their proposals by sending all the files in a compressed folder to this e-mail address: detroitcityportrait@gmail.com. The compressed folder won't be larger than 2M.

Call for papers deadline:

10th July 2013. Call for papers launch --> **25th August 2013. Deadline for abstract submission**
8th September 2013. Notification of acceptance --> **20th October 2013. Full paper delivery**

For further informations and questions candidates can write to detroitcityportrait@gmail.com or visit the conference website detroitcityportrait.wordpress.com