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## **Shared Territories. Turin**

**Angelo Sampieri**

DIST - Interuniversity Department of Urban and Regional Studies and Planning  
Polytechnic University of Turin, [angelo.sampieri@polito.it](mailto:angelo.sampieri@polito.it)  
+39 348 2844406

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The contemporary city is strongly influenced by sharing. The term is ambiguous: it alludes to a consolidation of social relationships caused by the anxiety of individualisation. It assumes different forms, usually short-lived even when repeated. Examining shared territories means reasoning out of the box about the city and looking beyond certain more or less common clichés. It also means rethinking a project, emphasising the practices adopted in places, measuring their scope, persistence and continuity. This article will try and redesign a “shared territory” in Turin: an irregular section along the North Ring Road and the Stura river, stretching up to the Confluenza park and Barca-Betolla, passing through Falchera, the social housing neighbourhood in Corso Taranto, the Iveco industrial districts, and the malls of the northern suburbs. It’s a chance to explore the physical, social and symbolic dimension of this territory and rethink a project whose aim is to critically examine the way in which housing evolves.

## Sharing in the city<sup>1</sup>

Over a century and a half ago Ralph Waldo Emerson said «The people are to be taken in very small doses», urging his audience at Harvard to maintain a wise and firm balance between solitude and society. He explained «We must keep our head in the one and our hands in the other» (Emerson, 2008). Where the one was the space of intimacy, the critical scrutiny of oneself and the protection of others, and the other was the receptive space of one's friends and social circles - a legacy of the Fourier communities of that age. Emerson studied and discussed the reasons behind their failure and its implications (Urbinati, 2008) raising his concerns in *Society and Solitude*: those concerns and warnings are once again topical. Apart from the studies on the re-emergence of shared uses, resources and spaces - so important and influential in the transformation of contemporary European territories - even the nineteenth-century community experiences reveal their topical ambiguity.

Voluntary alliances and temporary aggregations, areas of structured or on the contrary fragmentary and disjointed communion, groups that demand ideologically-oriented rights, values and beliefs, instrumental convergences to achieve specific advantages. More frequently, an opportunity to position a shared meaning, fully aware of the transitory nature of the investment. Ways and forms of being together involving housing and other practices. Mobile, discontinuous groupings that come and go, leaving often weak and not very incisive traces. But also repeated rituals, with some claim to permanence. Hard, compact, negotiated and necessary groups, similar to others elsewhere. Ways and forms difficult to classify with distinctive, unambiguous traits, capable of clearly representing this phenomena. In such a way as to make its expression appear exaggerated compared to its real consistency. And yet, one trips over it all the time when examining the city, and not just the city.

Sociological, philosophical and economic studies all examined the phenomenon (Sennett, 2012), acknowledging the progressive weakening of the biographical solutions which for almost twenty years people had tried to assess using problems and systemic contradictions (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2001). Autonomy and independence no longer appear strong enough to make an impact. They have lost relevance, character, vitality. Individual profiles look like empty shells. The same way in which the recompositions that Bauman traced back to swarms were now rarefied and exhausted: instrumental, and not in the least passionate aggregates mainly devoted to consumption, forms of mechanical solidarity as a residual of modern forms of public relationships and interactions (Bauman, 2008). The response to an increasingly less exuberant and dynamic request for freedom and individual achievement does not lie in collectivism involving forced constraints and ceremonials. So much so that, compared to the past, moving beyond an individualised society and the end of a world of consumers (Bauman, 2008) is becoming increasingly topical.

However this reasoning isn't focused on waiting for a time when virtuous and participated forms of citizenship will be recreated within well-organised models of sharing, beyond the society of individuals, beyond the society of consumerism, beyond the liquid present (Russo, 2008; Brezzi, Russo, 2011). Instead it focuses on the theory that the weakening of biographical solutions and the reduction of the public sphere to protect and safeguard collective commitments and constraints now appears to create several more robust relationships as well as the usual tenuous and fragile, easily broken and, more often than not, short-lived relationships (Bauman, 2008). A concentration of exchanges, reciprocity and responsibilities determining an increase in certain practices. A concentration that takes places over time and in certain places, one which appears to emerge and increase while in others it declines and fades.

As the stage for sharing, urban places determine the material conditions within which sharing can occur. Places obstruct and contrast it; elsewhere they facilitate and make it possible by embracing, within more or less suitable spaces, the symbolic reasons and practices covering the entire range of the values at stake: desire for proximity and recognition, advantages and participative drives, solidarity attitudes of solidarity

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1 These considerations are born within a collective research conducted on the issues of sharing in the contemporary city. The hypotheses of the research, the first explorations and their results are on the blog: [www.territoridellacondivisione.wordpress.com](http://www.territoridellacondivisione.wordpress.com)



and radical requests, promotion of the new economies of us (Carlini, 2011). Different forms of collective resourcefulness aimed at providing services, sharing resources, offering safety and sharing interests. Until the places where we live express a sharper image of the phenomenon. Within a circumscribed and distinct space where, on the one hand, political, market and design interests converge to supply robust and well-defined forms of sharing and, on the other, make this supply diverge from the demand for sharing expressed by the inhabitants. Temporary, supple, fragile, a far cry from the more or less experimental forms of cohabitation currently being promoted (Bianchetti, 2011; Sampieri, 2011). A non-coincidence that encourages the in-depth study of the gap, disparities, approaches and contacts involved in trying to solve the problem using design and political solutions. Using formulas which, however, are repeated within the confines of chiefly contractual models aimed at the institutionalisation and solidification of the phenomenon within closed and internally well-structured formats. And as such, moderately incapable of providing expansion and complexity. Several districts in the city of Turin are trying something different. Different to housing, to old and new forms of publicised collective living. Different to neighbourhoods, to shared kitchen gardens and cultural and ethnic associationism. Or rather, by using all these conditions, but not inside the city. Along its borders, in their relationship with the city. In places where the consolidation of certain social ties are more exposed. Places which by overcoming their physical and symbolic borders speak about themselves as well as their immediate surroundings.

### **A sector through Falchera, Corso Taranto, Barca-Bertolla**

In Turin, some homogeneous parts of the city are located along the sector running from the North Ring Road and the Stura River, up to the Confluenza park and Barca-Bertolla, through the rough patches along the slip road to Caselle, the railway, the Iveco industrial district and the malls of the northern suburbs: Falchera, the social housing neighbourhood of Corso Taranto, Barca-Bertolla. Extremely recognisable twentieth-century settlements, yet very different: the satellite district built in the fifties with grass courtyards for community activities and shared services in the common areas between the residential blocks; the public city of the next decade, dense and severe in its repeated homogeneity along the main urban road; the low-density city on the margins of the last suburb which more or less nonchalantly includes what it encounters in its path: plots of cultivated countryside, farmhouses, small hamlets, infrastructure centres, market streets. Falchera, Corso Taranto and Barca Bertolla represented, and still represent, very different forms and ways of sharing the city. They are interesting to examine in order to understand the gaps, coincidences and, more often, the differences between these forms and the new forms of sharing, to comprehend whether they replicate or mirror the original forms, or whether they occur only within a neighbourhood. In this sense, Falchera, Corso Taranto, Barca Bertolla are places where it's easier to start a study, because they are recognisable and finite, almost a yardstick for the phenomenon; they are also the visible expression of how parts of twentieth-century design culture tried to imagine shared territories.

In Falchera, sharing is a basic element of its design. no different from what it was fifty years ago. Recent renovation work hasn't changed these well-restored spaces. The market, the church, the trade union offices, a few shops under the porticoes, a new canopy, a small amphitheatre sunk in the ground in the middle of the neighbourhood, big well mowed and silent lawns in the inhabited courtyards. These common areas are not new forms of sharing. They are old; we have to look elsewhere to find new forms of collective living. Outside the neighbourhood, along its borders, along the agglomerations that stretch into the countryside or worm their way into more concealed and intimate environments, into the (internal) spaces of associationism and new, often emergency forms of shared housing. We can imagine the large, empty areas in these public spaces where activities are diminishing, absorbed by their exterior surroundings. Not due to a lack of institutions (libraries, schools). Or problems of morphology (even if policies to preserve the model neighbourhood of the fifties could have played an important role over the years). Not even due to flawed renovation (even if the latest not very innovative work does nothing but once again propose the typical materials of the public city used fifty years ago). Although some spaces in Falchera are very characteristic, they

are indistinct enough to be rewritten and reinvented. The layout is soft, supple, packed with heterogeneous environments, ready to be crossed by actions and relationships. Which, however, remain unexpressed. So much so that Falchera still seems the original satellite nucleus - not very attractive, incapable of turning into a hub, of becoming more robust on the fringes, or inducing agglomeration along its borders. What's needed are cars and buses, and the city nearby.

The units in the residential housing districts in Corso Taranto, Via Pergolesi and Via Gottardo vary in density and morphology. Most housing blocks have five or six floors, either orthogonal or slightly sloped compared to the main roads; the houses are very similar and would be soulless if it weren't for the ungainly and cumbersome shades jutting out over the balconies and windows, denoting mutual hard work due to an obvious lack of comfort. The technical spaces between the blocks, the space to manoeuvre and park cars, as well as snippets of a mowed lawn to keep the buildings at a safe distance. Groups of trees as flower-beds. Inside a few dry fountains and statues of Our Lady: a weak sign of belonging. Bigger or smaller statues of Our Lady in different areas. More or less important renovation work, everywhere, to reiterate that the open space is public. You might be fooled if you look carefully at the huge amount of space still available. Or notice in the snippets a timid form of private appropriation: the private desire to plant a flower or a kitchen herb, to encircle a space and make it more intimate than the domestic one on the third or fifth floor.

This private occupancy of everyone's space is interesting in the context of the project and, if repeated, should be carefully studied. It proves that people try to find spaces for their personal use, something that appears by nature impossible in the area around inhabited buildings which can neither be encroached on or cramped, nor certain parts obscured and hidden. It might not be a paradox: creating spaces for oneself as a way to guarantee and protect the sharing of a common area. A little like the urban kitchen gardens along nearby Via Botticelli and Strada dell'Arrivore, gardens where people seek new spaces to colonise: spaces three hundred metres from home, but, practically speaking, very exotic. This is where certain actions become institutionalised, for example vegetable gardens. Individual, collective, aimed at personalising a space, instrumental to consumption. Difficult to accurately define their nature. What's interesting is the eccentric location compared to the home and neighbourhood. A sort of migration, in some ways compact, indicating, amongst other things, several characteristics of the comfort and, on the contrary, the inhospitality of inhabited places.

Once upon a time Barca Bertolla and Falchera were exact opposites. Barca was just another satellite town of mostly single-family homes with gardens where no-one was interested in any kind of proximity. The world inside one's own fencing. And with a city near enough to be reached if necessary. Today its current density makes proximity inevitable. So much so that several parts of Barca are a disorderly jumble of small and big fences around buildings which have grown so much they now completely invade the garden and almost touch one another. Barca Bertolla, once a diffuse city, now looks like a town. A village where it's easy to imagine that people know each other and where small home owners share their problems: a breakage or malfunction, the fact that the house has become too big or costs are too high, but also the lack of services and the fact that certain spaces are no longer suited to their original purpose because the way they are used has increased exponentially over the years. The objective of the programme, proposed by local associations and supported by the municipality, is: "Social integration, prevention, support and energising of the Barca Bertolla territory". The aim is to turn Barca Bertolla into a neighbourhood. So much so that it now runs the risk of being classified like Falchera (or Corso Taranto): a square with a portico, small amphitheatre and skateboard ramp. As sort of appeasement of differences. But the renovation of Barca-Bertolla appears to imply that different forms and ways of living are fundamental. If for no other reason than the fact that in Barca-Bertolla sharing is based, more noticeably than anywhere else, on a strong individualistic matrix penetrating the fabric, a fabric extending outwards towards the residual countryside and the city. In fragmented and disjointed ways. Indeed, compared to Falchera and Corso Taranto, Barca Bertolla seems ready to change and become more open and hospitable unless, of course it's placed in the straightjacket of new or old forms of centrality which would turn it into a hamlet.



## Dense and deserted spaces

Falchera, Corso Taranto and Barca Bertolla are very recognisable and characteristic city districts that cross Turin in an east-west direction. Other districts, just as typical, also exert the same kind of influence over the way in which people assemble in cities. For example, the gypsy camps along the Stura, frequently studied because of their compact relationships (FMPQ, 011). Others are radical, permanent and intermittent, for example the ones in the parks in Colletta, Arrivore and Meisino and, more in general, many of the open spaces around Confluenza. Instead, the agglomerations around the Tobacco Factory are different: a maze of well-kept, empty roads around a church and a few shops, capable of reproducing a town in a few square metres. Then there are the vegetable garden plots in Basse di Stura and the ones squeezed between Corso Vercelli and the railway lines. Finally the deserts, or what look like deserts, around the large Iveco production plants or Via Romoli. A rarefaction reproduced in similar forms near the Novotel in Corso Giulio Cesare or at night in the malls on the outskirts of the city.

The spaces running along this discontinuous section, which dares to tell a story, are the spaces that give shared territories their form, although not within the regular and orderly sequence of fences and plots: internally organic environments, spaces of cohesion and participation, of repeated encounters and interaction. Apart from these images created by studies on different aggregation modes, another image exists. More complex and multifaceted because it tries to capture homogeneity and repetition when the latter change. Redesigning the city like a series of episodes, often unplanned, of dense spaces (of relationships, bonds and exchanges) and deserts. A system of full and empty spaces involving crossings, intersections and ramifications that neither create an uninterrupted, continuous and regular pattern, nor an archipelago of distinct and independent parts.

A web of relationships capable of maintaining the link between the city and spaces where life is different. Spaces with diverse political, economic and symbolic importance, capable of affecting real estate prices by transmitting political and design choices. Spaces that are often shared and which unexpectedly and temporarily become forceful and central. And which immediately afterwards, in time and space, fade and die. An elimination of uses that again occurs in patches rather than gradually. More often in full and extremely compact rather than marginal or degraded areas of the city: middle-class areas, the public city, places in which to invest renovation projects or new development plans. Falchera, Corso Taranto, Barca Bertolla, or at least that's how they appear to a distracted observer.

The stakes include sharing, as well as conflict, competition and exclusion. But also variety. The merger and dissolution of different areas of the city. The possibility, and impossibility, to change the way we live in fits and starts or through rupture. Something that involves the rewriting of a right to the city as well as to its design. A design focusing on practices in space. Neither to support them. Nor to intensify density and relationships in the name of a shared participation which is expected to be continuous and uninterrupted – like it often was from the eighties to the present day when it involved the design of land and open spaces. Instead we need to critically review how we live together in contemporary cities. To thoroughly understand their temporary nature and brief rituals. But also the demand for space that can stage the city in a more sophisticated and problematic manner compared to the way the public city was staged in the last century.

If we observe the many little private subterfuges that have emerged and merged, and now coalesce around the use of common spaces and resources, subverting old rules, weak outdated norms, and inverting formulas and habits, then we are able to distinguish some of the characteristics used by these new rules and new habits to redesign the city. Slowly and unobtrusively, but relentlessly and ever more clearly. Practical rather than symbolic, instrumental rather than ritual, they require the right kind of space in which to reposition the common experience of worlds that are not too big, even if permeable and open, not too enduring, even if safer and not ephemeral.

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